

Social categorisation

Blurring the boundaries

If you think of conflicts around the world, a common link emerges: in many cases they can be traced to differences in religion, ethnicity, or countless other bases for group membership. The pervasiveness of classification into social categories as a bedrock of intergroup relations is evident in all strata of social life; from efforts towards closer integration of European member states to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, from 'ethnic cleansing' in former Yugoslavia to genocide in Rwanda. How we classify ourselves and others along these multiple social criteria has a significant impact on intergroup relations.

Ever since Allport's (1954) seminal writings categorisation has played a central role in explorations of person perception. It is now understood to be an integral part of the explanation for prejudice and discrimination. With such understanding comes the possibility of modifying some aspect of the categorisation process to alleviate social conflict. Can we use what we know of social categorisation in attempts to improve intergroup relations, whether it be curtailing of either violent intergroup conflict or the social exclusion of ethnic minorities and other stigmatised social groups?

One emerging approach in social categorisation research may offer the potential for reducing prejudice. Typically, work in intergroup relations has focused on single 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' (where ingroups are social categories that include the self and outgroups social categories that exclude the self). But the complexity of real social contexts in an increasingly multicultural world demands a new approach. Psychologists are realising that



The winner of the 2000 Award for Outstanding Doctoral Research Contributions to Psychology, RICHARD J. CRISP, describes his research on the potential of 'multiple social categorisation' in reducing prejudice.

people can classify themselves, and others, along multiple dimensions of category membership simultaneously (e.g. 'female' or 'male' and 'young' or 'elderly'; 'British' or 'French' and 'black' or 'white'), and that such multiple social classification can have significant effects on social perception.

Do people use multiple social classifications?

Perceivers certainly have the mental ability to process non-social stimuli that vary along multiple criteria (Crisp & Hewstone, 1999; see also Deschamps, 1977). But this ability is not restricted to the classification of physical objects. In culturally varied contexts people also seem spontaneously to use multiple bases for classification in the processing of social information. With colleagues, I adapted a paradigm used by Park and Rothbart (1982) to allow subtle manipulation of multiple category memberships. Participants were presented with a short paragraph, ostensibly taken from a local newspaper, and were told that the experimenter was interested in how people read such stories. The stories concerned different events, both positive (e.g. a citizens' award) and negative (e.g. drunk driving). Participants read the story and answered several questions, then the experimenter left the room as if the 'survey' was over. Forty-five minutes later the experimenter reappeared and gave the participants a surprise cued recall test in which they were required to recall some specific information about the character in the story (e.g. age, occupation).

We used this paradigm in a study in Northern Ireland and found that participants processed the information, about females and males and Catholics and Protestants, as an interactive function of

both category dimensions (Crisp, Hewstone & Cairns, 2001). Put another way, both bases for category membership were attended to by participants. We found similar effects in studies that employed the same paradigm, but in different cultural contexts (Singapore, Wales) and using alternative category dimensions (ethnicity: Chinese vs. Malay; nationality: English vs. Welsh) (Crisp & Hewstone, 2001).

These studies demonstrated that people can spontaneously use multiple criteria in the processing and retention of information about their social world. The question then became how people use these combinations of category membership. To fully understand (and beneficially use) multiple categorisation as a potential means of reducing prejudice, it is necessary to model the effects we expect multiple group affiliations to have on social judgements. Several such models have been proposed, and recent work is establishing when and how social judgements vary according to particular combinations of group membership.

Models of multiple categorisation

A consequence of activating more than a single basis for social classification is that 'others' can be classified as both the same as us and different from us at the same time. Take, for example, sex and age. If the perceiver is a young female then other young females share group membership with the perceiver on both dimensions of categorisation (they are 'double ingroup' members). Young males and elderly females are thus 'mixed-category' members (being partially ingroup and partially outgroup), and elderly males are 'double outgroup' members (being different from the perceiver on both category dimensions).

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As demonstrated by the memory studies in Northern Ireland, Singapore, and Wales, people can and do respond to others differently contingent on the relative composite of multiple group memberships. Specifying exactly how evaluations vary in such contexts is an intriguing question. (Would, for instance, British psychologists identify more with British engineers or German psychologists?) There are several models that specify how the four composite groups possible with two categories of membership will be evaluated (see Brewer *et al.*, 1987; Hewstone *et al.*, 1993).

Initial work examining composite group evaluations found that some patterns were more prevalent than others (e.g. the 'additive' pattern, where positive evaluation varies simply according to the degree of shared group membership; see Table 1, row 1.). Other more complex patterns were, however, also evident (e.g. the 'social inclusion' pattern, where evaluations are equally high for any group with at least one membership shared with the person making the judgement). Another example is the 'equivalence' pattern where all combined groups are evaluated equally positively). This variation in the pattern of evaluation observed across crossed-category composite groups prompted work that tried to uncover when different patterns of evaluation might be observed, and what psychological processes might explain their structure.

Some key moderators are now emerging from work that has examined potential predictors of the different patterns of evaluation. Compared with the most basic 'additive' pattern (which is the baseline pattern, expected in the absence of all other influences), positive mood seems to promote more socially inclusive evaluations. For example, we studied the effects of positive mood on combined categorisations using artificial groups (Crisp & Hewstone, 2000a). The anticipated additive pattern of bias was found in the neutral mood condition. As predicted, when participants were in a good mood (by receiving positive feedback about their performance on a 'vigilance task') the additive pattern of responding was replaced with an equivalence pattern (which represents positive and equal evaluation of all the composite groups; see Figure 1). This shift supports the notion that positive mood promotes a more inclusive use of categorisation (Isen *et al.*, 1992).

Something else that can change how people evaluate composite groups is the simultaneous presence of a 'higher level' superordinate membership (for example,

TABLE 1 Degrees of positive evaluation of different combined groups

	Combined categorisation			
	Two shared memberships (ingroup + ingroup)	One membership shared, one not shared (ingroup + outgroup)	One membership shared, one not shared (outgroup + ingroup)	Neither membership shared (outgroup + outgroup)
1. Additive	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
2. Social inclusion	High	High	High	Low
3. Equivalence	High	High	High	High

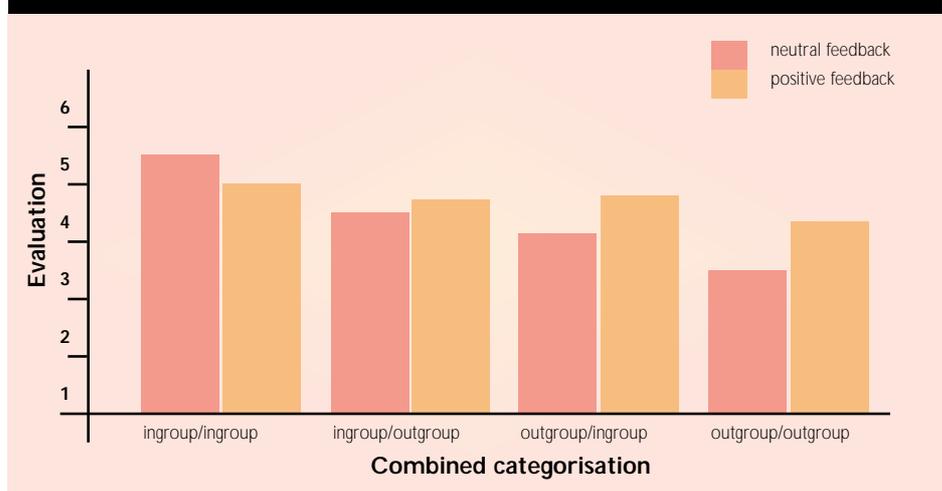
'European' is a more inclusive membership than 'British', which in turn is more inclusive than 'Londoner'). We asked participants simply to remember a number of different names during 'filler' tasks that involved indicating whether a personality trait appearing on a computer screen was positive or negative in connotation (Crisp & Hewstone, 2000b). In fact, the names varied in the extent to which they were typically male or female, and the extent to which they were also typically English or Welsh (e.g. 'Rachel Whitehouse' versus 'Aled Thomas'). Faster responses to positive traits and slower responses to negative traits indicated higher evaluation of the name currently in memory. Finally, prior to each trait presented on the screen a masked prime appeared for 50 milliseconds. This prime was either neutral 'xxxx', the pronoun 'we' or the pronoun 'they'. It was predicted that the pronoun 'we' would act like a 'superordinate prime', making a higher-level superordinate identity more salient (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Perdue *et al.*, 1990). In so doing, judgements in the

multiple-category context should become themselves more inclusive with any basis for shared membership (even if the target was partially an outgroup) promoting positive evaluation (in other words, the social inclusion pattern). Only those targets completely excluded from the ingroup (i.e. the double outgroup) should retain a relative negative evaluation.

As predicted, the superordinate 'we' prime did in fact lead to a more inclusive pattern. Reaction times to positive traits were facilitated when participants retained in working memory any name that indicated some element of shared membership. For our English female participants, this meant English female, English male, or Welsh female names, compared with the total outgroup name (Welsh males; for related work involving exclusive 'they' primes, see Crisp, Hewstone *et al.*, in press).

It is worth asking at this point whether specifying the interrelationships between multiple memberships in the context of more inclusive memberships is too abstract and complex for any application to real

FIGURE 1 The effects of positive mood on evaluations in a crossed-categorisation context (data from Crisp & Hewstone, 2000a)



intergroup relations. I would argue that it is not, and that such studies can capture the complexity of real social contexts well. Consider for instance the case of European integration and the effects of using this highly inclusive membership to categorise oneself and others. As we have noted, people do spontaneously (and apparently pre-consciously) use multiple criteria for classification when thinking about others. As we are increasingly encouraged to consider our European membership in conjunction with national and ethnic affiliations, the relevance of how patterns of judgement may vary becomes clear. For instance, what it means to be British and Asian may change in the context of a more inclusive European identity. Studies of the determinants of models of multiple classification may well help to clarify what to expect in an increasingly dynamic sociopolitical climate.

Recently we proposed a framework to unite all the work outlined above. This framework integrates what we now know of the antecedent factors that determine different patterns of evaluation in multiple category contexts (e.g. positive mood, a salient superordinate identity), and predicts when and via which psychological route (e.g. affective, cognitive) particular outcomes are likely (Crisp, Ensari *et al.*, in press). Such a model will, we hope, guide future developments in our understanding of complex intergroup contexts.

There is, however, an additional proposed benefit of multiple categorisation. Compared with settings where one criterion for group membership is situationally dominant, considering additional shared bases for categorisation may offer a way of reducing prejudice. For instance, racial discrimination may be reduced when people are aware of shared (e.g. nationality) as well as non-shared (race) group memberships. Can encouraging people to consider additional bases for group membership reduce the extent to which an existing social classification is used as a basis for intergroup bias? Some recent work suggests that, under the right conditions, multiple categorisation can indeed reduce negative evaluations of outgroups.

Reducing prejudice

Early anthropological observations suggested that multiple and crossed societal structures may promote lower levels of intergroup conflict. For instance, LeVine and Campbell (1972) noted improved intergroup relations in cultures where there

were conflicting group loyalties. They observed that individuals may have an obligation to engage in military operations for their local group but at the same time be obliged to do the same for their group founded on common ancestry. When these loyalties were mutually inconsistent, there seemed to be reduced conflict (apparently due to the dilemma in attempting to find a way to satisfy the two or more groups instead of being disloyal to one of them). LeVine and Campbell suggested that group members actively make use of this state of affairs by affiliating themselves with multiple groups.

Despite these promising observations, experimental studies comparing simple categorisation with criss-crossing group structures have been equivocal in their findings. In a review of experimental studies addressing this issue we found as much evidence in favour of the proposed bias-reducing effects of crossed categorisation as we did against (Crisp & Hewstone, 1999). However, we did find methodological variability that may account for this lack of consensus, such as the absence of particular statistical comparisons and baseline conditions. We addressed these issues in a refined test of the bias-reduction hypothesis (Crisp, Hewstone & Rubin, 2001).

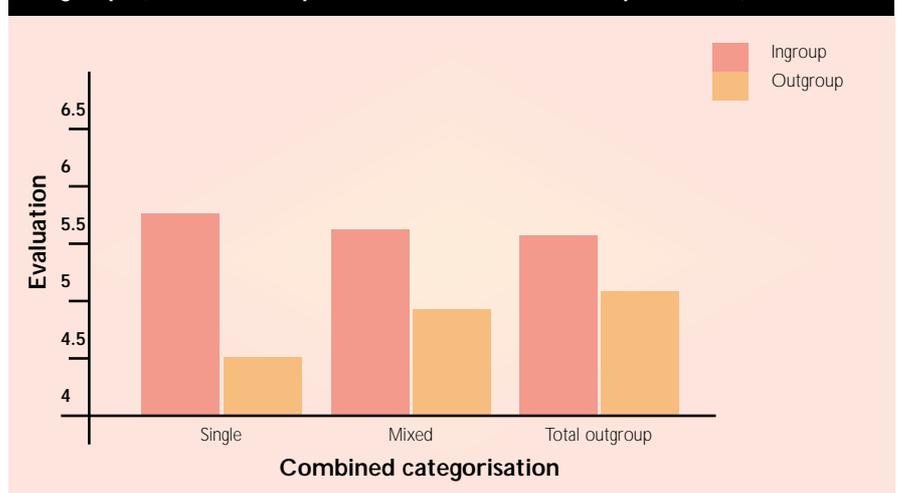
In this study, participants were categorised by means of a random allocation procedure (into artificial groups) and completed 'reward matrices' (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971), awarding points to members of either a single outgroup, mixed group (with one shared and one non-shared membership), or double outgroup (with two non-shared memberships). A higher

points allocation to participants' own group indicated ingroup favouritism. The findings revealed that participants were no less biased against a person with shared (mixed) membership compared with those without. There was, in fact, an increase in bias against targets who differed from participants on two criteria. Encouraging participants to consider a shared additional group membership did not, therefore, reduce bias.

In another study we investigated whether actively introducing a shared basis for categorisation into an existing situation involving just one ingroup and one outgroup would reduce bias. A similar study was carried out to that described above, but this time participants rated first single outgroups and then mixed/double outgroups. Point allocations at Time 2 (combined categorisation) were compared with those at Time 1 (single categorisation, Crisp, 1998). The introduction of a shared categorisation did not change the level of bias for (Time 2) mixed groups, but the introduction of an additional non-shared membership led to a significant increase in bias for (Time 2) double outgroups. Once again, an additional shared basis for group membership did not improve evaluations, and bias only increased against total outgroup members.

In a final experiment, we extended the crossed-categorisation paradigm by adding an extra four categories for consideration instead of just one; for example, Cardiff and Bristol students who were all also 'psychologists', 'females', 'living in university accommodation', '18- to 21-year-olds' and 'born in the UK'. (Crisp, Hewstone & Rubin, 2001). We

FIGURE 2 Evaluations of single, mixed and total outgroups relative to ingroups (data from Crisp, Hewstone & Rubin, 2001; Experiment 2)



hypothesised, on the basis of a return to the functional assumptions inherent in theories of social categorisation (e.g. Tajfel, 1969), that using more than just two categorisation criteria in the social context may be more successful in improving attitudes towards the outgroup.

Our reasoning recognised that categorisation is a basic, adaptive and useful cognitive mechanism that allows us to make sense of the complexity of our everyday environment. It is not easy to 'switch off' this automatic mechanism when we encounter people instead of objects. The spontaneous classification of people (especially into basic level categories such as sex and race) forms the mental distinction between ingroups and outgroups, and the prerequisite for prejudice and discrimination ('they' cannot be evaluated negatively compared with 'us' if no mental distinction between 'us' and 'them' exists).

Even two categorisation criteria (as in typical crossed-categorisation contexts) may provide enough of a simplifying function to remain 'useful', hence the findings I have discussed so far. But an increase in the number (and complexity) of available classifications may lead people to abandon the whole categorisation strategy as a useful guide to social judgement altogether. Instead, when making judgements, people may rely more on considering people as individuals, rather than members of particular social groups.

In this study we found a pattern of evaluation entirely in line with these predictions (see Figure 2). Compared with single classification, when both mixed and total outgroups comprised five bases for social classification, less bias was observed (i.e. a smaller difference between ingroup and outgroup evaluations). As predicted, the reduction in bias was equivalent for both multiple-group conditions – if categorisation was abandoned as a means of guiding judgement, affiliation to those categories should indeed be incidental. Supporting the notion that categorisation was abandoned, in the multiple-group conditions participants thought less about the situation as involving two distinct groups, but instead regarded all targets in the experiment as individuals. This difference statistically explained the improved outgroup evaluations. Thus, multiple categorisation can lead to a shift in how people are perceived (if there are enough clear additional criteria for classification), and can improve intergroup relations.

Conclusion

In this article I have reviewed a programme of research that has sought to establish whether, when, how and why multiple social categorisation may improve intergroup relations. We know that people use multiple criteria for social classification in naturalistic settings (e.g. when selectively processing group-relevant information). Furthermore, the use of multiple classification in person perception can lead to predictable variations in the evaluation of others who both share and do not share group memberships with perceivers. This variation in evaluation can be predicted on the basis of situational factors such as mood, or the presence of superordinate identities. Finally, while making just one additional basis for classification salient may not reliably improve intergroup relations, recent work has found that when many more criteria for classification are considered in conjunction with the target groups, people think less categorically. They then show improved attitudes towards the outgroup. In the context of increasing multiculturalism, such findings will

improve our understanding of the relationship between complex social categorisation and intergroup discrimination.

Future clarification of the phenomena associated with such complex group affiliation will hopefully yield more insights into the psychology of social categorisation. Perhaps most importantly, what we now understand of the intricate links between mental representation and evaluation of social groups is contributing to the development of prejudice-reduction and conciliation strategies. For example, by promoting a shift from categorised to individuated thought, multiple categorisation may prove useful in orienting rival groups away from broad divisions prior to any conciliatory meeting. Application of such psychological models may ultimately provide an invaluable contribution to the promotion of social inclusion and the establishment of harmonious intergroup relations.

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