

Otherring as a Mediated Process

Theoretical Modelling and Examples from International Communication

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1

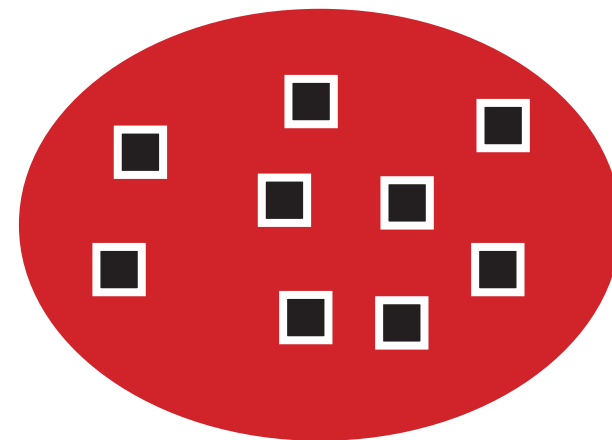
Otherring as a process of social identity building

- “Otherring” (Spivak, 1985) is conceptualised as the process of establishing **borders** between the own and other social groups
- It contributes to an individual’s **social identity** which constitutes a significant share of his/her **self conception** (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)
- One important aspect of othering is the establishment of an **in-group/out-group bias** (Hinkle & Schopler, 1986) within an individual’s social perception

2

Otherring as social consensus

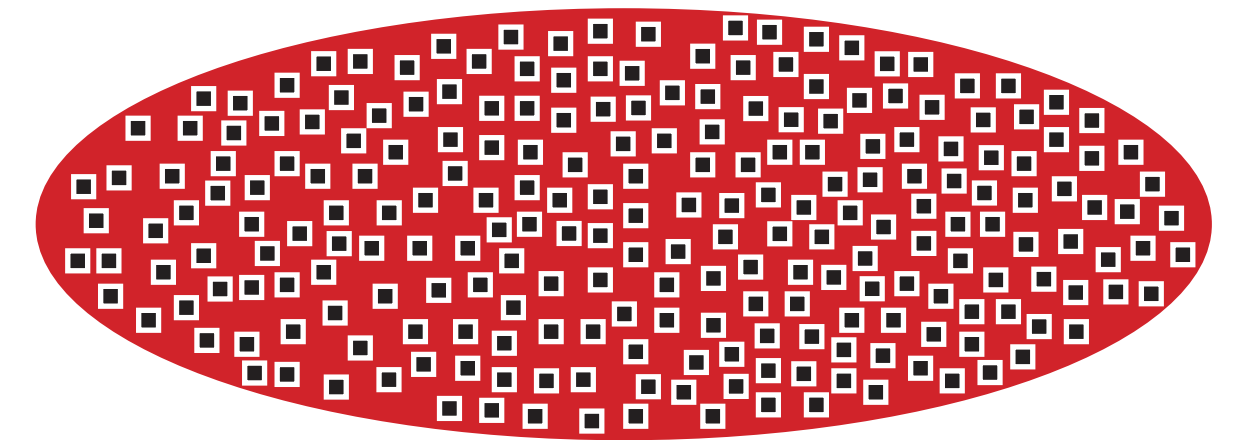
- Social groups require a consensus on the group’s identity among their members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)
- Therefore, in-group/out-group biases are communicatively shared within a group. In **small groups**, this happens by means of interpersonal communication (Sherif et al., 1954)



3

Otherring in larger groups

- However, interpersonal communication appears to be **ineffective for larger social groups** (e.g. cultures/nations).
- Within such groups, In-group/out-group biases could be shared and distributed through **public communication**, making othering a mediated process

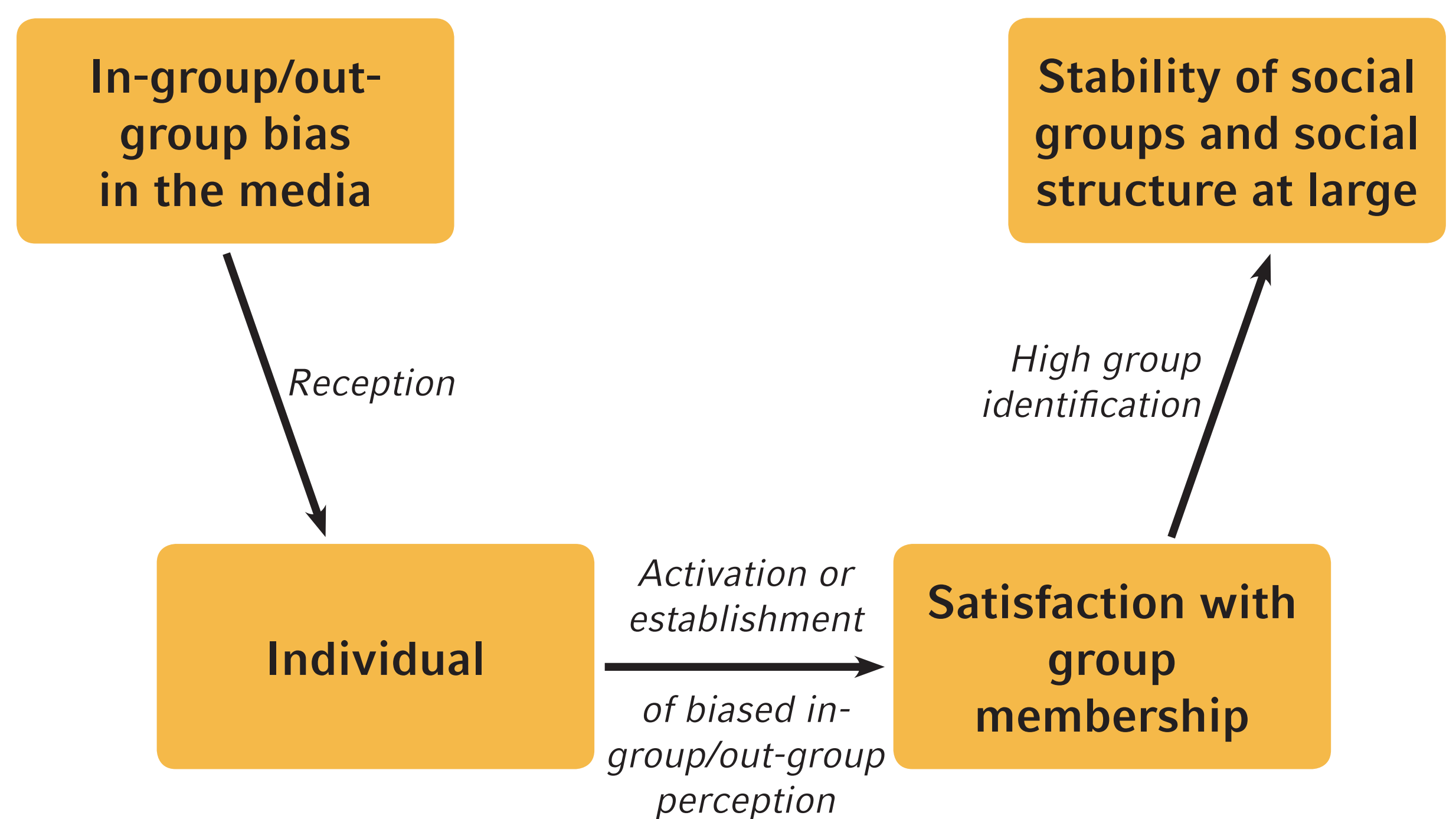


4

Otherring as a mediated process: A two-level model

In order to integrate both, the individual and the social level, this model adopts the skeleton of Coleman’s bathtub (Coleman, 1991):

1. The **content of mass media** contains in-group/out-group biases of larger social groups
2. This content is **received** by individuals who consider themselves members of positively (or negatively) portrayed social groups
3. The reception of the biased media content activates or newly establishes a **cognitive scheme** of the own group’s superiority (or threat)
4. The perception of superiority (or threat) of the own social group enhances the individual’s **satisfaction** with his/her group membership
5. This leads to high group identification on the micro-level which **cumulates in a high stability of social groups on the macro-level** - and, thus, in a high stability of the social structure at large



5

Evidence from international communication

How do the media portray different nations?

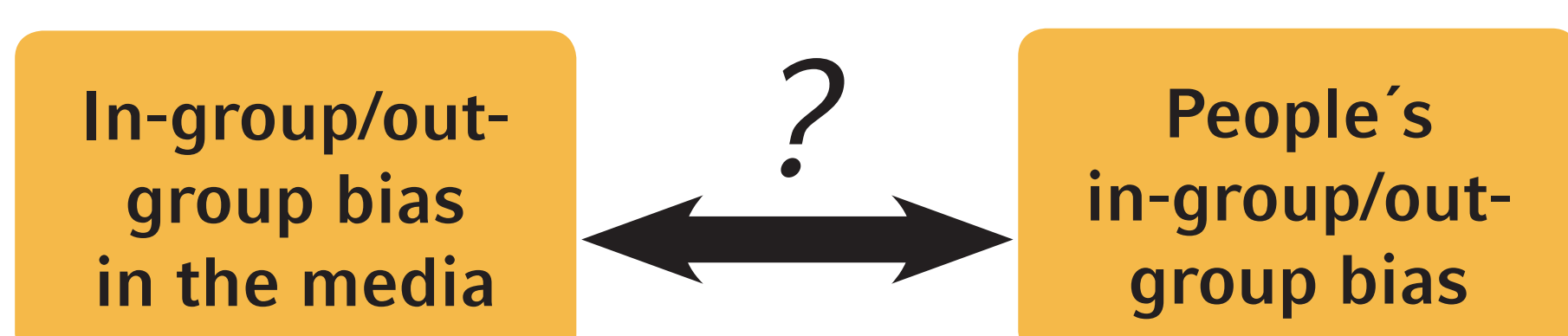
- In lack of adequate primary experience, foreign nations are often portrayed using **stereotypical descriptions** (Nitz, 2008)
- The population of foreign nations as well as ethnic minorities within the own nation are often **evaluated less positively** than the own population (e.g. Delgado, 1972; Nafroth, 2002; Müller, 2005; Brantner, 2009; Fick, 2009; Müller, 2010)

How do people evaluate different nations?

- The *Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index* yearly measures the international evaluation of countries (2008: n = 20,157)
- When asked to evaluate the “people” of different countries (items: friendliness, professional skills, & personal appeal, 7-point scales), respondents of nearly all nations (exceptions: France & Poland) rate their fellow citizens as **superior to other nations** (data from 2008)

The problem of causality

However, the direction of this apparent correlation remains unclear



6

The missing link: Reception

To find an answer to the problem of causality, reception should be taken into focus. Therefore, a **reception experiment** was conducted

Method

- Participants (German undergraduate students, n = 53)
- Media stimulus that either contained an in-group/out-group bias (concerning German and U.S. voters’ orientation on candidates’ TV appearances) or did not (1x2 design)
- Repeated measurement of the participants evaluation (of German and U.S. voters orientation on candidates’ TV appearances)
- Distracting questions to minimize repeated measurement effects

Results

- At t_1 , no significant differences between both groups were observed
- At t_2 , participants in the experimental condition strongly followed the in-group/out-group bias, whereas the bias in the control group had significantly diminished
- The reception of an in-group/out-group bias in media content, indeed, seems to amplify existing in-group/out-group biases

Next steps

Consequences for satisfaction with group membership & group identification; longitudinal development of observed interrelations

For more detailed information on the model, please see: Müller, P. (2011, in press). „Wir sind besser als die anderen.“ Optimistic Bias als Schema der Medienberichterstattung. *Publizistik*, 56.