Social Dominance Orientation and Outgroup Intolerance: The Role of Transcendence in Outgroup Attitude

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The multi-group composition of diverse societies is associated with conflict and general outgroup intolerance. The intergroup literature has thus been committed to searching for variables that accentuate and alleviate negative outgroup attitudes. This study, therefore, examined the relationship between an orientation towards social inequality and outgroup intolerance among a sample of participants drawn from a culturally diverse society. An aspect of spirituality, transcendence, was also examined for its role in improving tolerance for outgroups. The study participants were from a university environment characterized by diversity in ethnic affiliations. The study outcomes show that a bias for social inequality leads to more intolerance of outgroups. Furthermore, transcendence was associated with increased tolerance for outgroups. The implications of systemic social inequalities of most societies for continued negative outgroup attitudes were emphasized. The role of transcendence in appealing to the humaneness of individuals and encouraging openness to diversity was discussed. Suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: *outgroup intolerance, social hierarchy, spirituality, transcendence, social dominance orientation, intergroup relations*

Introduction

As societies become increasingly diverse or multi-cultural, attitude towards outgroups has become a topical issue in the intergroup literature (Florez, Schulenberg, Lair, Wilson, & Johnson, 2018; Grebennikova, Ayanyan, & Golubeva, 2020). Such diversity may cut across various social and natural

groupings such as sex, gender, religion, race, and ethnicity. Increased focus on people's attitude towards outgroups has been necessitated because of the implications for intergroup relations and societal functioning. Outgroup intolerance is a well-known phenomenon in multi-cultural societies. It is defined as the lack of appreciation for diversity and lack of concern for the welfare of outgroups (Miller & Nicholas, 2020; Olonisakin, 2021). Such intolerance may manifest in different forms such as discrimination, mistrust, aggression, violence, and avoiding interaction with outgroups. This variable cannot be deemphasized in multi-cultural societies because such diversity comes with different groups having different cultural elements that may sometimes contradict those of other groups. In addition to such cultural contrasts, the constituent groups may also have to compete for resources, inclusion, relevance, and political power. This competition may further motivate and intensify negative attitudes toward outgroups. The different manifestations of outgroup intolerance are antithetic towards societal growth and development, social trust, and peaceful relations. For example, such intolerance can lead to groups perceiving one another as a threat, having recurrent conflicts, having heightened perception of threat cues, and being unable to fathom alternative modes of social relations (Bar-Tal, 1998; Berkowitz, 1993; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017). Consequently, outgroup intolerance and its correlates should be a focal point of research for intergroup relations management.

Motivation for outgroup intolerance has been linked to social/political attitudes that emphasize and justify group domination, societal hierarchy, and social inequality. Social dominance orientation (SDO) is one prominent social/political attitude that underscores group dominance and group inequality (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). It has been demonstrated as one of the most potent and consistent predictors of negative intergroup attitudes (Ho et al., 2015; Ho et al., 2012; Olonisakin, 2021). SDO is an attitude that generally favors social inequality or hierarchical societal ordering (Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). It motivates support for ideas, policies, and processes that enhance or perpetuate hierarchy and social inequality (Pratto et al., 1994). With such an attitude, an individual is likely to show low tolerance for outgroups. Most societies are unequal and having societal group diversity means that constituent groups may believe in the superiority of their culture and ways of life (Gil-White, 2005; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017; Pratto et al., 1994; Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2017). In addition, each group wants positive distinctiveness, which leads to ascribing positive qualities to itself and negative qualities to outgroups (Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, Brown, & Polikoff, 2018; McClanahan, Ho & Kteily, 2019; Tajfel, 1978). Consequently, outgroups cultures are perceived as inferior, and ingroup's culture is exalted and prescribed as a frame of reference. Thus, support for social hierarchy is likely to lead to low tolerance for outgroups. This theory is supported by studies that have found a positive relationship between SDO and anti-outgroup attitudes such as xenophobia, ethnocentrism, anti-immigrant attitudes, and avoidance of cross-group friendship (Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Kauff et al., 2016;

Kleppestø et al., 2019; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021; Puckett, DuBois, McNeill, & Hanson, 2020).

With the attending negative consequences of outgroup intolerance in multicultural societies comes the broad search for ways to make groups amenable towards each other (Florez et al., 2018). Hence, researchers have investigated variables that could encourage tolerance, multiculturalism, and cooperation. Such variables include intergroup contact (Hashemi, Yousofi, & Hashemi, 2017; Scacco & Warren, 2018), cultural intelligence (Olonisakin, 2019; Young, Haffejeeb, & Corsuna, 2017), intercultural communication sensitivity (Dong, Day, & Collaço, 2008; Ramalu, Rose, Kumar, & Uli, 2010), and cultural empathy (Ahmadi, Shahmohamadi, & Araghi, 2011). Another crucial recourse for researchers is the role that religion and/or spirituality can play in other-concern or prosociality (Giordano et al., 2014; Jakovljevic & Jakovljevic, 2021; Stewart, Lawrence, & Burg, 2019). This variable has received focus on other-concern because it plays a prominent role in self-regulatory behaviors that border on morality (Hodge et al., 2020; Ozhiganova, 2021). The link between religion and/or spirituality and self-regulatory behaviors is premised on the former emphasizing or subsuming the values of care, fairness, inclusion, and the idea of reckoning (Hodge et al., 2020; Ozhiganova, 2021). Thus, religion and/or spirituality have been largely investigated for their roles in stimulating concern for others (Giordano et al., 2014; Jakovljevic & Jakovljevic, 2021; Stewart et al., 2019).

One aspect of spirituality that has received empirical support for its relationship to prosociality is transcendence (Florez et al., 2018; Piedmont, 2012; Piotrowski et al., 2019). Transcendence is a belief that one's life and actions have meaning and effect beyond the self and the moment and are connected to those of other persons. Piedmont (2012) construes it as the belief in life being broad, purposeful, and beyond time and space. It is the perception that human lives are connected, and people are responsible for each other's outcomes (Piedmont, 2010, 2012). Such a worldview imbues in an individual a feeling of responsibility towards other people and concern for their welfare (Florez et al., 2018; Hodge et al., 2020). Thus, transcendence has been linked to concern for others (Ardenghi, Rampoldi, Bani, & Strepparava, 2021; Florez et al., 2018; Licciardello, Castiglione, & Rampullo, 2011; Łowicki, Zajenkowski, & Cappellen, 2020; Sugiura et al., 2020). For instance, Licciardello et al. (2011) found self-transcendence to be associated with more queer receptivity. Likewise, Sugiura et al. (2020) found it to be associated with aiding survivors of natural disasters. Given what transcendence embodies, it is likely to motivate less outgroup intolerance and moderate discriminatory attitudes too.

Based on the preceding outline for the nature of the study variables, the objectives of this study were to examine the relationship between SDO, transcendence, and outgroup intolerance. In addition, transcendence as a moderator of the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance was examined. These objectives were accomplished by testing the following hypotheses: (1) SDO would be positively related to outgroup intolerance. (2) Transcendence would have an inverse

relationship with outgroup intolerance. (3) Transcendence would moderate the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance by weakening the relationship between the two variables.

Methods

Design and Setting

This study is a survey research with 331 participants purposefully sampled from one of the public academic institutions in Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-cultural country whose ethnic groups contend for power, relevance, and inclusion. Its public universities are usually a mesh of people of different ethnic backgrounds. They provide the appropriate setting for investigating social/political attitudes and social relations with outgroups because everyday social realities of the broader society with regards to ethnic competition, resentment, and rivalry play out in this setting.

Participants and Procedures

The participants comprised 37.2% males and 62.8% females with an average age of 21.51 years and were of Yoruba (87.9%), Igbo (9.7%), and unnamed (2.4%) ethnic groups. In terms of religion, participants comprised 92.1% Christians and 7.9% Muslims. The research was approved by the Research Committee of the institution of the authors. Participants were informed of the nature of the study. Participation was voluntary. The survey instrument was administered directly to participants who indicated their interest and consented to the research.

Research Instrument

Three standardized scales put together as a questionnaire were utilized to collect data on the study variables. The questionnaire was organized into different sections capturing demographic information, SDO, transcendence, and outgroup intolerance. Data were collected on participants' age, sex, religion, and ethnic group. Age and sex are related to outgroup attitudes (RipplKlaus & Boehnke, 2016; Vala & Costa-Lopes, 2010).

SDO was measured with the SDO_7 scale developed by Ho et al. (2015) as adapted by Olonisakin (2019). The scale is considered a valid measure of social dominance attitude across cultures (Ho et al., 2015). The items measure opposition to social inequality. Responses were scored on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree, to strongly agree and were reverse-scored. Scale items include "We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups" and "No matter how much effort it takes, we ought to strive to ensure that all groups have the same chance in life." Olonisakin (2019) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. The Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.81.

Transcendence was measured with items drawn from the Universality sub-scale of the Spiritual Transcendence Scale by Piedmont (1999). This dimension of transcendence entails a belief that humankind is connected and that there is a purpose to life (Piedmont, 2010). Some of the items include "I believe in an order in the universe that transcends human thinking" and "Belief in a larger meaning of life." Items were measured on a five-point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale has been widely used and shown to be valid in measuring tran-scendence beliefs (Simkin & Piedmont, 2018). Previous usages of this scale show good internal consistency as reported by Piotrowski et al. (2019), 0.75; Lau et al. (2015), 0.67; and Piedmont (2012), 0.82. The Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.72 after eliminating two items with poor loadings.

Data on outgroup intolerance were collected with the Outgroup Intolerance subscale of the Ethnocentrism scale developed by Olonisakin (2019). Items mea-sure low acceptance of diversity and concern for outgroups' welfare. Sample items include "People of other ethnic group(s) deserve my support" and "I care about understanding the culture of other ethnic groups." Responses were pro-vided on a five-point rating scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree and were reverse-scored. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 was reported by Olonisakin (2021). This study recorded a value of 0.89.

Results

Tests for univariate and multivariate outliers and normal distribution were con-ducted on the data set from an initial sample of 345 participants. Among them, 14 cases were excluded, thereby reducing the number of participants to 331. First, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the study variables. Table 1 shows the result of this analysis alongside the descrip-tive statistics. As can be seen, all correlations between the study variables were statistically significant, but no relationship was observed between the study vari-ables and age and sex.

SDO and transcendence were entered into the first step of a hierarchical regression model as predictors of outgroup intolerance to test hypotheses one and two. The result of the analysis shows that the model was significant ($F[2, 328] = 24.67$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 13 percent ($d = 0.15$) of the variance in outgroup intolerance. SDO predicted higher outgroup intolerance ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) while transcendence predicted less outgroup intolerance ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm hypotheses one and two.

SDO and transcendence were mean-centered to test the moderating effect of transcendence in the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance, and their interaction was entered into the second step of the regression model. The inclusion of the interaction led to an increase in the variance accounted for in outgroup intolerance ($\Delta R_2 = 0.02$, $\Delta F(1, 327) = 9.21$, $p = <0.01$) that confirms a moderation effect of transcendence. The interaction of SDO and transcendence negatively predicted outgroup intolerance ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$). These results are presented in Table 2, and Figure 1 shows the graphed interaction effect to

Table 1   Means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables

Variables	N = 331					M	SD	Skew	Kurt	α
	1	2	3	4	5					
1. SDO	1					9.75	6.01	0.97	0.09	0.81
2. OI	0.29**	1				17.20	6.97	1.48	2.49	0.89
3. Transcendence	−0.29**	−0.28**	1			25.55	4.79	−0.22	−0.22	0.72
4.Age	0.09	0.04	−0.04	1		21.57	2.62			
5.Sex	0.06	0.05	0.03	–	–					

Note.: SDO, social dominance orientation; OI, outgroup intolerance; sex- male (1), female (2); Skew, skewness; Kurt, kurtosis.
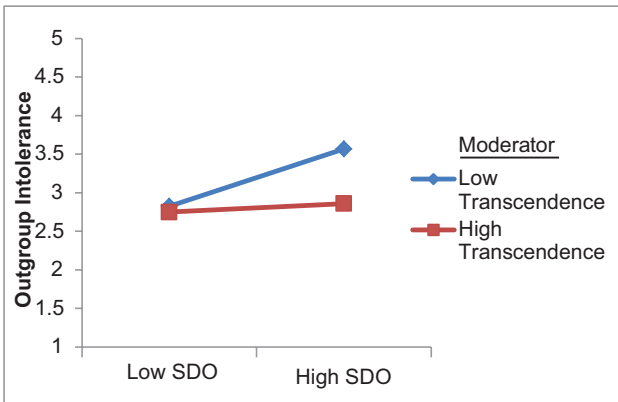** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2   Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting outgroup intolerance from SDO and transcendence

Variable	Model 1 β	Outgroup intolerance Model 2		
		β	sr²	95% CI
SDO	0.24**	0.21**	0.04	[0.75, 2.22]
Transcendence	−0.21**	−0.19**	0.04	[−2.11, −0.64]
SDO*Transcendence		−0.16*	0.02	[−1.79, −0.38]
R^2	0.13	0.16		
F	24.67**	19.93**		
ΔR^2		0.02**		
ΔF		9.21*		
N		331		

Note: SDO, social dominance orientation.
**$p < 0.001$.
*$p < 0.01$.

Figure 1   The moderating effect of transcendence on the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance. Transcendence dampens the positive relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance.

understand the moderating effect of transcendence. The result shows that with a high transcendence, the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance is not as strong as when there is low transcendence. This result confirms hypothesis three.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study outcomes show that outgroup intolerance is significantly associated with SDO. A support for social hierarchy or social inequality is likely to promote intolerance for diversity and lower concern for the welfare of outgroups. This suggests that a preference for social hierarchy can motivate people to discriminate against, avoid interaction with and be unconcerned about those considered as outgroups. This finding is in line with studies that have linked SDO with prejudice and discrimination (Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Kauff et al., 2016; Kleppestø et al., 2019; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021; Puckett et al., 2020). This finding affirms SDO as a social/political attitude that could perpetuate social divide as it would not encourage social interaction between groups. Groups in conflict or ones that see each other as rivals usually maintain social and physical space from one another (Amoateng & Heaton, 2017). Such boundaries in social interaction may invariably continue to fuel the notion of hierarchy between groups. For instance, people of different groups by political or economic design may live close to each other, thus creating ethnically homogenous communities. Such social exclusion of groups prevents exposure to the cultural ways of each other and the opportunity to correct and dispense negative stereotypes (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010). Therefore, SDO is a potent variable that could prevent the contact that could be valuable in bridging the divide between groups.

On the other hand, transcendence emerged as a significant mitigator of outgroup intolerance. This variable predicted less outgroup intolerance. Also, with transcendence, the relationship between SDO and outgroup intolerance is negative. This shows that transcendence can help to reduce or moderate discriminatory attitudes. It can be surmised from these results that transcendence would encourage tolerance and concern for outgroups and appreciation of diversity. This finding attests to the nature of transcendence as a variable that increases prosociality. Belief in the interconnectedness of humankind stimulates mindfulness of others' welfare and the awareness that actions and inactions have a ripple effect beyond time and space. This finding, therefore, contributes to the existing body of knowledge that has found spirituality in its different dimensions to improve social relations through increased concern for others (Giordano et al., 2014; Jakovljevic & Jakovljevic, 2021; Stewart et al., 2019).

Implication of Findings and Recommendations

In multi-cultural societies, citizens have myriad social identities on which there is perceived superiority. It is conceivable that such societies would be froth with

intolerance for outgroups along so many social groupings. Groups may perceive each other as a threat to the values, power, and other resources considered important and/or limited in supply. Consequently, conflicts, violence, and social mistrust which are antithetic to societal growth and development are likely to be prevalent in such societies. Given that group inequality is a feature of most societies, it is, therefore, important to address social processes or structures that legitimize, justify, or "naturalize" social inequality as they may continue to reinforce the belief in social hierarchy and the resolution to maintain the status quo (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Chow, Lowery, & Hogan, 2013). In addition, appealing to people's spirituality regarding the values of care, justice, fairness, and reckoning may also be a way to touch their humaneness and stimulate their openness to social differences. Most religions or human-deity relationships assume the transcendent nature of human existence and social responsibility. An appeal to the ethics of religion could be a persuasive message for promoting peaceful relations and embracing diversity, particularly in highly religious societies.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study utilized a single group of participants, that is, undergraduate students in the university. It would be pivotal to have participants across different ages, educational, ethnic groups, and other population characteristics. Subsequent studies should aim for a broader sample and explore more intervening variables that could attenuate outgroup intolerance.

Acknowledgments

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