

Ingroup bias amongst Nagas- A psychological study of Social Distance

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Abstract: *Ingroup bias is a common feature of many intergroup relations and is believed to be one of the sources of prejudice and intergroup conflicts. The Naga society is one that is comprised of many tribes. The study examined ingroup bias amongst four Naga tribes using scores on a Social Distance (SD) scale. The sample comprised of 240 respondents from four major tribes of Nagaland- Angami, Ao, Konyak and Lotha. There were 80 respondents (40 males and 40 females) within the age group 18 and 40 in each of the four respondent groups.. Ingroup and outgroup SD scores of each respondent group were compared using t-test. Results show ingroup bias in all four respondent groups. Ingroup bias was observed in both male and female respondents of all four groups except for male Lotha respondents who showed bias in favour of some outgroups.*

Key words: *Ingroup, Outgroup, Naga tribes, social categorization, social distance, ingroup bias.*

I. Introduction

Social categorization into ingroup and outgroup is said to be one of the important contributors to the development of discriminatory intergroup behavior (Tajfel, 1982¹). Categorization of individuals into distinct groups, even when those group boundaries are based on arbitrary and transient criteria, can lead individuals to perceive outgroups more negatively than the ingroup (Brewer and Silver, 1988). People possess strong tendencies to do such distinctions (Tajfel, 1982¹, Turner et al., 1987³) based on many dimensions including race, religion, sex, age, occupation, and so on (Baron and Byrne, 1995⁴). According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986⁵), individuals derive a sense of social identity from their membership to a group which is one basic reason for social categorization. Individuals then begin to compare their ingroup with relevant outgroups in their social environment leading to ingroup biases and intergroup differentiations (Tajfel, 1982¹). Studies on intergroup relations typically show the ingroup as more favored than outgroups (Kalin and Berry, 1996⁶; Abela and Petzold, 1996⁷; Phinney, Ferguson and Tate, 1997⁸; Liu, Campbell, and Condie, 1995⁹). Ingroup favoritism is a common feature of many intergroup relations and is believed to be one of the sources of prejudice and intergroup conflicts.

Study of intergroup relations amongst the Nagas is relatively new. One distinctive basis for social categorization amongst the Nagas is tribal membership. The Naga community is comprised of many tribes that share the same racial identity, have a common religion, and is considered as an egalitarian society in that there is no class distinction amongst them. However, it may be mentioned that one distinct characteristic of the Naga society is the strong tribal identity that members of each tribe share with one another. Since the tribes speak different dialects, have different traditional cultures and costumes, and occupy different geographical territories, tribal identity has become a primary social identity for tribe members and social categorization into 'us' and 'them' is done largely in terms of tribal membership. Study of intertribal relationships, is, therefore pertinent to the present day Naga society that is fast becoming urbanized, has limited economic avenues, and is embroiled in a political struggle for naga sovereignty that has stretched on for decades. The study used measures of Social Distance (SD) to see whether ingroup bias exists in the intergroup relations amongst the Naga tribes. SD refers to the degree of intimacy that members of different groups wish to maintain in their relationships with each other. It is used as a measure of prejudice in many intergroup studies (for eg., Mullick, Rehan, & Hraba, 2001¹⁰; Kevin & Fathali, 2001¹¹; Verkuten & Kinket, 2000¹²; Hraba, Hagendoorn & Hagendoorn, 1989¹³; Uniyal & Shah, 1983¹⁴). Findings from the study will serve as an indicator to the kind of inter-tribal relationships among various Naga tribes.

II. Method

2.1 Participants

Sample comprised of 240 respondents from four major tribes of Nagaland- Angami, Ao, Konyak and Lotha. 80 respondents (40 males and 40 females) within the age group 18 and 40 years were taken from each of the four tribes. The participants had varying educational qualifications and were from urban as well as rural areas. All respondents were Christians.

2.2 Tool

The Social Distance Scale (Hindi Version) developed by Diwedi, Bhatnagar, and Asthana was translated in English for the purpose of the study. The scale consists of twelve statements that are expected to elicit responses indicative of the respondent's degree of acceptance of any group. Some statements in the scale relate to acceptance in marriage, willingness for invitation for food, acceptance as neighbors, friends, colleagues, permanent settlers in one's locality, visitors in one's locality and casual acquaintance and others relate to wishes to maintain no relationship, driving out of one's locality, getting imprisoned and shooting. The scale values ranged from 1.04(greatest social distance) to 11.80(least social distance)

The scale was based on Bogardus' scale as well as on Crespi's Social Rejection Thermometer. Therefore, its validity was accepted on a priori basis. The split half reliability coefficients were .91, .83, 1.00, and .90 for boys across national, provincial, religious and caste groups respectively and .52, .75, .70, and .90 for girls across national, provincial, religious, and caste groups respectively.

2.3 Procedure

The participants in all four respondent groups checked the scale with respect to six Naga tribes namely Angami, Ao, Chang, Konyak, Lotha and Sema. Since the participants belonged to the Angami, Ao, Konyak and Lotha tribes, each responded to their respective tribe (ingroup) and five other tribes (outgroups). Participants endorsed the statements they agreed with pertaining to each of the six target tribal groups. The statements that a participant had endorsed with respect to a given tribe were then assigned their respective scale values and the median of such scores was then taken as the participant's SD score for that tribe. The scores obtained by all the 80 respondents in a given group with respect to any given tribe were then averaged to give the group SD score for that tribe. The t-test was used to compare ingroup scores with outgroup scores.

III. Result And Discussion

Table 1 shows the mean SD scores of all four respondent groups with respect to each of the six target tribal groups. The ingroup SD score of each respondent group was compared with the five outgroup SD scores. Results show the ingroup SD scores higher than outgroup SD score across all four respondent groups indicating preferences for greater intimacy with ingroup than with the outgroups.

Target tribal group	Respondent group			
	Angami	Ao	Konyak	Lotha
Angami	8.79	8.38 (D= 0.62; t=4.43**)	7.80 (D=0.72; t=1.89)	7.99 (D=0.18; t=0.58)
Ao	8.37 (D= 0.42; t= 1.91)	9	7.58 (D=0.94; t=2.41*)	7.81 (D=0.36; t=1.12)
Chang	7.58 (D=1.39; t=5.79**)	8.43 (D=0.70; t=5.38**)	5.90 (D=2.62; t=6.72**)	7.16 D=1.01; t=3.16**)
Konyak	7.81 (D= 0.98; t=4.08**)	8.49 (D=0.51; t=4.64**)	8.52	6.74 (D=1.43; t=4.77**)
Lotha	7.31 (D=1.48; t=5.10**)	8.06 (D=0.94; t= 4.27**)	6.42 (D=2.1; t=8.75**)	8.17
Sema	7.19 (D=1.60; t=5.52**)	8.40 (D=.060; t= 4.00**)	6.14 (D=2.38; t=8.21**)	7.08 (D=1.09; t=3.89**)

Table 1 Mean SD scores of four respondent groups toward six target tribal groups

D: Difference between SD scores for ingroup and outgroup;

*significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level

The Angamis' ingroup SD score is higher than those for the five outgroups indicating preference for its own group. Significant differences were observed between their ingroup score and their scores for the Chang, Konyak, Sema and Lotha tribes. There was no significant difference between their ingroup score and that for the Ao tribe indicating a more or less equal preference for this outgroup with the ingroup.

The Aos' SD score is significantly higher for the ingroup. There is significant difference between the ingroup score and each of the outgroup scores indicating a clear preference for the ingroup. Ingroup bias seems to be a prominent feature amongst the Aos.

The Konyaks' ingroup SD score is also higher than their outgroup scores. Significant differences have been observed between their ingroup score and their scores for the Ao, Chang, Lotha and Sema tribes. Their

score for the Angami tribe, however, does not vary significantly from their ingroup score indicating a more or less equal degree of preference for this group and their ingroup.

The Lothas' ingroup SD score is higher than their outgroup scores. Significant preferences of the ingroup over the Chang, Konyak and Sema tribes have been observed. Their score for Ao and Angami tribes did not differ significantly from their ingroup score indicating more or less the same degree of preference for these two groups and their ingroup.

Target group	Respondent group							
	Angami		Ao		Konyak		Lotha	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Angami	8.82	8.80	8.19 (D= 0.59; t= 4.71**)	8.56 (D= 0.64; t= 3.76**)	7.83 (D=0.70; t= 2.33*)	7.77 (D= 0.75; t= 1.97)	7.90 (D= -.15; t= 0.00)	8.07 (D= 0.52; t= 1.49)
Ao	8.29 (D=0.53; t=3.12**)	8.45 (D=0.35; t= 1.75)	8.78	9.20	7.44 (D=1.09; t= 3.30**)	7.72 (D= 0.80; t= 2.05*)	7.98 (D= -.23; t= .70)	7.64 (D= 0.95; t=2.64*)
Chang	7.16 (D=1.66; t=2.75**)	8.00 (D= 0.80; t= 3.08**)	8.17 (D= 0.61; t= 4.36**)	8.68 (D= 0.52; t= 5.2**)	5.34 (D= 3.19; t= 8.86**)	6.45 (D= 2.07; t= 4.93**)	7.13 (D= 0.77; t=1.72)	7.19 (D=1.4; t= 3.59**)
Konyak	7.75 (D=1.07; t= 5.35**)	7.86 (D= 0.94; t= 3.61**)	8.19 (D= 0.59; t= 4.21**)	8.79 (D= 0.41; t= 4.1**)	8.53	8.52	6.31 (D= 1.44; t= 4**)	7.17 (D= 1.42; t= 3.94**)
Lotha	7.11 (D=1.71; t= 5.34**)	7.51 (D= 1.29; t= 3.91**)	7.97 (D= 0.81; t= 4.05**)	8.16 (D= 1.04; t= 5.2**)	6.97 (D= 1.56; t=3.80**)	5.88 (D= 2.64; t= 5.87**)	7.75	8.59
Sema	7.37 (D= 1.45; t= 6.59**)	7.00 (D= 1.8; t= 5.15**)	8.33 (D= 0.45; t= 3.21**)	8.48 (D= 0.72; t= 3.6**)	6.32 (D= 2.21; t= 5.97**)	5.96 (D= 2.56; t= 5.33**)	6.67 (D= 1.08; t= 4.15**)	7.49 (D= 1.1; t= 3.06**)

Table2 Mean SD scores of male and female respondents of the four tribes toward six target groups

Table 2 shows the mean SD scores of male and female respondents of each group with respect to ingroup and five outgroups.

Male respondents of the Angami, Ao and Konyak groups rated one's ingroup significantly higher than outgroups indicating strong ingroup bias among these respondent groups. Male respondents of the Lotha tribe, on the other hand, have shown a mixed trend with some outgroups(Ao and Angami) rated more favorably and some others(Konyak and Sema) less favorably than the ingroup. For the Lotha male respondents, ingroup bias seems to be dependent upon the type of outgroup with which it is compared, with the more advanced groups favored over the ingroup as well.

Amongst the female respondents, the Aos have shown strong ingroup bias as indicated by the significantly higher scores toward ingroup when compared with each of the outgroup scores. The other three groups of female respondents - Angami, Konyak and Lotha, have shown exceptions with respect to at least one outgroup(either Ao or Angami) in ingroup bias.

One main observation from these findings is the preference for greater intimacy with one's ingroup. Ingroup bias was observed in all four respondent groups. This bias is also seen across both gender groups with a great majority of male as well as female respondents favoring ingroup over outgroups. The findings support the theory that social categorization leads to ingroup/outgroup bias. According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals derive their identity from the groups to which they belong and so in order to enhance their own self esteem, they adopt a more negative perception of outgroups and attempt to maintain greater distance from them. In the case of the Nagas amongst whom the primary basis of social categorization is tribal membership, ingroup bias in the form of preference for one's tribe seems a prominent feature in their intergroup relations.

A small section of respondents ie., Male Lotha respondents, showed a reversed bias in favour of groups that are considered relatively more advanced amongst the Naga tribes – Aos and Angamis. Another observation was that in spite of the strong ingroup bias, respondents' SD scores were all average or above average. They did not express the preference for a great degree of social distance with any particular group. Whether this lack of expression for a negative SD score can be taken as a measure of level of social acceptance amongst the tribes or simply the unwillingness to express negative opinions pertaining to intertribal relations is not clear. Future studies on intertribal relations amongst Nagas may take these factors into account .

The results of the study support findings in other countries (Kalin and Berry, 1996⁶; Abela and Petzold, 1996⁷, Phinney, Ferguson and Tate, 1997⁸, Liu, Campbell, and Condie, 1995⁹) that in intergroup relations the ingroup is more favoured than relevant outgroups. The Naga tribes in this study showed strong ingroup bias in their relationships with respect to the other Naga tribes.

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