

SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND IDENTITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Using a social cognitive theoretical and methodological approach, this research looks into the concept of social categorization, an assumed precondition for the development of social identity, within the Philippine context. The study was conducted among students at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City. Three sets of questionnaires were administered to tap into various social category perceptions. Results showed that national category membership is deemed important but is not nearly as salient as one's family, gender or religious group memberships. Perceptions of own ethnic group were seen as more positive than those for the national group and very little overlap in features was noted between the two social categories. Data trends indicate a possible weakness in our concept of national category membership which could provide the possible underpinnings for earlier findings by other researchers on the tenuousness of Philippine national identity.

INTRODUCTION

Bruner, Goodnow and Austin (1956) said that "to categorize is to render discriminably different things equivalent, to group the objects and events and people around us into classes, and to respond to them in terms of their class membership rather than their uniqueness." By grouping objects and events together that, to our minds, have commonalities on certain dimensions, we are able to think about and respond to them in familiar learned ways. Categorization thus serves as an anchor in a complex and potentially overwhelming environment (Lingle, Altom and Medin, 1984).

Nowhere is the value of categorization more apparent than in dealing with our social world. Without categorization, every person and every social situation would have to be processed as new, leaving the social perceiver confused and overwhelmed by the volume of information that needs to be processed prior to engaging in any action.

Tajfel (1981) referred to social categorization as one of our tools for structuring our environment and establishing our own "construction of any particular social reality." Many social processes arise from categorization. Among these are stereotypes (Allport, 1954) and social identity (Tajfel, 1981).

This study investigates social categorization among Filipinos, focusing on ethnic and national categories, their salience and use with the goal of understanding better the underpinnings of national identity. It aims to look at the relevant social categories identified and processed by the Filipino social perceiver, the place of ethnic and national categories within this matrix and the relationship of the ethnic to the national category.

There is no doubt that stereotypes and social identity, particularly national and ethnic identities, have their origins in history and cultural traditions related to one's experiences within a particular socio-political context. Looking into these origins has been the popular approach used by various Philippine researchers (Constantino, 1974; Corpuz, 1990; Doronila, 1989, 1992) in analyzing the stunted growth of our Filipino national identity.

The social cognitive theoretical and methodological framework is suggested in this research as a dynamic alternative to standard approaches. Rather than focusing on historical and contextual antecedents, this approach would treat group memberships and their dynamics as information to be processed and their social outcomes as resultant by-products of such information processing.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

At the outset, this researcher was interested in obtaining a sample that would give a fair distribution of the different ethnic groups in the country. Since a large national sample was not possible for the research, it was decided to pilot the research with the Social Science classes at the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy of the University of the Philippines in Diliman. The Social Science courses are general education courses required of all students at the university in their first two years of college. It was thus reasonable to expect the students to be fairly varied in their backgrounds. Three Social Science classes were approached with a total of 106 respondents ultimately participating in the study.

The respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 26 years with 46.2% falling in the 18-year-old bracket. Majority (79.2%) were Catholics. More than half of the respondents (65.1%) graduated from a private high school and only 34.9% came from public high schools.

Majority (59.4%) of the respondents listed a home address situated in Metro Manila with the rest listing provincial addresses from all over the country. Only 35.8% of the respondents, however, mentioned the National Capital Region as their

region of origin. The rest mentioned various regions all over the country, although regions in Luzon (Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog) were over-represented (13.2% and 15.1%, respectively).

Respondents categorized themselves as belonging to different ethnic groups. Table 1 shows the distribution of the self-ascribed ethnicity of the respondents. It should be noted that although Manileno is not, strictly speaking, an ethnic group, a small percentage of the respondents gave that as their ethnic affiliation.

Parental ethnicity of the respondents was also varied. Approximately one-third of the respondents (33.96%) had parents who came from different ethnic groups. The rest had parents belonging to the same ethnic group.

Across the different ethnic groups, 65.09% claimed Tagalog or Pilipino as the dominant language used. Of the remaining 34.91%, 13.21% said their dominant language was English. Thus, only a total of 21.7% actually used the language of the ethnic group they belonged to as a major means of communication.

Questions about other languages used by the respondent showed that 22% of those who did not mention Tagalog or Pilipino as their dominant language mentioned it later as another language also used.

Procedure

Three questionnaires were administered at three-to four-week intervals to the study participants. The sequence in questionnaire administration was randomly varied with approximately one-third of the subjects receiving a different sequence each. This was to rule out the influence of response set on subject's performance.

One questionnaire looked into the respondents' perceptions of being Filipino; another looked into perceptions of one's ethnic group; and a third questionnaire focused on social category memberships in general. Additional demographic data, as well as data on parents' ethnicity, region of origin, languages used at home and religion, were also obtained. Data were analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Categorization in the Philippines

The first question of interest in the research was the matrix of social categories in which both ethnic and national group memberships may be embedded. To tap into group memberships viewed as relevant and important, respondents were simply asked to list down all the social categories or groups which they felt they belonged to and to rate each one in terms of its personal importance. Order of listing was used as an indicator of category information accessibility and group salience.

The maximum number of social categories listed was 13 with a mean of 7.58 groups mentioned. Among the mentioned categories, family, gender and religion, in

that order, were mentioned first by 91.9% of the respondents. Family was particularly salient with 27.4% mentioning it first. This finding is not surprising and is consistent with previous research on the marked significance of the family to the Filipino (Doronila, 1989, 1992; Medina, 1991; Torres, n.d.).

National group came in a poor fourth among the first mentions with only four respondents mentioning it before all other groups named. Across mentions, however, national group was identified as a relevant social category by 67.92% of the respondents. It would appear then that nationality, though viewed as a relevant social category, is not as salient (i.e., not the first thing that comes to mind) as apparently more basic group memberships.

How did the ethnicity-based social category fare? Many of those who criticize the Filipino's lack of nationalist sentiment often blame heightened sense of regionalism or strong sense of ethnicity as the social cognitive approach that would trace to an overly salient and highly accessible ethnic category. Doronila (1989), citing the literature on Philippine ethnic groups, reported that "ethnic boundaries have not yet been transcended, for which reason it is also reported that Philippine society remains primarily familistic and secondarily regionalistic in orientation."

Data collected showed that ethnicity was mentioned in second place, at the earliest, and this by only 2 out of 106 respondents. Taken all together, however, ethnicity was mentioned as relevant by only 38.68% of the respondents. It appears that more respondents were mindful of the national compared to the ethnic group category. The mean salience rating (based on the category list position) for nationality was 3.24 compared to 2.68 for ethnicity. Though caution in interpretation is advised given the skewness of the sample, the results appear to be consistent with a nationalist mind-shift that Doronila (1992) noted in her research.

Consistent with the data on category salience, the importance ratings given to the national group were also higher compared to those for the ethnic group (mean rating for nationality is 3.08, whereas that for ethnicity is 2.68, given a 4-point rating scale where 4 = very important).

Five types of respondents may be identified based on the category salience data: (1) those who seem to find no relevance to either nationality or ethnicity as evidenced by their failure to mention either national or ethnic social categories; (2) those for whom ethnic group seems dominant, mentioning only this category but not the national group; (3) those for whom ethnicity is primary but do not forget the national group; (4) those who mention or consider the national group before thinking of their ethnicity; and (5) those who consider only the national group. Further research should be done to look into the impact of these five cognitive sets on the definition of national identity.

Ethnic Versus National Group Perceptions

A second question of interest was the comparative assessment of ethnic and national categories. This looked into the possible outcomes of category processing. Aside from a listing and rating of relevant social categories, respondents were also asked to list down 10 features and characteristics which they felt defined their own ethnic group and the national group. The proportion of positive features to the total mentioned was computed and used as an indicator of positivity of one's perception toward that particular social category. Table 2 shows the proportion means for each ethnic group.

The data show a clear trend of subjects favoring their own group over the national group. The literature often refers to this as the in-group bias (Turner, 1981) except that in this case, both ethnic and national groups could be considered as in-groups. The greatest difference in positivity proportions is shown by the Mindanao groups and the least difference is shown by the Chinese/mestizo group. Of particular note is the rather low means for own group perception among the Muslim and the Chinese/mestizo groups compared to the other ethnic groups.

A t-test for correlated means was done on the overall means and the results showed a significant difference between the proportion of positivity toward one's ethnic group and the national group [$t(105) = -6.902, p < .0001$], indicating that own ethnic group is seen in a more positive light than the national group.

A related issue explored was the perceived relationship between own group and the national group. To do this, the researcher reviewed each subject's feature lists for own ethnic and national groups and counted the number of category overlaps, mentioned features which were common to both groups (Table 3). In the social cognitive literature, common and distinctive features between two categories are used to represent similarity relations (Tversky, 1977; Lingle et al., 1984).

Data trends follow the patterns of the positivity index with the Mindanao groups showing the least similarity with the national group. It would appear that, aside from seeing themselves in a more positive light, the Davao and Muslim groups also perceive minimal similarity between themselves and the national group. One may be tempted to hypothesize cultural alienation. However, due to the limitations of the sample, care needs to be exercised in drawing any conclusions. Further research is recommended to follow up on these questions.

What seems puzzling about the data configuration of pronounced disparity between views about own group and the national group is its typicality for an in-group/out-group relation. It is typical for members of the in-group to exhibit in-group bias, a marked preference for one's own group, and out-group discrimination, heightened negative perceptions of other groups (Turner, 1981).

Ethnic and national groups, however, are not supposed to be in this type of relationship pattern. One may even possibly conceive of a category hierarchy where national group is the superordinate category encompassing ethnic group categorizations. Category overlaps are thus expected to be high and the valence of

perceptions relatively consistent. Further analysis of the social perceiver's category structures could provide some answers but that is beyond the scope of this particular study.

Social Category Features and Stereotypes

In addition to a rudimentary look at the structure of our respondents' social categories, the content of their ethnic and national category schemata were also explored. Three intriguing patterns were noted upon reviewing the content of the respondents' stereotypes of the ethnic and national groups.

First, there were traits that were mentioned by almost all of the respondents when describing the Filipino. These consensus traits included hospitality, religiosity and having close family ties. The regularity of their retrieval indicates the strength of their association with our national group stereotype.

Second, there was also some degree of consensus regarding what the Filipino is not. These features were being industrious, thrifty and modern.

However, it is in comparing ethnic stereotype content with the national group stereotype that we see the extent of our ethnic group-centeredness. Own ethnic group was usually described with positive traits like industrious/"masipag," hardworking, disciplined, thrifty, cooperative, helpful/"matulungin," clean/neat, patient, practical, not traditional, not superstitious.

The opposite negative traits were attributed to the national group, however. Thus the Filipino was described as lazy, always late, undisciplined, extravagant/showy, having a talangka-mentality, traditional, superstitious, impractical, litterbug, impatient.

Only the Ilocano group assigned themselves some negative traits – pessimistic and stingy – while ascribing the opposite positive traits to the Filipino in general.

A good question to raise after seeing the data trends is why the positivity of ethnic perceptions does not generalize to national group perceptions. Given the awareness majority of the respondents had of the importance of being Filipino (even beyond being a member of one's own ethnic group), one fails to see why there is a denigration of such an important social category.

Tajfel (1981) posited that social categorization is often done in the service of a need for positive social identity. If the group does not satisfy this requirement, the individual can either quit being part of the group or, in the event such an option is unavailable, he may modify his interpretation of the group's unwelcome features to make them more acceptable. Which option our respondents take would make an interesting subject for further study.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, three major findings are underscored. First, national and ethnic groups are identified as relevant social categories but they are not as salient nor as easily accessible as categories like family, gender or religious groups. Second, being Filipino was more salient and rated as more important than being a member of one's ethnic group. Third, despite the cognitive awareness of the importance of the national category, category content was less positive compared to the ethnic group category.

What are the implications of the findings? It would appear that, on the cognitive level, we acknowledge our Filipino-ness and the importance of being a member of this particular social category. Yet, it seems apparent that we have a less clear picture of what the Filipino is and how being Filipino relates to our other social identities. We see little overlap between our definition of our own group and the Filipino.

On the affective level, we still favor our own group over the national group. We ascribe more positive features to our ethnic group than we do to the Filipino seemingly ignoring the fact that one identity is subordinate to the other.

This research certainly raises more questions with its results than it had intended to answer. Clearly, more research needs to be undertaken if we are to more fully understand the Filipinos' processing of social categories and their social identity.

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Table 1. Distribution of respondents' ethnicity (N = 106)

	<i>Percentage</i>
Tagalog	41.51
Ilocano	13.21
Manileno	10.38
Bicolano	9.43
Cebuano Visayan	8.50
Chinese/mestizo	4.72
Ilonggo	4.72
Pampango	3.77
Davaoeno	2.83
Muslim	.94

Table 2. Mean proportions of positivity of respondents' perception of ethnic compared to national group

	<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Ilocano	.891	.669	.222
Tagalog	.845	.713	.132
Bicolano	.915	.677	.238
Pampango	.813	.750	.063
Manileno	.715	.665	.050
Cebuano Visayan	.819	.667	.152
Davaoeno	1.000	.467	.533
Muslim	.667	.143	.524
Chinese/mestizo	.611	.600	.011
Ilonggo	.800	.720	.080
Combined gorups	.830	.679	.151

Table 3. Mean number of overlapping features for ethnic and national groups

<i>Overlaps with National Category</i>	
Ilocano	2.357
Tagalog	3.227
Bicolano	2.400
Pampango	2.500
Manileno	2.455
Cebuano Visayan	3.444
Davaoeno	2.000
Muslim	1.000
Chinese/mestizo	2.200
Ilonggo	2.800
Combined groups	2.821

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