



Race, diversity and pro-social behavior in a segmented society[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of racial identity on behavior in trust games played by public high school students in South Africa. There is a systematic pattern of distrust towards Black partners, even by Black proposers, partially attributable to mistaken expectations. Non-Black proposers are significantly less likely to engage in a strategic interaction at all when paired with a Black partner, while Black proposers engage in exchange but at lower levels than when paired with non-Blacks. However, greater racial diversity in public schools promotes pro-social behavior towards Black partners.

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1. Introduction

A rich tradition of social psychology literature affirms that group identity or affiliation matters for outcomes in society, particularly since individuals tend to favor members of their own group over outsiders. The groundbreaking work in these minimal group experiments is due to [Tajfel et al. \(1971\)](#) who demonstrated that the simple categorization of individuals into groups, on the basis of some trivial criteria, such as the tendency to over- or under-estimate the number of dots on a screen, or a preference for the artistic work of Kandinsky over Klee, was sufficient to induce a favorable bias in behavior by subjects towards in-group members. This stood in stark contrast to previous work in this area, which had attributed in-group favoritism to perceived similarities in attitudes and beliefs among in-group members relative to outgroup members ([Byrne, 1969](#)), inter-group conflict over resources ([Sherif and Sherif, 1961](#)), or a common identity forged through a common shared fate ([Rabbie and Horwitz, 1969](#)). The minimal group experimental results were attributed to the fact that to the

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extent that the self-identity of individuals was at least partly derived from the social identity of the groups to which they belonged, individuals would treat in-group members positively in order to enhance the positive image of the group, thereby enhancing their own self-identity. This is not conceptually different from the view articulated in the economics literature by Akerlof and Kranton (2002) that an individual gains utility when her actions and those of others enhance her own self-image. (Billig, 1973; Messick and Mackie, 1989; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). In the event that the social identity of the group became unfavorable, individuals would attempt to leave the group (physically or psychologically through disassociation) and join a better group (Turner et al., 1987).

Subsequent work in the minimal group tradition (MGE), while cautioning against the generalizability of these results to real world groups (Yamagishi et al., 1999), has tried to elucidate the mechanisms which generate the observed in-group bias. One important mechanism is that group membership or identity must be public knowledge (Hoff and Pandey, 2004; Yamagishi et al., 1999). Secondly, identity *per se* may be insufficient to produce an in-group bias unless it comes with an expectation of in-group reciprocity (Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000).¹ There is some evidence that when one controls for the expectations of proposers concerning reciprocity from in-group members, the in-group bias disappears, suggesting that it is an expectation of (generalized) reciprocity from in-group members that drives the results (Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000; Yamagishi et al., 1999).²

This paper adds to the substantial insider–outsider literature by examining the impact of observable racial identity on behavior in trust games played by public high school students in South Africa, a country with a well-documented history of legislated discrimination. To the extent that the expectations and social meanings created by apartheid persist even in the post-apartheid era, one might expect the racial identity of participants to affect trust relationships, particularly those involving Black South Africans, as it was this group that was most severely marginalized by apartheid institutions. Yet, these effects have been little studied in South Africa. In an important study, one of the first of its kind in South Africa,³ Ashraf et al. (2006) find that Black proposers make significantly lower offers in a trust game, supporting previous work suggesting that members of previously disadvantaged groups in a society may be less trusting (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). The work reported here extends this earlier work by examining the impact of the racial identity of *both* the proposer and the responder on individual behavior in this strategic setting. Moreover, the students who participated in these games form part of the first generation of South African students who have not only had the opportunity to participate in a more integrated schooling environment, but have also spent much of their lives living in the “new” South Africa, where attempts to redress the devastating effects of racial segregation under apartheid have been made. This provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which increased racial integration, measured here through racial diversity within the schools attended by these students, might affect inter-racial co-operation.

2. Trust and social identity

Individuals may differ in their trust levels because of differing beliefs about the trustworthiness of others or different abilities to elicit trustworthy behavior from others (Glaeser et al., 2000). These differences may be exacerbated in segmented societies where group affiliation based on some individual attribute such as race, ethnicity, or gender, is particularly salient, with trust being inversely related to the social distance between groups (Zack and Knack, 2001; Bouckaert and Dhaene, 2003; Akerlof, 1997). Thus, while inter- and intra-group trust may affect the economic success or failure of the society as a whole (Knack and Keefer, 1997), it may also affect the relative economic outcomes for different groups within that society (Fershtman and Gneezy, 2001). Individuals may be less likely to trust outsiders, and more prone to stereotyping, especially where outsiders can be easily identified by costlessly observable cues such as race and gender⁴(Chandra, 2003; Cornell and Welch, 1996). In return, negative group stereotypes may affect the performance of members of those groups about whom the stereotype exists (Hoff and Pandey, 2004; Steele et al., 2002). Hoff and Pandey (2004) provide evidence from experiments in India that caste identity, when it is publicly revealed, inhibits the motivation of low-caste subjects in

¹ In the minimal group experiment tradition, Yamagishi et al. (1999) compared a treatment in which only the proposer was aware of the group identity of the recipient to the case where both the proposer and recipient were aware of each other's group affiliation. If identity on its own was sufficient to produce in-group favoritism (as predicted by social identity theory), then the bias should have appeared in both treatments, but Yamagishi et al. (1999) found that an in-group bias only emerged in the latter case where group membership was mutually known. This was attributed to multilateral fate control or interdependence in the outcomes of group members (Yamagishi et al., 1999; Karp et al., 1993; Rabbie et al., 1989). In other words, proposers favor in-group members because they expect that this favorable behavior will be reciprocated by in-group members when group identity is known, thus making the outcomes for group members interdependent. (Rabbie and Lodewijckx, 1994; Pruitt and Kimmel, 1977; Yamagishi et al., 1999; Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000).

² The design of the minimal group experiments suggests that it is expectations of generalized reciprocity (i.e. reciprocity from any in-group member as opposed to the member they make an offer to) that matters (Yamagishi et al., 1999). It is this expectation of generalized reciprocity that gives rise to a generic norm concerning group behavior, or a group heuristic of an expectation of generalized reciprocity among, but not extending beyond, members of the same group. For example, when the return payment for proposers is determined at a fixed rate by the experimenter as opposed to an in-group or out-group member, the in-group bias disappears (Karp et al., 1993). Moreover, when the payoff of the proposers is determined by an outgroup member, they tend to favor outgroup members, while the converse holds true (Rabbie et al., 1989).

³ The only other trust game study in South Africa that the author is aware of is the work of Carter and Castillo (2009) and in this work, they do not examine differences in behavior by race.

⁴ Because these attributes are costlessly observable, they are likely to be privileged over other categorizations, such as class or educational background, even when the latter might be more relevant for individuals trying to distinguish between in-group and out-group members.

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