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Perceiving one's nation: Entitativity, agency and security in the international arena

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Perceiving one's nation: Entitativity, agency and security in the international arena

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The perception of groups as real entities rather than mere aggregates of individuals has important consequences on intergroup relations. Social psychological research, in fact, shows that it affects stereotyping, identification process, and intergroup bias. Previous research has also shown that group entitativity is not a positive or negative group attribute per se; rather, it depends on the context and the relationship between the perceiver and the group. While enhancing entitativity leads to worse expectations about the out-group actions, high entitativity is a valued characteristic when associated with an ally or with the in-group. Indeed, enhancing in-group entitativity leads to stronger in-group identification. The specific reasons for why this is the case, however, remain to be ascertained. What is good about in-group entitativity? In the present contribution we propose that in-group entitativity may lead to perceive the group as a real entity provided with intentions and capacity for planned actions, notably ensuring the safety of its members by protecting them against external threats. We report two correlational studies conducted with American citizens (Study 1) and Italian citizens (Study 2), showing that in-group entitativity is associated with a higher level of identification, attribution of intentionality, and perceived security provided by the in-group. These findings were replicated in a third study—conducted with a role-play method on a fictitious scenario—in which entitativity was manipulated rather than measured. Study 3 also shows that artificially increasing the perception of in-group entitativity enhances perceived safety in an international context and reduces the perception of threat from an out-group. Findings are discussed in terms of possible implications for intergroup and international relations.

La perception des groupes en tant qu'entités réelles plutôt que de simples agrégations d'individus a d'importantes conséquences sur les relations inter-groupes. La recherche psychologique sociale, en effet, indique que cela affecte les stéréotypes, le processus d'identification et le biais inter-groupe. La recherche passée a aussi montré que l'entitativité du groupe n'est pas un attribut de groupe positif ou négatif en soi; plutôt, il dépend du contexte et de la relation entre le percepteur et le groupe. Alors que l'amélioration de l'entitativité mène aux pires attentes concernant les actions de l'exogroupe, une entitativité élevée est une caractéristique valorisée lorsqu'elle est associée avec un allié ou avec l'intragroupe. En effet, l'amélioration de l'entitativité de l'intragroupe mène à une identification plus forte à l'intragroupe. Les raisons spécifiques expliquant pourquoi tel est le cas demeurent, cependant, à découvrir. Qu'est-ce qui est bien à propos de l'entitativité de l'intragroupe? Dans la présente contribution, nous proposons que l'entitativité de l'intragroupe peut mener à la perception du groupe comme une entité réelle munie d'intentions et de capacité pour des actions planifiées, notamment l'assurance de la sécurité de ses membres en les protégeant contre les menaces externes. Nous reportons deux études corrélationnelles menées auprès de citoyens américains (étude 1) et de citoyens italiens (étude 2) indiquant que l'entitativité de l'intragroupe est associée avec un plus grand niveau d'identification avec, une attribution de l'intentionnalité et avec une sécurité perçue fournis par l'intragroupe. Ces résultats ont été répliqués dans une troisième étude—menée avec une méthode de jeu de rôle sur un scénario fictif—dans laquelle l'entitativité a été manipulée plutôt que mesurée. L'étude 3 indique aussi que l'augmentation artificielle de la perception de l'entitativité de l'intragroupe favorise la sécurité perçue dans un contexte international et réduit la perception de

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menace de la part d'un exogroupe. Les résultats sont discutés en termes de possibles implications pour des relations inter-groupes et internationales.

La percepción de los grupos como unas entidades reales, en vez de meros agregados de individuos, tiene consecuencias importantes en las relaciones intergrupales. La investigación en psicología social, de hecho, demuestra que ésta afecta a la estereotipización, el proceso de identificación y los sesgos intergrupales. La investigación anterior también demostró que la entitatividad no es un atributo del grupo, positivo o negativo per se, sino que depende del contexto y la relación entre el perceptor y el grupo. Mientras que la entitatividad elevada conduce a peores expectativas sobre las acciones fuera del grupo, la alta entitatividad es una característica valorada cuando se relaciona con el aliado o con el intergrupo. Es más, la entitatividad intergrupala elevada conduce a mayor identificación intergrupala. Las razones específicas de las causas de esto, sin embargo, están por averiguar. ¿Qué hay de bueno en la entitatividad intergrupala? En la presente contribución proponemos que la entitatividad intragrupal puede conducir a percibir el grupo como una entidad real, con intenciones y capacidad para acciones planeadas, asegurando notablemente la seguridad de sus miembros y protegiéndolos contra las amenazas exteriores. Informamos sobre dos estudios correlacionales llevados a cabo con ciudadanos americanos (Estudio 1) y ciudadanos italianos (Estudio 2) demostrando que la entitatividad intergrupala está relacionada con mayores niveles de identificación con el intergrupo, atribución de la intencionalidad y seguridad percibida proporcionada por el intergrupo. Estos resultados fueron replicados en un tercer estudio—llevado a cabo mediante el método del role-play en un escenario ficticio—en el que la entitatividad, más bien que medida, fue manipulada. El Estudio 3 también demuestra que el incremento artificial de la percepción de la entitatividad intragrupal aumenta la seguridad percibida en un contexto internacional y reduce la percepción de la amenaza del exogrupa. Se discuten los resultados en términos de sus posibles implicaciones para las relaciones intergrupales e internacionales.

Keywords: Entitativity; Identification; Intentionality; Security; Threat.

“Together we stand” or, in Italian, “L’Unione fa la forza” are just two examples of how the idea that collective action may help reaching intended results is conveyed, be it protection against an external threat or aggressive action against another social entity. The belief that there is safety in numbers is so ostensibly true that it requires little rigorous research: Late at night we would rather walk in small groups or with a friend than alone. The tighter the group, the more cohesive, the safer one feels.

The tendency to amplify the groupness of our own group may not be limited to small, interacting groups, but also seems to extend to large social categories. The present paper deals with this latter kind. After reviewing the literature on entitativity, we present a rationale according to which seeing one’s in-group as a real entity leads to the perception of intentionality at the collective level, as well as an enhanced sense of security and protection against specific threats. We then present findings from three studies that investigated our hypotheses with real and fictitious groups in both Italy and the US.

Perceiving groups as entities

In the early 20th century, social scientists engaged in a debate about whether groups were real entities

or just the sum of their individual members (e.g., McDougall, 1920/1973). In social psychology, highly influential ideas on the perception of groups as entities were presented in the 1950s. Donald Campbell (1958) coined the term entitativity to indicate the extent to which a social group can be perceived as an “entity”—almost a biological organism—having a real and irrefutable existence. As pointed out by Moreland and McMinn (2004, p.420), Campbell’s definition refers to what groups actually are, as opposed to how they are perceived to be. However, in Campbell’s paper and in most of the work that it inspired since the 1990s, it is the perception of groups that is the focus of attention among social psychologists, and which is likely to be the most important aspect to investigate. In psychology we are chiefly concerned with what is real in people’s mind.

Inspired by the *Gestalttheorie*, Campbell argued that entitativity is influenced by factors such as proximity and similarity between group members, as well as their common fate and the salience of the group from the perceiver’s perspective. Entitativity, in other words, is the dimension along which we differentiate between a mere aggregate of individuals (e.g., the line of people at the bank) and a real group (e.g., a soccer team). In defining entitativity, it is important not to consider it as a quality that a group possesses or

not, but instead as a property varying along a continuum (Campbell, 1958; Castano, 2004b; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998). Although a relation between actual and perceived characteristics may well exist, entitativity, like beauty, is likely to exist primarily in the eye of the beholder (cf. Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004a).

The ideas put forward by Campbell were only systematically investigated several decades later, with research on the concept of entitativity flourishing in the 1990s (for a review, see Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004b). Research building on the concept of entitativity helped understand a variety of phenomena ranging from the motivation of the perceiver in seeing groups as entities (Brewer & Harasty, 1996) to the impact of perceived group entitativity on impression formation (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), stereotyping (Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002), and collective responsibility (Castano, 2004b; Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2003).

A prolific line of research focused on the effects of group entitativity on intergroup relations (e.g., Castano, Sacchi, & Gries, 2003a; Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999), with most recent results suggesting that entitativity per se does not seem to be a positive or negative group attribute. Its valence depends on the relational context. For instance, studies on out-group entitativity showed that it has different consequences depending on whether the out-group is an enemy or an ally. If the out-group is in a conflictual relationship with the perceiver's in-group, enhancing its entitativity leads to a worsening of expectations about its actions (Castano et al., 2003a) and to a general perception of its actions as more harmful (Dasgupta et al., 1999). However, when the out-group is perceived as an ally, its perception as an entitative group leads to opposite expectations. This might be due to the fact that an ally is almost an in-group, and when it comes to the in-group, research findings show that entitativity is good (for a review, see Castano, 2004b).

Lickel et al. (2000) found a positive correlation between the perception of in-group entitativity and in-group identification; Gaertner and Schopler (1998) showed that entitativity leads to a stronger in-group bias; Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, and Sacchi (2002) found that in-group members respond to an existential threat by enhancing in-group entitativity; and research that directly manipulated in-group entitativity showed that this had a positive effect on in-group identification (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 2003b). While there is little doubt that entitative groups are attractive, the reasons why this is the case are less well understood. It is the aim of this manuscript to investigate some consequences

of the in-group reification that could be attractive from the point of view of the perceiver and the consequences with respect to the way the group can be purported to outsiders.

Entitativity and intentionality

According to Morris, Menon, and Ames (2001), the perception of agency is driven by "implicit theories" that are likely to suggest who is behind an event and what kind of entities act intentionally and autonomously. These theories of agency could designate as agent a person or a supernatural being as well as a group. Research in cross-cultural psychology tells us that, in collectivistic cultures, groups are perceived as well-integrated and coherent entities, independent agents provided with intentions, able to regulate the social life and possessing decision-making power (e.g., Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999). This seems to be true in individualistic cultures as well, provided that the group is perceived as high in entitativity. In this case, individuals explain the action of cohesive groups in much the same way that they explain individuals' behaviour—using reasons (O'Laughlin & Malle, 2002). If the group is perceived as low in entitativity, a clear difference in the perception of the individual and the group emerges.

These hypotheses are consistent with the theoretical perspective on entitativity put forward in a seminal paper by Hamilton and Sherman (1996), who argued that information about individuals is processed differently from information about social groups. However, when the latter are highly entitative, information is processed similarly to what is observed for individual targets, that is, with an on-line, continuous updating of the image of the target while the information is coming through (integrative processing). Several studies have yielded support for this hypothesis, with highly entitative groups and individuals being treated in much the same way by the perceiver (e.g., McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1994, 1997; Welbourne, 1999). This, of course, does not mean that entitative groups and individuals have exactly the same status in the perceiver's mind. What we argue is that, compared to low-entitative groups, high-entitative groups are perceived as agents, capable of pursuing a goal. This, of course, is related to intentionality: a behaviour is considered intentional when it appears purposeful and directed to an object or an action (Brentano, 1995; Kant, 1785/1923), and intentionality is defined as having a representation of a goal (Gärdenfors, 2000). In psychological

literature too, intentionality has been operationalized in terms of plans and purposes—for instance, in Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1975; Ajzen, 1985). The perceiver who represents the group as capable of pursuing a goal would thus also perceive intentionality in the actions of such a group.

Entitativity, security and threat

The group has always been considered as playing a fundamental role for the survival of the individual. The idea that “the individual who does not need to live in society can only be a god” has already been found in Aristotle's *Politics* (350 BC/1921, 1253a, pp.2–8). Albeit less poetically, a similar idea is put forward by sociobiological models, which emphasize the fundamental role of the group in the process of adaptation, going from the optimization of the use of resources to defence against external threats (e.g., Alexander, 1974). Since cooperation with other members of the community leads to more effective hunting and greater chances to defend oneself against rivals, individuals are more likely to survive in a group than when they are alone. This is an argument that has been proposed to account for the presence in humans of a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Although the group per se seems to have an important function in satisfying the individual need of protection, not any type of group is likely to serve this function effectively. We argue that highly entitative groups are more capable of providing such an evolutionary advantage to the individual (see Wilson, 2002). Highly entitative groups undergo a process of reification, which is associated with the perception of the group as possessing the necessary agency to defend the individual from external threats. Indeed, highly entitative groups are more likely to display coordinate collective action, or a disposition toward unified mass actions (cf. Abelson, Dasgupta, & Banaji, 1998). The evaluation of a highly entitative in-group as a valid source of security for its members could make it suitable to satisfy the individual's motivational need of protection, at a symbolic, imagined level as well as in actuality.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

The rationale outlined above led us to formulate a series of hypotheses. First, the perception of entitativity, intentionality, and security should go hand in hand. Specifically, the higher the perceived entitativity of the in-group, the greater the perception

of intentionality at the group level, and the greater the security. Second, positive correlations between entitativity and identification should emerge, as in previous research. Third, and most important, experimentally enhancing in-group entitativity should lead to the perception of the in-group as possessing intentionality and provide an enhanced sense of safety against external threats. These hypotheses were tested across three studies. The first two were correlational (Study 1 and Study 2); one was conducted in the US and one in Italy, to test the hypothesis cross-culturally. Study 3, conducted in the US, aimed to verify experimentally the effect of manipulated in-group entitativity on the aforementioned variables. In addition, this third study explored a possible interaction effect between entitativity and the quality of the relations between the two groups.

STUDY 1

Participants

Forty-six students at Ohio State University were approached in various libraries and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study, without any monetary reward or course credits. Approximately 80% of those approached agreed to take part in the study.

Material and procedure

Participants were asked to answer a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A), which comprised a shortened version of the entitativity scale (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 1999) consisting of six items ($\alpha = .71$): a four-item identification scale ($\alpha = .86$) and two items assessing whether participants perceived the US as possessing a set of intentions that direct its actions ($r = .27, p < .07$). Finally, seven items measured whether the US was perceived as stable and strong in the international arena, the extent to which enemies could hurt it, and the extent to which it could be threatened ($\alpha = .75$). Participants answered all questions on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). A final item was included to ensure that participants were US citizens.

Results and discussion

As expected, the variable entitativity was positively correlated with identification, intentionality, and perceived security (see Table 1). Consistent with the hypotheses proposed earlier, these results showed that the more people saw their group as

highly entitative the more they identified with it. Moreover, the more the in-group was perceived as entitative, the more it was judged as having precise intentions and purposes driving its actions (Castano et al., 2003b; Lickel et al., 2000). Entitativity went also hand in hand with the sense of safety in the international context: The more people perceived their group as highly entitative, the more they felt protected and safe. These empirical findings gave early support to our rationale: In a second study we aimed to replicate them in a different context and to extend the intentionality scale by including some negatively worded items to avoid acquiescence bias.

STUDY 2

Participants

Participants, approached in various libraries of the University of Milano-Bicocca (Italy), were asked to volunteer in a study about Italy and Italian people. A total of 81 students accepted (approximately 80%) and were handed a questionnaire. All participants were Italian.

Material and procedure

The questionnaire was a translation of the questionnaire used in Study 1 (see Appendix A). It included the entitativity scale ($\alpha = .74$) and the scale of identification with the in-group ($\alpha = .82$). Measures were identical with the exception of the addition of two negatively phrased items for the intentionality scale ($\alpha = .63$) and for the use of a six-item scale to measure perceived security ($\alpha =$

.68): The item "it is difficult to jeopardize the Italian commercial supremacy" has been deleted from the scale because speaking of Italian commercial supremacy was not plausible. Two items of the security scale used in Study 1 (i.e. the fourth and the sixth) were also negatively phrased to avoid response acquiescence. Participants answered all questions on 7-point scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*).

Results and discussion

The pattern of correlation is highly consistent with that obtained in Study 1 (see Table 2). Entitativity correlated positively with identification, confirming that the more people evaluated their group as entitative the more they identified with it. Entitativity also correlated positively with the variables intentionality and security. The more the in-group is perceived as entitative, the more it was judged as having precise intentions and the more it was perceived as having a stable and secure position in the international arena. The correlation between intentionality and security was also replicated in this second study.

Overall, the pattern of correlations emerging in Study 2 provides a replication of the findings obtained in Study 1 in a different country, Italy, which enjoys a much less powerful position in the international arena. Taken together, the findings of these two studies provide encouraging support for our claim concerning the relations between entitativity, intentionality, and security. The goal of Study 3 was assessing whether entitativity can actually influence the perception of intentionality and security.

TABLE 1
Correlations between variables (Study 1)

	<i>Identification</i>	<i>Intentionality</i>	<i>Security</i>
Entitativity (M = 4.04, SD = 0.89)	.58**	.45**	.38**
Identification (M = 4.60, SD = 1.58)	–	.42**	.24
Intentionality (M = 4.15, SD = 0.96)		–	.35**
Security (M = 4.38, SD = 0.90)			–

** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2
Correlations between variables (Study 2)

	<i>Identification</i>	<i>Intentionality</i>	<i>Security</i>
Entitativity (M = 4.13, SD = 1.07)	.44**	.22*	.34**
Identification (M = 5.01, SD = 1.44)	–	.12	.20
Intentionality (M = 3.38, SD = 1.02)		–	.34**
Security (M = 3.68, SD = 0.99)			–

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

STUDY 3

The primary goal of Study 3 was to test the hypothesis that in-group entitativity has a causal role on the perception of the in-group of possessing intentionality as well as on the perception of safety. In the context in which we are testing our hypotheses, this was operationalized in terms of safety in the international relations arena, both in general terms and with respect to a specific situation—namely the confrontation with another country that can be an ally or a competitor. The reason why we included the intergroup relation as an additional factor was to investigate whether the impact of entitativity on the perception of threat from an out-group varied depending on the actual relations between two states. In fact, the presence of an out-group is menacing per se, but it could be that entitativity plays a role, especially when a priori relations between the in-group and the out-group are competitive.

Participants

A total of 101 (70 female and 31 male) undergraduate students from Ohio State University participated in the study in exchange of course credits.

Materials and procedure

Participants arrived in the laboratory in groups of four and each of them was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of the experimental design: in-group entitativity (high vs low) and nature of intergroup relations (competitive vs cooperative). The experiment was done entirely on a computer using MediaLab software (Jarvis, 2000). Since the study was conducted before the 9/11 terrorist attack, both the manipulation of the perceived level of entitativity of the US and identifying a country that was a credible threat to the US military or economic supremacy proved to be difficult—as a series of pre-tests using China, India, and Russia as possible antagonists revealed. Thus, participants were asked to engage in a role-play as citizens of an imaginary country. After some general instructions, participants were presented with a map of a fictitious continent and were asked to imagine that they were citizens of the country marked on the map by the letter “A” and named “Arland.” In the next screen, an image of Arland and a paragraph describing Arland were presented. In the high entitativity condition, Arland was presented as a country with a long

history, characterized by political and economical harmony, and with a high degree of cohesiveness and similarity between its inhabitants. Arland’s map was very simple, and filled with one single colour. On the contrary, in the low entitativity condition, the map of Arland showed the boundaries of six distinct regions. These were described in the paragraph as having a very different political, cultural, and economical situation and a recent common history. The two descriptions were modelled after the US, which can be presented as a highly entitative nation or as an ensemble of highly distinctive states. To assess the effectiveness of the in-group entitativity manipulation, after reading the information about their fictitious country, participants were asked to evaluate their in-group (Arland) on the entitativity scale ($\alpha = .83$).

Participants were then presented with the identification ($\alpha = .86$), intentionality ($\alpha = .67$), and security scales ($\alpha = .73$) used in the two previous studies (see Appendix A for details) and answered all questions on 7-point scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). After completing this first set of dependent variables, participants were presented with a map representing Arland (in-group) and another imaginary country of the continent, named Yzet (out-group). The map appeared on the screen with a short paragraph illustrating the relationship between Arland and Yzet. Half of the participants in both the high and low entitativity conditions read that Arland and Yzet held cooperative relations, and that the two countries had reached a trade agreement on import/export economic politics (cooperative condition). The other half of the participants read a two-sentence paragraph saying that Arland and Yzet held competitive relations, and conflicting positions over trading issues (competitive condition).

To test the effectiveness of this manipulation, participants were next asked two questions concerning the relationship between Arland and Yzet (see Appendix A). Finally, participants answered a four-item scale ($\alpha = .77$) that measured perceived threat from the out-group. The threat was devised as the likelihood for Arland to be jeopardized by Yzet in the international arena (see Appendix A). Participants answered all questions on a 7-point scale, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). The time participants spent reading the screens containing the manipulation were also recorded in order to identify participants who did not follow the instructions. At the end of the session, they were asked whether they had engaged seriously in the role-play, carefully debriefed, thanked, and released.

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses

Two participants were excluded from the analyses because they declared not to have engaged in the role-play, and three other participants because they ostensibly did not read the instructions. The final sample thus comprised 96 participants.

The items for the different scales were averaged to form composite scores. A *t*-test was computed to compare the two groups in the high and low entitativity conditions on the entitativity score. The difference proved statistically significant, $t(94) = 9.94, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 2.05$, indicating that the participants in the high entitativity condition perceived Arland as being more entitative ($M = 5.15, SD = 0.85$) than those in the low entitativity condition ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.80$). We can thus conclude that the experimental manipulation of entitativity was successful.

A two-way ANOVA, using entitativity (high vs low entitativity) and relations (cooperation vs competition) as between-subject factors was conducted on the score of the second manipulation check, which was obtained by averaging the two items measuring the quality of the relationship between the two countries ($r = .67, p < .001$). The analysis revealed a main effect of relation on the manipulation check, $F(1, 94) = 130.21, p < .01, f = 1.23$. As intended, participants in the cooperative condition perceived the relationship between the two countries to be significantly better ($M = 5.79, SD = 1.09$) than participants in competitive condition ($M = 3.32, SD = 0.98$). In line with our hypotheses, no main effect of the entitativity manipulation and no interaction effects were found, $F(1, 94) < 1, ns$.

Intentionality, security, and identification

As the manipulation of the variable relations was introduced towards the end of the experiment, a simple *t*-test using condition as factor was computed for the variables identification, intentionality, and security.

Participants in the high entitativity condition identified with the citizens of their nation more strongly than participants in the low entitativity condition, $t(94) = 5.51, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 1.12$. The analyses also revealed a significant effect of entitativity on intentionality, $t(94) = 4.67, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 0.95$, and on security, $t(94) = 5.83, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 1.41$. Compared to the low entitativity condition, participants in the high

TABLE 3

Means and standard deviations of dependent variables by condition (Study 3)

Variables	Entitativity			
	High ($n = 50$)		Low ($n = 46$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Entitativity	5.15	0.83	3.45	0.80
Identification	5.16	1.12	3.81	1.28
Intentionality	4.67	0.91	3.67	1.16
Security	4.37	0.86	3.04	1.01

entitativity condition perceived their nation as possessing greater intentionality and as providing more security in the international arena (see Table 3).

Consistent with Study 1 and 2, entitativity, intentionality, and security go hand in hand (see Table 4). To verify that the effects on security and intentionality were not solely the consequences of the increase in identification in the high entitativity condition, an ANCOVA was computed using identification as covariate. In this analysis, the main effect of entitativity remained significant and identification did not predict intentionality, $F(1, 93) < 1, ns$, nor security, $F(1, 93) = 1.86, ns$. This result thus rules out the possibility that the effect of the manipulation on intentionality and security was due to an increase in the level of identification.

Threat

We conducted a two-way ANOVA with entitativity (high vs low entitativity) and relations (competitive vs cooperative) as between-participants factors and threat as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed a strong, although quite trivial, main effect of relation on threat, $F(1, 92) = 13.79, p < .01, f = 0.42$. Participants to whom Yzet (the out-group) was presented as a competitor of Arland perceived it as significantly more threatening ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.14$) than participants who were led to perceive Yzet as an ally ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.14$). More importantly, the main effect of entitativity was significant, $F(1, 92) = 5.74, p = .02, f = 0.26$. Participants in the high entitativity condition ($M = 3.60, SD = 1.31$) perceived

TABLE 4

Correlations between variables (Study 3)

	Entitativity	Identification	Intentionality	Security
Entitativity	–	.39**	.56**	.53**
Identification		–	.29**	.36**
Intentionality			–	.59**
Security				–

** $p < .01$.

significantly less threat from Yzet than participants in the low entitativity condition ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.04$). No significant interaction effect was found, $F(1, 92) = 0.06$, $p = .80$. This result shows that the relationship between the in-group and the out-group does not need to be competitive for entitativity to have effect on perceived threat. Even when the out-group is an ally, enhanced in-group entitativity reduces perceived threat.

Study 3 was carried out to test the causal effect of in-group entitativity on perceived intentionality, security, and threat. In line with our hypotheses, the pattern of results indicates that high in-group entitativity leads to the perception of stronger intentionality, of greater security in the international arena, and of lesser perceived threat when confronted with a foreign country, whether this is in a cooperative or competitive relationship with the in-group. As expected, participants in the high entitativity condition also identified significantly more with the in-group than did participants in low entitativity condition. It is interesting to note that this result, although obtained in a role-play situation, is consistent with previous findings conducted on real groups (Castano et al., 2003b).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main aim of the present paper was to investigate some consequences of the in-group entitativity enhancement that could play an important role at a motivational level. We have argued that for individuals to identify with social categories, they need to be perceived as having real existence, which in turn leads to the attribution of intentionality to the entity itself, and to the feeling of greater security and protection from external threats (cf. Castano, 2004b). Two correlational studies focusing on the US and Italy and one experimental study focusing on a fictitious country examined the relationship between entitativity and these countries' standing in the international arena. The results emerging from these studies yielded clear evidence in support of our hypotheses.

Entitativity and intentionality

The perception of entitativity was positively correlated with the attribution of intentionality and with the perception of security in the international arena (Studies 1 and 2). More importantly, manipulating the perception of entitativity of participants' country (Study 3) led to stronger attribution of intentionality to the country. In other words, when the in-group is highly

entitative, its actions come to be perceived as wilful and voluntary. In Western philosophical thought, influenced by Descartes' conceptualization of ego and by the Judeo-Christian concept of "free choice," human action follows from reason and volition (e.g., Browning, 1964); highly entitative groups seem to acquire similar characteristics. This is consistent with earlier findings reviewed above, showing that individuals attribute traits and form representations of highly entitative groups similarly to the way they do for persons (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Susskind, Maurer, Thakkar, Hamilton, & Sherman, 1999; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998). The interpretation of our results in terms of group anthropomorphization, however, clearly needs further exploration. Future research should explore in more depth this phenomenon and its consequences on the perception of collective agency and on the attribution of collective responsibility (Menon et al., 1999).

Entitativity and security

We argued that highly entitative groups increase the sense of safety and decrease the perception of external threat for their members. Consistent with our expectations, we observed a relation between entitativity and the perception of security in the international arena in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 3, participants who were presented with a highly entitative in-group felt more secure when thinking of their country's standing in the international arena, and perceived less threat from a specific foreign country. The idea that the group provides protection to its members is consistent with the literature in both social and evolutionary psychology, and in political science. For instance, the sociobiological model suggests that protection of the individual is one of the ecological advantages given by the group to its members. Some of the several benefits of group life are the possibility of intragroup cooperation against rival groups (Wrangham, 1979), the reduction of predators' pressure (Alexander, 1974), and the improvement of the defence system due to increased environmental vigilance (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997; Van Schaik, 1983).

In reviving the concept of *group selection* within evolutionary theory (Wynne-Edwards, 1962), Brewer and Caporael (1990) argue that the social group constitutes "the *selection environment* for human evolution at the individual level" (p. 190). The characteristics of such an environment are clearly of fundamental importance and, as a result, not every group constitutes an equally fertile environment. The formation of cooperative groups,

well defined and organized, allows for a better and more effective environment compared to an indistinct pool, a simple aggregate of individuals. In other words, a highly entitative group is more likely to satisfy the demands upon which individual survival depends (Caporael & Brewer, 1991). A process that originated in the early phase of human evolution, defined by the presence of small groups characterized by face-to-face interaction, is likely to have been internalized and subsequently generalized to larger, more abstract social entities, with little or no actual contacts between members. It is thus possible that inciting members to boost in-group entitativity taps into a very fundamental psychological structure.

The findings reported here concerning the link between entitativity and perceived security are consistent with earlier work on the in-group homogeneity effect (e.g., Castano & Yzerbyt, 1998; Simon & Brown, 1987). Simon and Brown showed that minority members are motivated to accentuate their group homogeneity to counteract external threat—in term of menace of status—and to reach more positive social identity (see also Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). Rothgerber (1997) provided evidence that individuals stress in-group homogeneity when externally threatened by a hostile out-group (see also Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995, Study 4). Switching from perception to actual homogeneity, Brauer (2001) showed that low status group members react to threatening situations by actually becoming more homogeneous (i.e., they close ranks).

A possible development of this line of thought would be to look at the relation between entitativity and threat. In the present work, in the high entitativity condition, the out-group was perceived as less threatening than in the low entitativity condition. Further studies should attempt to manipulate the level of threat and assess whether the perception of entitativity of the national in-group is affected by such manipulation, in order to provide convergent support for our rationale and preliminary findings. Because of the enhanced need for safety, people should represent their national group as more entitative when menaced as compared to when not. The fact that “United We Stand” signs and bumper-stickers were ubiquitous after 9/11 is certainly anecdotal evidence in support to this hypothesis.

Implications

When its entitativity is increased, the in-group becomes a safe “nest” for individuals, an umbrella

of security under which they can feel protected as a part of a stable and strong unity. Since the concepts of security and threat are inherently relational, involving the presence of the other, these findings have important implications for intergroup relations in the social and political context.

The link between group cohesion and security has already been discussed in the rich political science literature on nationalism. Smith (1995), for instance, suggests that at the basis of the nationalism there is a reaction to a perceived or real external challenge (military, economical, cultural). As such, nationalism would have a defensive function. Furthermore, according to Kelman (1969), one of the roles played by every form of nationalism is that of maintaining the independence and the integrity of the group.

Nationalism, however, should not only be seen in functional and instrumental terms; for the individual, the nation plays an important “symbolic” and “sentimental” role (DeLamater, Katz, & Kelman, 1969). Anthony Smith (1995, p.160) underlines this aspect in the conclusion of in his work: “Over and beyond any political and economical benefits that ethnic nationalism can confer, it is this promise of collective and terrestrial immortality, outfacing death and oblivion, that has helped to sustain so many nations and national states in an era of unprecedented social change [...]” In psychological literature this perspective is paralleled by the suggestion that highly entitative in-groups provide a shield against existential anxiety. Castano and his colleagues (2002) have demonstrated that the in-group is perceived as more entitative when individuals are reminded of their mortality (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). They also argue that this increase in entitativity is due to the fact that being part of a highly entitative, reified entity means possessing a secure social identity: This process results in a different, more abstract level of existence that is not subject to the same, mortal fate as human beings (see also Castano, 2004a; for reviews see Castano & Dechesne, 2005; Castano, Yzerbyt, & Paladino, 2004).

The *leit-motif* of the present paper has been that in-group entitativity is perceived as a positive characteristic of the in-group. It should be noted, however, that it could also lead to undesirable consequences at a social level. First, the social psychological literature presents evidence of a relation between group entitativity and intergroup bias (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Castano et al., 2002; Gaertner & Schopler, 1998). An enhancement of perceived in-group entitativity may thus lead to increase favouritism toward the in-group

and the psychological distance between in-group and out-group.

Furthermore, to the extent that high in-group entitativity fosters the perception of the group as having agency, intentionality, and as being able to pursue its goals, members of highly entitative groups might support actions, notably aggressive ones, that may be disastrous for the well-being and survival of the in-group itself. Political leaders who build consensus and support by fostering a particular sense of “we,” and especially a of a “Great We,” often contribute heavily to the reification of the national community and in so doing may create, among their citizens, an illusion of power that may lead to devastating consequences (e.g. Anzulovic, 1999)

In conclusion, it seems that reifying the in-group has a series of psychological advantages for the individual and for the group as a whole, an observation that helps understand why in-group entitativity has been shown to go hand in hand with strong identification, and offers support to claims that in-group reification serves deeply-rooted psychological needs. Further research is of course needed in order to explore in more detail the relationship between these variables, particularly with respect to the possibility that entitativity is related to the anthropomorphization of the group. Future research is also needed with respect to the other, less positive side of the phenomenon investigated here, namely that perceiving the in-group as highly entitative may bring about negative consequences in terms of intergroup relations. Social psychological research has already shown how groups that are in competitive relations with the in-group are more likely to be perceived as threatening and their actions as harmful when they are also high in entitativity. In addition to this negative effect of displaying the in-group as highly entitative, perceiving the in-group as such, we suggest, may be counter-productive under certain circumstances. Research that would elucidate this phenomenon would have both a theoretical and an applied value.

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APPENDIX A

Entitativity scale (Adapted from Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 1999)

- Citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans have many characteristics in common¹²³
- There are strong ties among citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans¹²³
- Citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans cooperate with each other¹²³
- There are strong similarities between citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans¹²³
- Citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans share a common past experience¹²³
- Citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans have a sense of common fate¹²³

Identification scale

- I identify with citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans¹²³
- Being a citizen of Arland/Italian/American is important for me¹²³
- Being a citizen of Arland/Italian/American does not mean anything to me¹²³
- I'm happy to be citizen of Arland³
- I feel ties with the other citizens of Arland/Italians/Americans¹²³

Intentionality scale

- The US/Italy/Arland is following a well-thought-out master plan¹²³
- The actions of Italy/Arland are characterized by a lack of consistent intentions²³
- The US/Italy/Arland takes control of situations and acts on its intentions¹²³
- Italy/Arland actions are dependent upon factors that are beyond its control¹²³

Security scale

- The US/Arland/Italy is proving to be stable and strong¹²³
- The US/Arland/Italy is likely to affirm itself in the international arena¹²³
- The US/Arland/Italy does not have to worry about having foreign enemies¹²³
- It's difficult to jeopardize the commercial supremacy of the US/Arland¹³
- It is hard to think that the US/Arland/Italy might be threatened by another country¹²³
- The interests of the US/Arland/Italy are well established and defended¹²³
- The US/Arland/Italy holds a stable and secure position in the international arena¹²³

Manipulation check 2

- To what extent Yzet can be considered an ally of Arland? ³
- To what extent Yzet and Arland have cooperative relationships? ³

Threat scale

- Yzet may put in jeopardy the world commercial supremacy of Arland³
 - The commercial supremacy of Arland may be threatened by Yzet³
 - The creation of a Yzet army might jeopardize the power of Arland in the international arena³
 - Yzet might become a serious antagonist for Arland³
-

Superscripts indicate the number of the study in which the item has been used.