

INTERGROUP EMULATION

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Abstract

In December 2010, the Romanian pop-rock band Vunk launched the single ‘I want a country like abroad’. This marked the beginning of the band’s homonymous campaign aimed at motivating Romanians to take an active part in their country’s development. The popular campaign advocates learning from more successful nations and striving to reach a similar level. Such examples of positive regard for high status groups are not uncommon – economic, national, or political groups of lower status often seek to forge relations with and emulate higher status groups. However, this type of behaviour towards more successful groups has not been directly investigated empirically in social psychology, and is not encompassed in existing theories on intergroup relations.

In this thesis, I explore the way in which social groups relate positively to higher status groups and how they emulate successful traits in order to improve. I investigate why members of social groups may admire outgroups, and how admiration is linked to becoming inspired and learning from these outgroups. I look at what features of the social system encourage groups to learn, rather than use other strategies, such as competing or justifying their lower status position. I also investigate what kinds of features are most likely to be learned, and what group members ultimately aim to achieve through learning. I investigate intergroup emulation from a social psychological perspective, working mainly within the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, in order to understand fully the processes of admiration and emulation, I draw upon insights from a variety of social science disciplines.

In Chapter 1, I present the relevant body of knowledge in social psychology in the study of status relations. The review of literature will focus on how the various theories view and discuss lower status groups and the strategies available to them for improvement. I will argue that existing theories in social psychology have had a particularly conflictual

focus, and do not adequately explain positive, collaborative relations within status hierarchies. Most approaches suggest that conflict in status hierarchies is inherent and unavoidable, while those approaches that accept consensus as ubiquitous state that lower status groups are deluded into accepting hierarchy consensus.

In Chapter 2, I look at sociological and psychological approaches that offer insight into positive relations within status hierarchies. Based on these theoretical approaches, I propose intergroup emulation as one of the positive ways in which lower status groups relate to higher status models. I further describe emulation as a distinct strategy available to lower status groups, with an eye to integration with existing intergroup relations literature.

In Chapter 3, I present the relevant literature for understanding intergroup emulation. This includes literature on social comparison, particularly upward comparison, and literature on individual and group-based admiration. I will also look at research connected with social learning, intergroup learning, and assimilation. Finally, I will review relevant research on intergroup help and collective action, as both concepts are central to the subsequent assessment of intergroup emulation.

Chapter 4 presents a series of empirical results that look at the features that are admired in higher-status groups (i.e., “who is admired”) in order to understand why certain outgroups are preferred targets of emulation. Study 1 introduces prototypicality as an admired feature and stresses the importance of a common reference category for comparing groups. Study 2 further explores prototypicality in an experimental setting, looking at different facets of prototypicality and their relation to admiration and emulation. Study 3 is a thematic analysis of Scottish nationals’ comments on proposals that Scotland could emulate Scandinavian countries; this study further explores the role of common reference categories and common values in intergroup emulation.

Chapter 5 is concerned with understanding the conditions that favour groups choosing an emulation strategy over other strategies (i.e., “when does emulation occur”). Study 4 looks at the role of legitimacy, showing that emulation is more likely when status

relations are perceived as legitimate. Study 5 further explores the role of status stability, showing that the emulation strategy is most likely to be employed when status relations are perceived as legitimate and unstable.

Chapter 6 presents a thematic analysis of a representative example of intergroup emulation, analysing the comments of members of the Facebook group associated with the 'I want a country like abroad' campaign. This analysis is focused on two specific questions: what is being emulated and how does emulation occur. To answer these questions, I look at the categories of attributes that are likely to be emulated, and I investigate how group members implement the emulation strategy and what they see as the aim of emulation, analysing how this strategy is distinct from assimilation.

In Chapter 7, I outline the various directions for further work stemming from current analyses. This chapter includes some data that suggest directions for future research into the interplay of emulation and distinctiveness threat in social groups, and emulation's relation to individual mobility strategies and group goals.

In Chapter 8, I discuss all the empirical results taken together. I relate them to the existing literature, and discuss the theoretical implications of these results. I also discuss the practical implications for social psychologists interested in understanding intergroup help and the development of disadvantaged national groups. Finally, I outline the limitations of these results and discuss the overall contribution of this work.

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