How Diverse Is This Community? Sense of Community, Ethnic Prejudice and Perceived Ethnic Heterogeneity

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the relationship between territorial sense of community (SoC), perceived ethnic heterogeneity within the community and ethnic prejudice was analyzed. Specifically, the moderating role of perceived ethnic heterogeneity within the community on the SoC–prejudice relationship was tested in a sample of residents ($N = 603$) of the Salento region, Italy. Results showed that the relationship between SoC and prejudice was moderated by perceived contextual heterogeneity. For blatant and subtle prejudice, when perceived ethnic heterogeneity was low, SoC was negatively associated with prejudice. In the case of modern prejudice, SoC was positively associated with prejudice when perceived ethnic heterogeneity was high. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: sense of community; ethnic prejudice; community diversity

THE COMMUNITY-DIVERSITY DEBATE

Nearly 20 years ago, Wiesenfeld (1996) critiqued the myth of 'we', objecting to the persisting tendency to emphasize the notion of similarity as the basis for developing community identity and belonging and the concurrent tendency to neglect the internal dynamics of differences within communities. Echoes of this argument resonate in anthropologists' critique of an essentialist view of community, along with the acknowledgement that the idea of community is not only the recognition of cultural similarity but also a positioning that implies some forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). More recently, sociologists such as Richard Sennet (2004) have argued against the myth of community solidarity, highlighting that the concept of community is built on the postulate that people feel that they belong to a community because they

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are similar to each other rather than because they really share the experience of the community, deal with each other and engage in community-building processes. In the same vein, Bauman's (2000) analysis of the liquid society has elucidated that in a postmodern and globalized world, the evocation of community is an essentially defensive reaction to uncertainty.

The concept of 'sense of community' (henceforth SoC) was originally conceived to refer to the perception of similarity to others. Although the similarity postulate raises many issues relevant to communities' functioning and development, its implications have only recently begun to draw the attention of researchers. Townley, Kloos, Green and Franco (2011) argued that SoC, because of its emphasis on group member similarity and homogeneity, conflicts with diversity and that it is unlikely that a strong SoC can encompass respect for diversity. In the same vein, Neal and Neal (2014) offered evidence that in a world in which relationship formation is driven by homophily and proximity, respect for diversity and SoC cannot be promoted simultaneously. Studies on multicultural diversity within neighbourhoods reached similar results, highlighting that as neighbourhoods become more ethnically heterogeneous, residents' SoC decreases (Castellini, Colombo, Maffeis, & Montali, 2011; Hombrados-Mendieta, Gómez-Jacinto, & Dominguez-Fuentes, 2009).

Our investigation aimed to contribute to the *community-diversity dialectic* debate (Townley et al., 2011). However, unlike the studies previously mentioned, our studies do not focus on exposure to real community diversity but the perception of diversity within a territorial community. Specifically, the current research was driven by the prospect that the perception of different degrees of ethnic heterogeneity within the territorial community would affect the relationship between SoC and attitudes towards diverse groups that settled in the community, namely, immigrants. The rationale behind this hypothesis was based on three assumptions: (i) SoC processes are akin to group social identity-social categorization processes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986); (ii) when community members experience a threat associated with an out-group, the in-group–out-group boundaries become more pronounced and the pro-in-group bias is likely to result in some form of out-group derogation (*intergroup threat theory*; Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios Morrison, 2009). We considered a specific type of threat, that is, the perceived degree (high versus low) of ethnic heterogeneity within the territorial community, as a proxy of the perceived out-group threat (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010); and (iii) finally, when community members experience no threat associated with an out-group, the intergroup boundaries are likely to blur. As a consequence, the pro-in-group bias would be extended to former out-group members (*common in-group identity model*; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Each of the assumptions is discussed in detail following the presentation of the theories and research on SoC.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Sense of community is a multidimensional construct that captures the subjective sense of belonging to an organized collectivity, the expectations of having one's needs fulfilled by the community and individuals' psychological investment in the social system in terms of active contributions. In the mid-80s, McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a model that includes four components, namely, *membership* (i.e. a sense of belonging that marks the boundary between those who belong to a community and those who do not), *influence* (i.e. a sense of bearing on the community), *integration and needs fulfilment* (i.e. the expectations

regarding the possibility of having one's needs fulfilled by a community) and *shared emotional connection* (i.e. the feeling of being deeply involved in collective experiences).

Research has fundamentally emphasized the positive outcomes associated with SoC, particularly with regard to a variety of participatory behaviours (refer to the meta-analysis by Talò, Mannarini & Rochira, 2014), well-being (Mak, Cheung, & Law (2009); Obst & Stafurik, 2010), life satisfaction (Hombrados Mendieta, Gómez-Jacinto, Dominguez-Fuentes, & García-Leiva, 2013) and quality of life (Gattino, De Piccoli, Fassio, & Rollero, 2013; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2009). SoC has been studied in a variety of populations and across a variety of ethnic groups, including migrant minorities living in host societies. For this specific target group, SoC has been associated with positive outcomes, such as increased resistance to oppression (Sonn, 2002) and parental satisfaction (Lee, 2012), strengthened ethnic identity (Kenyon & Carter, 2011) and improved adjustment (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2013; Rivas-Drake, 2012). Conversely, very few studies have investigated the role of SoC in acculturation processes and ethnic prejudice from the perspective of the host population. In regard to the SoC–prejudice relationship, to the best of our knowledge, only two studies have analyzed the association between territorial SoC and ethnic prejudice, and neither study observed a relationship (Castellini et al., 2011; Prezza, Zampatti, Pacilli, & Paoliello, 2008). In our research, we aim to integrate these findings by considering one of the factors that could make the SoC–prejudice relationship emerge.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION PROCESSES

In the very definition of SoC, as well as in McMillan and Chavis's (1986) model, membership, along with a sense of belonging, is a fundamental dimension. The relevance of membership and belonging closely ties SoC to social identity. Indeed, some researchers have argued that the former is a form of social identity (Fisher & Sonn, 2002; Mannarini, Rochira, & Talò, 2012), and have found that the two have similar effects (Cicognani, Palestini, Albanesi, & Zani, 2012). The parallelism between the two concepts draws on the extension of the theoretical frameworks of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) to the analysis of intra-community and inter-community processes. Furthermore, this parallelism is based on the assumption that identification processes within communities can be assimilated to identification processes within groups. Therefore, identification with a group/community contributes to shaping the social part of one's personal identity and has the function of fostering a positive self-image. At the same time, membership implies a cognitive process according to which individuals categorize themselves and others as either members of the same group (in-group) or members of different groups (out-group). As a general effect, social categorization results in the minimization of the differences within the groups and the maximization of the differences between the groups. Regarding the community context, minimizing intra-group differences corresponds to enhancing the perceived similarity among community members, which is the basic postulate of SoC. Self-categorization typically results in in-group favouritism, that is, the tendency to extend trust, empathy and cooperation to in-group but not to out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As SoC triggers similar processes, under specific circumstances the identification with the community can motivate members to positively differentiate their group from others in order to attain and preserve collective self-esteem (Brewer, 1999).

SENSE OF COMMUNITY, THREAT, AND PREJUDICE

Threat is a central explanatory concept in the literature on intergroup bias, and it is experienced when members of a group perceive that another group is in a position to cause damage to them. According to the *intergroup threat theory* (Stephan et al., 2009), the perception of threat is influenced by a number of variables, especially group power, group conflict and group size. In particular, group size is expected to elicit realistic threat to group resources. Furthermore, following the group threat approach, out-group size represents a contextual-level characteristic that contributes to cause anti-immigrant attitudes (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). Specifically, group members feel more threatened by an out-group if they believe that the out-group has a large number of members. In fact, although empirical results are still emerging and are somehow controversial, there is evidence that the overestimation of the size of the immigrant population is associated with a more negative evaluation of their impact on the host societies (Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2008). In addition, Schlueter and Scheepers (2010) found that perceived out-group size and perceived group threat are positively associated, and suggested that the perception of the out-group size brought about the perception that the in-group interests are threatened. Identity threats are more likely to be salient among the individuals who more strongly identify with the in-group, hence resulting in differentiation and negative reactions towards the out-group (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007).

In our research, we treated the perceived size of the out-group as a proxy of the perception of ethnic heterogeneity within the territorial community. In details, we considered it to be a threat to the unity of the community that, in a given place and a given moment, defines the feeling of we-ness. We focused on perceived ethnic heterogeneity based on the argument that if the out-group size is perceived as threatening when there is in-group cohesiveness, prejudice could be eventually enhanced, regardless of whether the evaluation is accurate.

In SoC research, the SoC–threat relationship has not been thoroughly investigated. However, Fisher and Sonn (2002) suggested that when there is a perceived threat of changes, SoC can be used to maintain social identity and either follow or resist change. Loomis, Dockett and Brodsky (2004) showed that a significantly higher aggregate level of SoC existed when a threat was present than when it was absent.

In our research, we aim to integrate these results by considering one of the factors that could make the SoC–prejudice relationship emerge (i.e. perceived threat-heterogeneity). When groups of host community members feel that they are threatened by groups of immigrants, either outside of or within the community, intergroup boundaries might become more salient, microbelongings might prevail over macrobelongings (Wiesenfeld, 1996) and in-group solidarity (i.e. SoC) might increase as prejudice increases (Castellini et al., 2011). On the contrary, when identity threats are not experienced, intergroup boundaries might blur and host community members might enter a process of social recategorization such as that postulated by the *common in-group identity model* (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Considered in light of our research, we would expect that when perceived ethnic heterogeneity is low, the positive attitudes towards the former in-group of community members would be extended to the former out-group immigrant members, thereby reducing out-group bias.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Based on the research presented previously, we conducted a study aimed at exploring the relationships between the host population's ethnic prejudice, SoC and perceived ethnic heterogeneity within the territorial community. Specifically, we hypothesized that the relationship between the residents' territorial SoC and prejudice might form depending on the perceived presence of immigrants within the territorial community. Concerning the direction of this relationship, two hypotheses were included. Precisely, we expected that SoC would be negatively associated with ethnic prejudice when perceived heterogeneity was low (i.e. no perceived threat; H_1). We also expected that SoC and ethnic prejudice would be positively associated in a context of high perceived ethnic heterogeneity (i.e. perceived threat; H_2).

Three different measures of ethnic prejudice were used to assess blatant, subtle and modern prejudice with exploratory purposes. In fact, we reasoned that the effects of SoC moderated by perceived ethnic prejudice may vary depending on the type of prejudice assessed, although we did not make specific predictions. Blatant prejudice is a traditional form of prejudice that involves the perception of the out-groups as a threat and entails both the formal and intimate rejection of the out-group.[1] Subtle prejudice is a more covert mode, manifested in forms that are considered acceptable in Western societies. Subtle prejudice involves the defence of traditional values, the exacerbation of the in-group/out-group cultural differences and the denial of negative affective reactions towards out-group members, who are perceived as not worse than the in-group, although the in-group is perceived as better than the out-group (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The modern racial prejudice (McConahay, 1983) denotes a covert and subtle mode that replaces the adverse attitudes towards immigrants with the rejection of the existence of prejudice in contemporary societies, the antagonism towards the demands, and the blame of any special favour towards ethnic minorities.

METHOD

Participants and procedures

The participants were 603 native-born Italian residents of Salento (48.3% female) aged between 18 and 75 years ($M = 38.90$, $SD = 13.76$). The majority of participants were high school graduates (56.1%), 25.8% were college graduates and the remaining 18.1% had lower education levels. The most represented professional categories were clerks (in both the public and private sectors, 20.5%), college students (17.7%) and unemployed individuals (10.7%).

Participants were recruited according to a snowball sampling procedure. The initial group of participants was recruited among university students living in the Salento region and their personal social networks. Each participant was asked to suggest one or more individuals who she or he was acquainted with, who lived in the same community and who the research assistants could contact and involve in the survey. Appointments were

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[1]According to Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) threat is built in the definition of blatant prejudice (p. 58). At the same time, threat is also considered a key moderator of intergroup bias, also for xenophobia and hate crimes (refer to Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, for a review).

scheduled at times that were convenient for the participants, and the questionnaire was administered in settings with confidential areas available (i.e. offices, participants᾽ home and meeting rooms at the university).

Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire.

Measures

In the opening question of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to think of the first ethnic group that they associated with the category of 'immigrants', to name the group and to think of this group when responding to items containing the term 'immigrants'.

Prejudice towards immigrants

Three measures were used. The first two measures were the 10-item Subtle Prejudice Scale and the 10-item Blatant Prejudice Scale created by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) in the Italian version validated by Arcuri and Boca (1996). Both scales have five Likert-type modes of response (from $1 = $ *strongly disagree* to $5 = $ *strongly agree*, 3 represents the neutral point; composite index, obtained by summing items, ranged between 10 and 50). Example of the item for blatant prejudice is '[targeted immigrants] have jobs that Italians should have'. Example of the item for subtle prejudice is 'Many other groups have come to Italy and overcome prejudice and worked their way up' '[Targeted immigrants] should do the same without special favor'. Both scales showed good reliability indexes (Cronbach᾽s α): Blatant Prejudice Scale $= .79$; Subtle Prejudice Scale $= .74$.

The third measure used was the Modern Racial Prejudice Scale developed by Akrami, Ekehammar and Araya (2000), which is also a measure of covert prejudice. It is composed of nine items based on three generative dimensions: denial of continuing discrimination, antagonism towards demands and resentment regarding special favours. The response modalities ranged from $1 = $ *strongly disagree* to $5 = $ *strongly agree* (3 represents the neutral point; composite index, obtained by summing items, ranged between 9 and 45). Example of item is 'Racist groups are no longer a threat for immigrants'. Reliability was acceptable ($α = .73$).

Sense of community

The 19-item Multidimensional Territorial Sense of Community Scale (MTSOCS; Prezza, Pacilli, Barbaranelli, & Zampatti, 2009) was used. This scale is based on the theoretical model originally developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and measures five first-order factors; three of which correspond to three of the four factors posited by McMillan and Chavis (1986) (i.e. membership, shared influence, needs fulfilment, help in case of need, social climate and bonds) and one second-order factor (i.e. a territorial SoC). The response modalities ranged from $1 = $ *strongly disagree* to $5 = $ *strongly agree* (3 represents the neutral point; composite index, obtained by summing items, ranged between 19 and 95). Examples of items are 'I feel I belong to [this community]' (membership); 'If people from [my community] take the initiative, they are likely to achieve their goals' (shared influence); 'Many people in [this community] are willing to help if someone needs it' (help in case of need); 'In [this community], people are friendly' (social climate and bonds); and '[My community] provides me with many opportunities' (need fulfilment). The scale showed a good reliability index (MTSOCS $α = .85$), and satisfactory

Cronbach's α values for the membership (.74) and needs fulfilment (.70) components. The other three components reported less satisfactory indexes (shared influence = .66, help in case of need = .64 and social climate and bonds = .68). All variables were calculated by adding the items' scores. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (with MLM estimator) performed on the MTSOCS confirmed the structure proposed by the scale developers: χ^2 (147, $N = 603$) = 481.25, $p = .001$; comparative fit index = .94; Tucker–Lewis index = .91; root mean square error of approximation = .06 [.06; .07], $p = .003$; standardized root mean square residual = .06.

Perceived ethnic heterogeneity within the community

Two items adapted from Hombrados-Mendieta et al. (2009) were used: 'How racially/ethnically diverse is the place where you live?' (3 = *very diverse*; 2 = *somewhat diverse*; 1 = *not at all diverse*) and 'To you, the presence of immigrants in the place where you live seems' (3 = *considerably high*; 2 = *quite a number*; 1 = *very limited*). The composite index, obtained by summing items, ranged between 3 and 6. Reliability was acceptable (α = .81)

RESULTS

The specific ethnic groups that participants had been asked to think about, and to cling to while completing the measures of prejudice, were Africans (57.09%), East Europeans (29.25%), Near/Middle/Far Easterners (8.23%) and other groups (5.42%). The orthogonal comparisons between the two largest groups [by analysis of variance (ANOVA)] showed a significant difference in modern prejudice (F[1, 487] = 9.24, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .02$) towards Africans ($M = 23.08$) and towards East Europeans ($M = 24.46$) and in blatant prejudice (F[1, 491] = 6.89, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .01$) towards Africans ($M = 20.40$) and towards East Europeans ($M = 21.74$), indicating a stronger prejudice towards the latter. This finding is in line with the social stereotypes developed in the contemporary Italian context, where immigrants coming from Eastern Europe are targets of harsh and hostile forms of prejudice, while immigrants from Africa are targets of more benevolent attitudes (Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001). However, these differences were very low, as indicated by the low effect size. Regarding subtle prejudice and perceived ethnic heterogeneity within the community, no significant differences emerged (for subtle prejudice: F[1, 491] = 3.87, $p = .051$, $\eta^2 = .008$; for ethnic heterogeneity: F[1, 491] = 1.51, $p = .220$, $\eta^2 = .003$),[2] although the p level for subtle prejudice was close to significance.

Table 1 shows the correlational analysis of the variables.

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[2]Because we had asked participants to think of different groups of immigrants, there was the risk that the observations were not independent (different models for different ethnic groups). To rule out this possibility, we used mixed-effects models in which we added the variable 'immigrant groups' (clustered in four macro groups) as a random variable. The comparisons (by ANOVA) between the linear models with and without the random effect showed no differences for blatant prejudice (LRT = 2.25, $p = .077$), subtle prejudice (LRT = .39, $p = .072$) and modern racial prejudice (LRT = 2.17, $p = .069$). [LRT = Likelihood Ratio Test]

Table 1.   Correlations between variables

	Gender	Age	Blatant prejudice	Subtle prejudice	Modern prejudice	Memb.	Influence	Help	Social	Needs	SoC	Ethnic heterogeneity
Age	.02	–										
Blatant prejudice	–.01	.16***	–									
Subtle prejudice	–.01	–.01	.57***	–								
Modern prejudice	.04	.09**	.62***	.43***	–							
Memb.	–.01	.07	–.06	.03	.09**	–						
Influence	–.01	.02	–.11**	.02	–.05	.33***	–					
Help	.03	.07	–.11**	–.03	.02	.34***	.48***	–				
Social	–.03	–.06	–.15***	–.01	.02	.61***	.35***	.40***	–			
Needs	–.01	.14***	–.02	–.01	.05	.40***	.39***	.43***	.30***	–		
SoC	–.01	.07	–.12***	.01	.04	.76***	.68***	.73***	.73***	.71***	–	
Ethnic heterogeneity	–.09*	–.18***	–.02	.13***	–.13***	–.01	.16***	.04	.06	.05	.07	–
M		38.89	20.87	29.52	23.59	14.09	9.45	12.52	15.15	10.71	61.92	3.72
SD		13.76	5.56	5.73	4.87	3.30	2.40	2.94	2.62	3.16	10.44	1.24

Memb., membership; Influence, shared influence; Help, help in case of need; Social, social climate and bonds; Needs, needs fulfilment.
Note:
***$p < .001$.
**$p < .01$.
*$p < .05$ (two-tailed).

To test the hypothesized pattern of relationships between SoC, perceived ethnic heterogeneity and prejudice, we performed a series of moderation models in which the three forms of prejudice were entered as dependent variables, SoC as the independent variable, along with gender and age, and perceived ethnic heterogeneity as the moderator (Table 2).

I. Blatant prejudice. The analysis showed the following results: (i) a negative relationship between SoC and blatant prejudice; (ii) no significant relationship between perceived ethnic heterogeneity and prejudice; and (iii) a moderating effect of perceived ethnic heterogeneity on the relationship between SoC and blatant prejudice. The relationship was not significant for the participants who perceived a high level of ethnic heterogeneity within the community (+1 SD), while it was significant for those who perceived a low level of ethnic heterogeneity (−1 SD). When the perceived ethnic heterogeneity was low, prejudice decreased as SoC increased (Table 2 and Figure 1).

II. Subtle prejudice. Results showed (i) no relationship between SoC and subtle prejudice; (ii) a positive relationship between perceived ethnic heterogeneity and prejudice; and (iii) a moderating effect of perceived ethnic heterogeneity on the relationship between SoC and subtle prejudice. The relationship was significant only for the participants who perceived a low level of ethnic heterogeneity within the community

Table 2. Model of moderation for blatant, subtle and modern prejudice

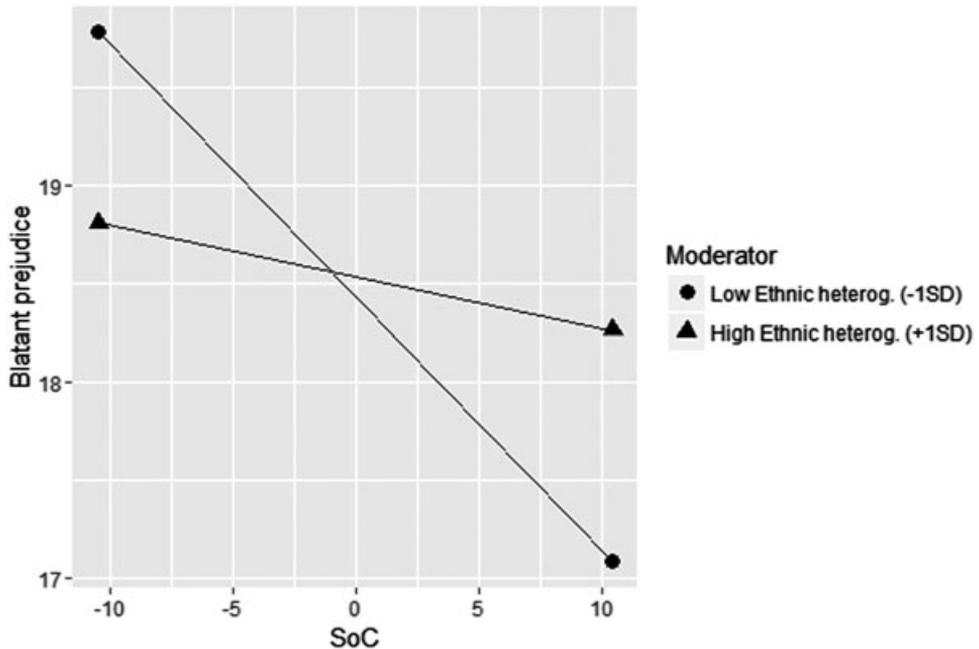|	Blatant prejudice		Subtle prejudice		Modern prejudice	
	b	Standard error	b	Standard error	b	Standard error
Step 1						
SoC	−.07***	.02	−.01	.02	.02	.02
Ethnic heterogeneity	.07	.19	.57**	.19	−.47**	.16
Gender	−.16	.45	.18	.47	.18	.40
Age	.07***	.01	.01	.07	.02	.01
F(df)	6.29(4, 557)***		2.18(4, 569)		3.57(4, 573)**	
R^2 adj	.04		.01		.02	
Step 2						
SoC	−.08***	.02	−.02	.02	.01	.02
Ethnic heterogeneity	.04	.19	.54**	.19	−.50**	.16
Gender	−.16	.45	.20	.47	.17	.40
Age	.06***	.02	−.01	.01	.02	.01
SoC*ethnic heterogeneity	.04*	.02	.05**	.01	.04*	.01
Low ethnic heterogeneity (−1 SD)	−.13***	.03	−.07*	.03	−.04	.03
High ethnic heterogeneity (+1 SD)	−.03	.03	.05	.03	.07**	.02
F(df)	6.28(5, 576)***		3.38(5, 568)**		4.74(5, 572)***	
R^2 adj	.04		.02		.03	
ΔR^2	.01		.01		.02	
Fchange(df)	6.05(1, 576)*		8.04(1, 568)**		9.20(1, 572)**	

Note:
***$p < .001$.
**$p < .01$.
*$p < .05$.

Figure 1.   Interaction graph for blatant prejudice. Note that sense of community (SoC) and ethnic heterogeneity were centred.

(-1 *SD*). For these participants, subtle prejudice decreased with increasing SoC (Table 2 and Figure 2).

III. Modern prejudice. Analyses revealed that (i) there was no significant relationship between SoC and modern prejudice; (ii) increased perceived ethnic heterogeneity was negatively associated with modern prejudice; and (iii) there was a moderating effect of perceived ethnic heterogeneity on the relationship between SoC and modern prejudice. The relationship was significant only for the participants who perceived a high level of ethnic heterogeneity within the community (+1 *SD*). In this case, prejudice increased as SoC increased (Table 2 and Figure 3).

As the ANOVA revealed a difference in modern prejudice towards Eastern Europeans and Africans, we repeated the moderation analysis for these two subsamples. In both cases, only the interaction term (SoC * perceived ethnic heterogeneity) was significant ($\beta_{afr} = .15$, $p = .007$, R^2 adj = .03; $\beta_{e\text{-}eu} = .14$, $p = .048$, R^2 adj = .12). In both cases, when perceived ethnic heterogeneity was low, prejudice decreased as SoC increased ($\beta_{afr} = -.05$, $p = .012$; $\beta_{e\text{-}eu} = -.04$, $p = .034$). When perceived ethnic heterogeneity was high, prejudice increased as SoC increased ($\beta_{afr} = .08$, $p = .016$; $\beta_{e\text{-}eu} = .07$, $p = .010$).

DISCUSSION

Unlike the findings of previous studies on SoC and prejudice that adopted some of the same measures adopted in our study (namely, MTSOCS, the Subtle Prejudice Scale and the Blatant Prejudice Scale; Castellini et al., 2011; Prezza et al., 2008), we found a
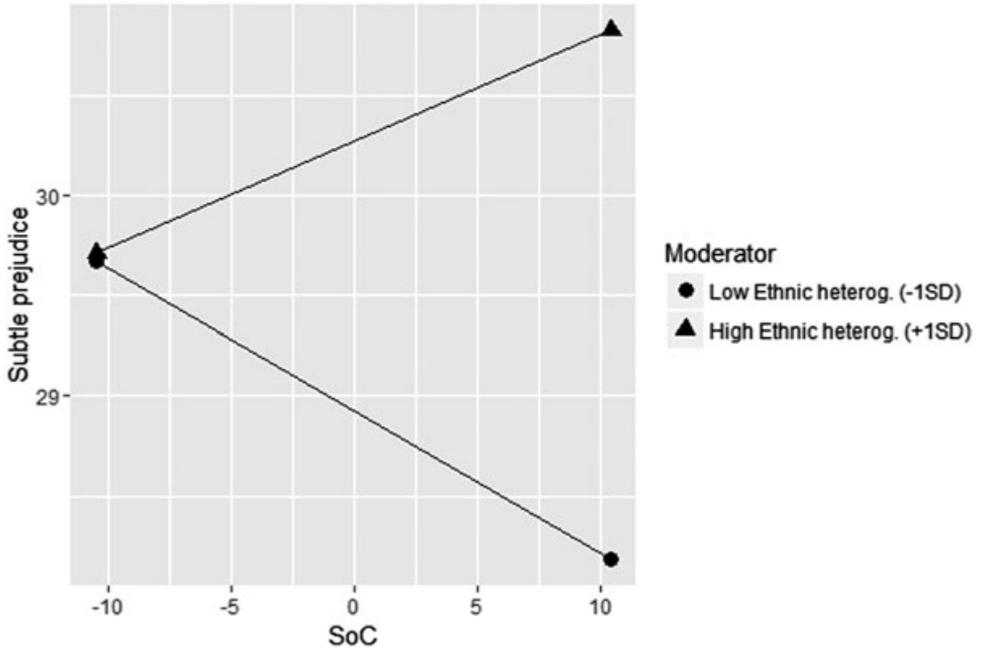
Figure 2. Interaction graph for subtle prejudice. Note that sense of community (SoC) and ethnic heterogeneity were centred.
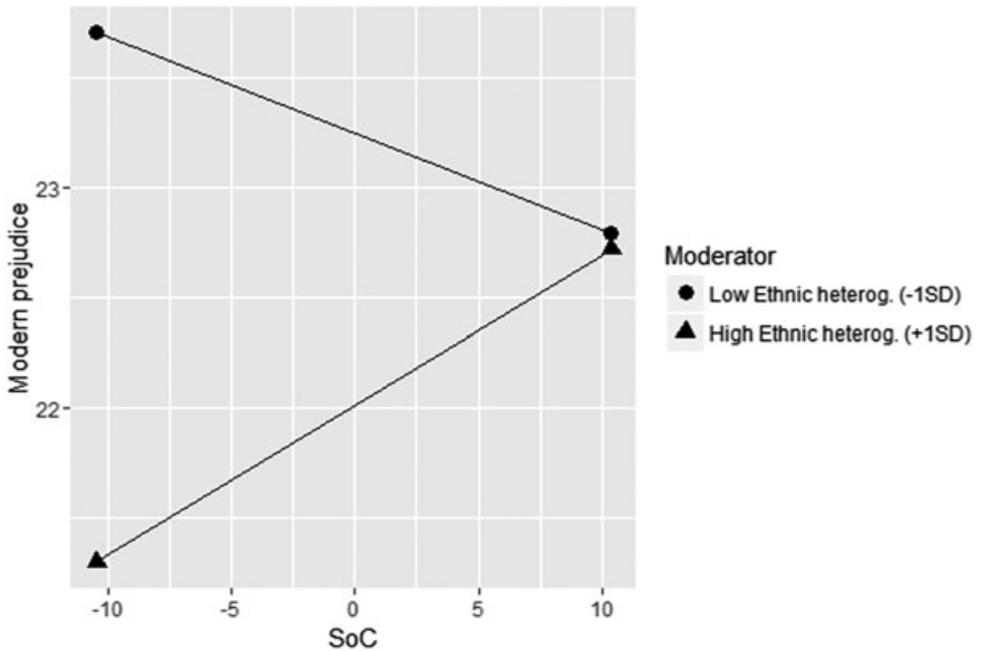

Figure 3. Interaction graph for modern prejudice. Note that sense of community (SoC) and ethnic heterogeneity were centred.

significant relationship between the two variables. In details, our analyses revealed a negative relationship between SoC and blatant prejudice and no relationship between SoC and both subtle and modern prejudice. In addition, the findings confirmed that perceiving a low versus high degree of ethnic heterogeneity within the community affected the relationship between SoC and all three forms of prejudice considered. However, the direction of this relationship was aligned only partially with the research hypotheses. The trends highlighted by the simple slope analyses showed that the associations changed according to the form of prejudice assessed: when no threat was perceived, increasing SoC was associated with decreasing both blatant and subtle prejudice (H_1); when threat from the immigrants was perceived, increasing SoC was associated with increasing modern prejudice (H_2).The study offered interesting, although inconclusive, data to elaborate on the community-diversity dialectic. The hypothesis that perceiving different degrees of ethnic heterogeneity within the community would affect the relationship between SoC and prejudice was confirmed overall. Indeed, perceiving that immigrants were high or low in number and, therefore, were (or were not) a threat to community similarity and cohesiveness changed the relationship between native-born residents' SoC and their attitudes towards immigrants. Although we found a trend rather than a definite pattern, the more consistent trend indicated that when native-born residents perceived that the immigrants who settled in the community were low in number, SoC was negatively associated with prejudice. We explained this trend according to the recategorization process postulated by the *common in-group identity model* (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). That is, we interpreted it as the effect of the blurring of the boundaries between host members and immigrants living in the same community and the consequent extension of the positive feelings directed to host in-group members to (former) out-group members. The opposite trend also surfaced, although it was found less consistently across our data. When native-born residents perceived that immigrants who settled in the community were high in number and, hence, were a threat, SoC was positively associated with prejudice. This refers to the situation in which, according to the *intergroup threat theory* (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), threat is likely to transform the pro-in-group bias deriving from a strong sense of belonging to the community to some form of out-group derogation, namely, prejudice.

The pattern of results emerging from the analyses was slightly different for the different forms of prejudice assessed. Such variations suggest that future studies addressing the relationship between SoC and prejudice should try to formulate very specific predictions, according to the different conceptualizations of prejudice that have been developed in the literature and also focusing on their underlying processes.

Overall, our research highlighted the need to explore the interplay of SoC and negative attitudes towards diversity in light of context-specific characteristics, and it suggested that SoC might be compatible with respect for diversity in those social circumstances in which diversity is not perceived as a threat. However, because SoC is a dynamic experience that is rooted in cultural and historical contexts, our research findings were culturally determined and cannot be generalized to other contexts even within the same country. In effect, because of the cultural, social and economic differences characterizing different parts of Italy, and specifically distinguishing the north from the south, specific cultural dimensions may account for our findings. Other limitations have to be acknowledged. One limitation concerns the characteristics of the sample, which was a convenience sample of residents. Another limitation is related to the cross-sectional nature of the study, which suggests that caution must be taken in interpreting the observed relationships as causal. In addition,

given the correlational nature of the data, several competing models could be compared, and different paths of relationship between the variables tested. Moreover, we are aware that we used different stimuli to assess ethnic prejudice, as respondents were asked to think of specific ethnic groups and not of the general category of immigrants. Finally, we acknowledge that all the predictive models we used had very low explanatory power, and there are several other relevant variables, such as intergroup contact, that that were not taken into account in the study and that may account for prejudice over and beyond SoC and community perceived ethnic heterogeneity.

Despite the limitations, there are some practical implications that can be drawn from this study, which may be of interest at the community development level. The first implication is that where immigrants are perceived as not very numerous, programmes aimed at increasing the community cohesiveness may also prevent residents from developing negative attitudes towards immigrants, thereby setting the premises for their acceptance and integration as fellow community members. Conversely, in cohesive communities where immigrants are perceived as high in number, community development interventions should act on reducing or reframing the perception of threat associated to immigrants.

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