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Abstract

Growing educational differentials in different domains have made some scholars wonder whether these differences have the potential to grow into an educational conflict and associated education-based group consciousness. In this article that question is contrasted with a body of literature which considers educational credentials a form of symbolic capital, that is, institutionalized social status. Theoretical insights derived from the social psychological stereotype content model are used to disentangle this apparent paradox. In the empirical section survey data from Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium; $N = 1967$) are used to assess the perceptions held by the public at large about the higher and less educated. A within-subject design whereby respondents rated the less and higher educated in terms of traits related to warmth and competence shows that indications of legitimate status differences but also intergroup conflict can be found depending on the dimension on which higher and less educated people are compared. In addition, the study demonstrates that higher and less educated groups use a different stereotype dimension to differentiate educational groups. The conclusion elaborates on the implications of these findings.

Keywords

Competence, education-based group identity, identification, stereotypes, symbolic capital, warmth

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Introduction

Over the past few years scholars in different Western European countries have documented growing educational differentials in, among others, political preferences (Stubager, 2010), public opinion (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2007), (leisure) time consumption (Van Eijck and Bargeman, 2004), labour market transitions (Gesthuizen and Wolbers, 2010) and even life expectancy (Deboosere et al., 2009). These findings made some scholars wonder whether these differences have the potential to grow into an educational conflict and associated education-based group consciousness. Bovens and Wille (2010: 418), for example, interpret the electoral success of populist parties in many Western European countries as the political emancipation of the ‘less educated’ in a ‘diploma democracy’ dominated by the higher educated. Following a similar line of reasoning, Stubager (2009) foresees the growth of an ‘educational cleavage’ crystallized around the distinction between libertarian and authoritarian values. In both examples growing ‘objective’ differences are thought to induce conflict potential to a relation of inequality.¹

Sociologists, however, have always been fascinated by the fact that large objective differentials and inequalities are often reproduced in symbolic differences that legitimize the position of the dominant groups. This, we hold, especially applies to educational differences. Educational credentials are considered ‘objectified symbolic capital’, that is, an institutionalized form of social status (Bourdieu, 1985; Meyer, 1977). As status rests on mutual recognition (Ridgeway and Correll, 2006), the work of these authors suggests that traces of an educational conflict – e.g. strong social identities and blatant outgroup hostility institutionalized in different political parties – are unlikely to be found. Instead, self-exclusion by the less educated based on the recognition of the status of the higher educated that results in a lack of feelings of entitlement is thought to be one of the driving factors behind the reproduction of observed educational differentials in thought, feelings and behaviour (Kingston et al., 2003).

A key question, then, becomes how are these two strands of thought to be reconciled? While providing a conclusive answer to this question exceeds the scope of single article, it is clear that a crucial difference between both accounts concerns the way they think education-based categories are perceived by the public at large. In this article we focus on that element. Based on insights derived from the stereotype content model (Cuddy et al., 2008), we argue that both accounts focus on but one of two basic dimensions underpinning social perception – i.e. warmth and competence – and merely neglect the other. In the empirical section we use survey data ($N = 1967$) to assess empirically how the public in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) perceives the higher and less educated in terms of both stereotype dimensions.

We show that indications of legitimate status differences but also intergroup conflict can be found depending on the dimension on which higher and less educated people are compared. In addition, we demonstrate that higher and less educated groups use a different stereotype dimension to differentiate educational groups. In the conclusion we elaborate on the implications of our findings.

Literature

Education as objectified symbolic capital

So what perceptions of the higher and less educated are likely to be found among the public at large? It is reasonable to assume that such perceptions strongly depend on the nature of the specific group relation. However, neither Bovens and Wille's (2010) nor Stubager's diagnosis of current society is accompanied by a full-fledged theoretical model of group relations. The latter may, however, be reconstructed from their line of reasoning. Its kernel consists of the idea that large differences between educational groups are the main or only determinants of the growth of an education-based group identity and consciousness whereby 'The ultimate consequence may very well be that the less educated will become a politically visible group with a clear shared interest, demanding equal rights or an improved position' (Bovens and Wille, 2010: 418). Within the literature on classes, this type of model is known as the *structure – consciousness – action paradigm* (e.g. Bechhofer et al., 1978); in the general literature on group relations it is called a realistic group conflict model (e.g. Jackson, 1993). Both predict that members of groups that strongly differ in objective position and interests gradually develop antagonistic views towards each other. One weakness of these theories, however, is that little attention is devoted to the 'problematic' nature of the growth of an education-based group identity and consciousness.

Sociologists have always stressed that large objective differences between groups of individuals may be a necessary but are certainly not a sufficient condition for the development of a group consciousness – that is, a group whose members are consciously aware of their position, and who identify with the group whereby this identification and the associated feelings of belonging affects behaviour and opinions. Such group consciousness does not develop automatically but results from intense cultural work in which public actors such as political parties but also media and education itself are involved. Seen from this point of view the development of an educational consciousness is unlikely. Hakhverdian et al. (2012), for example, correctly emphasized that (1) today there are no political parties who muster support on the basis of the educational issue and (2) the strong presence of individualism in today's society is a counteracting force to group identification.

In current (western) societies education is represented as a universal problem solver for all kinds of individual and societal problems (Smeyers and Depaepe, 2011). In such a type of society, Bourdieu (1998: 50) argues, educational credentials become a form of 'objectified symbolic capital': 'a reputation for competence and image of respectability and honourability' (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 291). Symbolic capital provides dominant groups with social status; it converts power into *prestige* by depicting realizations as an outcome of 'natural gifts' (Bourdieu, 1990).²

Symbolic capital, as seen by Bourdieu, is not an attribute of high status (or dominant) groups themselves, but a quality that inheres in the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. That characteristic is emphasized when symbolic capital is described as 'social esteem', which crucially relies on recognition by others (Bourdieu, 2000: 166). The distinguishing feature of educational credentials when compared to other forms of

symbolic capital, then, is that they are 'objectified' (Bourdieu, 1998: 50–51): 'a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets. As an official definition of an official identity, it frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective' (Bourdieu, 1989: 21–22). It follows that educational differences, as objectified status differences, will be unlikely to be rebelled against. The latter characteristic is also stressed when symbolic capital is said to yield symbolic power: the power to construct common sense wherein the world is accepted as it is and which includes a 'tacit acceptance of one's position' (Bourdieu, 1991: 235). Indeed, symbolic capital – as institutionalized and naturalized social status – is the theoretical vehicle with which authors like Bourdieu attempt to get a grip on processes of self-selection in education (exclusion without exam, see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979 [1964]) and politics ('le droit statutaire', see Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: Ch. 8) that are considered an important constituent of the social reproduction of inequalities (see also Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Lamont, 1992). One of our aims here is to investigate whether those with relatively low educational credentials indeed accept the high status of the more highly educated by attributing positive characteristics to them.

The preceding theories offer a compelling argument why an open educational conflict and associated strong education-based social identities are unlikely to develop. At the same time, however, the latter accounts share with Bovens, Wille and Stubager the idea that educational differentials occupy a central place in current (western) societies. Indeed, if education 'authoritatively allocates' people to social positions (see Kingston et al., 2003; Meyer, 1977), this implies first and foremost that people are regularly confronted with *educational categories* in social life. Even if educational categories do not form the basis for group consciousness among their members, it nevertheless remains the case that these categories are used by institutions such as political parties, media, the labour market, and even the social sciences. Jenkins (1999: 111) concludes that categorization 'at least creates group identification as an immanent possibility'. It is that insight, we believe, that warrants further empirical research. Studying (1) how exactly educational categories – i.e. the higher and less educated – are perceived by the public at large and (2) how subgroups *differentiate* educational categories, is a first step towards exploring the consequences of what Kingston et al. (2003: 55) aptly describe as the fact that 'everybody knows and *everybody knows that everybody else knows* that education rules in modern society [our emphasis]'. So while scholars like Bovens, Wille or Stubager focus on the ultimate consequences in terms of societal conflict, we start from the more immediate consequences and study whether and how educational group membership and consciousness influence social perception of those educational groups. The resulting educational group stereotypes are assumed to play a role in all other aspects of intergroup relations between educational groups.

From the preceding arguments two insights can be deduced which will serve as a guiding principle for our research. First, in modern societies education serves as a status marker based on *perceived competence* (see among others Lamont, 1992; Meyer, 1977; Ridgeway and Correll, 2006). What matters are not specific educational credentials but the position people occupy in the hierarchy of higher and less educated. And although the boundaries between these categories are not necessarily fixed or undisputed,

an individual's opportunities to increase the likelihood of being recognized as higher educated are limited precisely because of the institutionalized (or what Bourdieu terms the 'objectified') nature of the classifying practices. Second, but related to the first, symbolic capital rests upon *recognition by all groups* involved: 'After all, if people only accepted status beliefs that favor their own category, there is no set of status beliefs that could become widely held in society' (Ridgeway and Correll, 2006: 433).

While the first insight is largely undisputed, the second is more contested. A number of scholars have stressed that the hegemonic character of status in general and education as symbolic capital in particular is overestimated (Jenkins, 1982). One of the most comprehensive theoretical accounts in this area was developed by Mary Jackman (1994). Dominant groups, according to Jackman, are caught between the need to differentiate themselves sufficiently to procure the inequality and the need to integrate the dominated within a cooperative relationship in order to preserve the flow of benefits. Thus, dominant groups tend to develop attitudes that can best be described as 'paternalism', a conditional appreciation in which the dominant group hangs on to a positive picture of the dominated group for as long as the dominated group does not fundamentally question the dominant group's socio-political position. It is precisely this attitude, Jackman (1994: 180) continues, that strongly restricts change as (1) the dominated are not *obliged* to distance themselves to acquire a positive image of their own category – as the dominant do not feed into the negative image of the dominated – and (2) the dominated themselves have to take the initiative to induce conflict in the relationship.

So whereas Bourdieu and Jackman share the idea that objective relations of inequality are unlikely to result in open conflict and change, they differ substantially in their theorizing about how this situation comes about. Bourdieu emphasizes the role of objectified symbolic capital, through which the dominated accept their fate. Bourdieu's position, and those who consider education a status marker, suggest a lot of agreement leading to the expectation that both the higher *and* the less educated judge the higher educated as more competent than the less educated. The latter expectation is rejected by Jackman's theory. So our main empirical research question pertains to whether we can gain insight into how higher and less educated are evaluated by different groups. Despite its theoretical persuasiveness, the literature on symbolic capital contains relatively little means to test these ideas directly using empirical quantitative data. In the next section we argue that recent advances in the social psychological literature on stereotypes offer us more appropriate means for that purpose.

Social creativity and stereotype content

Our central question is how can we reconcile predictions for the presence and absence of (perceived) conflict between educational groups? Our solution is to focus on different dimensions of comparison. This reasoning is based on one of the central ideas of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity theory asserts that members of a group are motivated to construct a positive social identity, that is, the idea that their group compares favourably to other groups. If a positive social identity is difficult to achieve on one particular dimension, people can engage in *social creativity*: they choose an alternative dimension of comparison (i.e. a different domain or characteristic) and try

to achieve positive distinctiveness on that alternative dimension. That mechanism was already detailed in Paul Willis's (1977) landmark study on working-class boys. These 'lads' *were consciously aware* that they were held in contempt: 'For Willis, rebellious subcultures do not only affirm class culture. What makes working-class student opposition become "resistance" ... is that it express[es] "partial insights" into schools' complicity in class subordination' (Davies, 1995: 664). As Davies correctly observes, this awareness among the lads did not take the shape of a full-fledged political consciousness, but much stronger than in Bourdieu's view, it rested on an active awareness of status differentials. Willis's lads were not passive victims of prejudice, but motivated agents attempting to protect their identities from threat. They made sense of the world by adhering to alternative status hierarchies and rebelling against conventional status hierarchies. What Willis but also Jackman shows is that power differentials elicit more resistance among the dominated than Bourdieu was willing to admit. The bottom line for our current purpose is that focusing on different dimensions can give both groups a sense of a distinct and positive social identity. How exactly might this play out in the relation between less and higher educated people? In order to answer that question we borrow from the literature on stereotype content.

Stereotypes are seen as the enduring properties that are ascribed to individuals based on their group membership (Hilton and Van Hippiel, 1996; Schneider, 2005: 16, 24). They are considered the outcome of a categorization process that organizes social perception (cf. Turner, 1982: 29) and function as the cognitive building blocks of the more general representation people hold about specific group relations (McCarthy et al., 2002). The fact that stereotypes are linked more broadly to stigma and attributions for those stigma accounts for their pervasive influence (Goffman, 1973 [1963]). Stereotypes contribute to maintaining the existing intergroup inequalities because once a stereotype exists, people pay more attention to stereotype-consistent information and engage in several processes to avoid having to cognitively change the stereotype (Goffman, 1973 [1963]; Johnston, 1996; Kunda and Oleson, 1995).

Recently, a growing body of research has focused on the *content* of stereotypes (for an extended review see Cuddy et al., 2008). The central idea is that stereotypes reflect more than diffuse and generalized (dis)like and are structured by two core dimensions, *warmth* and *competence* (Fiske et al., 2002; see also Phalet and Poppe, 1997), that elicit different emotional responses and social outcomes (Fiske et al., 1999). Whereas warmth reflects the perceived intentions of the other and more precisely whether those intentions contradict or complement ours, competence expresses the perceived capability (in terms of possessed skills and talents) to accomplish these intents. Traits associated with the warmth dimension refer to the social and moral qualities of the group and concern among others sociable, (dis)honest, friendly, (im)polite, etc. Traits related to the competence dimension include independent, confident, intelligent, etc. While this conceptualization of competence can also be found in sociology (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]; Lamont, 1992; Ridgeway and Correll, 2006), that work has not explicitly distinguished competence from warmth.

Both dimensions combine and often result in *ambivalent stereotypes*: competent but not warm or warm but not competent. There is even evidence for a compensation effect whereby changes in one dimension trigger (opposite) changes in the other dimension,

especially when two groups are compared (Judd et al., 2005; Yzerbyt et al., 2005). The positive element in ambivalent stereotypes – so Cuddy et al. (2008) stress – does not contradict but rather reinforces the negative element on the other dimension. One of the major contributions of the stereotype content model, indeed, is the insight that unequal treatment is often justified by positive elements. That view dovetails with Jackman's (1994: 261) notion of paternalism: 'warm intergroup feelings and conservative policy dispositions that comply with the dominant design'.

Distinguishing these two stereotype dimensions allows us to disentangle the apparent contradiction between reasons for the presence and absence of conflict between educational groups. Authors who emphasize growing 'objective' educational differentials implicitly rely on realistic group conflict theory by assuming that growing 'objective differences' induce conflict potential to an existing relation of inequality. That is precisely what Stubager (2009) attempted to measure: the amount of perceived conflict between the higher and less educated and an evaluation of the socio-political position of both groups. In terms of stereotype content, both Bovens and Wille and Stubager only focus on the warmth dimension. That view contrasts with Bourdieu's view of educational credentials as a form of symbolic capital, that is, institutionalized perceived competence. So, both accounts limit their focus to one dimension and neglect the other. In order to advance this discussion, we argue that both dimensions should be taken into account.

Research strategy and hypotheses

Research inspired by the stereotype content model has briefly touched upon the educational issue. Fiske et al. (2002) asked respondents to rate different groups in terms of warmth and competence. A cluster analysis on these ratings revealed five clusters. 'Educated people' ended up in the cluster for which the difference between the associated warmth and competence was largest and whereby the judgement concerning competence exceeds the one for warmth. In other research the category 'educated people' was not used as such but the trait 'well-educated' was used as an indicator of social status (Fiske et al., 1999). These studies provide a glimpse on the perception of education-based groups, but suffer from important limitations. First, only the category 'well educated' was used so that we get no idea about the perceived difference between the high and less educated people. The latter is essential to judge the conflict potential of the relation between higher and less educated groups. In our study we asked respondents to rate both the higher and less educated groups. This provides not only a view on the absolute ratings of both groups. The within-subject design also allows us to study how individuals differentiate between both groups. The second limitation is that the majority of studies working in this line of thought rely on data gathered among university students, implying that less educated are excluded by design. Therefore, in this article we rely on a random sample of the Flemish population.

Two reasons make us believe that Flanders is a suitable test case for our theory. First, as in most Western European countries, research has documented large differences in preferences, attitudes and behaviour according to educational background. Second, in Flanders education is free of charge during compulsory education, truly elitist private schools hardly exist, and tuition fees for higher education are very low when compared

to Anglo-Saxon countries. The mere absence of large financial barriers to (higher) education, a situation comparable with Denmark (see Stubager's work) or the Netherlands, renders it plausible that aspects of an education-based consciousness are less strongly intertwined with class politics as might be the case in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

From the previous literature review a number of hypotheses can be derived. Based on the theory on symbolic capital, one expects that the higher educated are judged more competent than the less educated by both the higher and the less educated (*Hypothesis 1*). As it is assumed that an institutionalized relationship of inequality is unlikely to add up to mutual hostility between the groups involved, one also expects to find no important differences in perceived warmth between the higher and the less educated (*Hypothesis 2a*). The latter is rejected by the realistic group conflict theory that implicitly underpins Bovens and Wille's reasoning. In that view the large and even growing differences in living conditions, preferences and opinions, in short, interests between education-based groups, will prove a sufficient condition to produce differences in perceived warmth between both groups. More in particular, based on Bovens and Wille's reasoning mentioned earlier, it is expected that the less educated will perceive the higher educated as less warm than the less educated (*Hypothesis 2b*).

Social identity theory, followed by Stubager (2009), differs from realistic group conflict theory in that it assumes that subjective identification will be the determining factor in perceiving educational conflict and a positive ingroup evaluation complemented by outgroup hostility (Smith et al., 1994; Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 13). In terms of the stereotype content model perceived conflict and outgroup hostility are primarily a matter of warmth. Thus, people who feel attached to the higher educated are expected to perceive the higher educated as warm and the less educated as less warm (*Hypothesis 3a*). For people who feel attached to the less educated the reverse pattern is expected (*Hypothesis 3b*).

A common characteristic of all previous theoretical and empirical work is that it did not take into account the content of stereotypes. This implicitly suggests that, at least where the educational issue is concerned, they assume them to be undifferentiated. Based on the idea that people desire a positive and distinct social identity, we can expect that educational groups want to distinguish themselves positively from other groups, but possibly on different dimensions. The idea of undifferentiated stereotypes also contradicts Jackman's notion of paternalism among members of the dominant group. She demonstrated that the amount of perceived conflict between different groups – whether defined in terms of race, gender or class – is much higher among members of the dominated when compared to those of the dominant. That tendency was also found for education-based groups (Stubager, 2009). One of the limitations of measuring the amount of perceived conflict or an evaluation of the socio-political stance of different groups directly, however, is that it restricts the attention to conflict-based perceptions. This leaves an important element from Jackman's theory – the need to differentiate – uncovered. By using traits that refer to the essentially non-conflict loaded competence dimension, we attempt to fill this gap. As *warmth* is typically related to perceived conflict, Jackman's view leads to the expectation that the higher and less educated will differentiate educational groups on a different stereotype dimension. This hypothesis thus predicts an interaction between target group (higher versus less educated), stereotype dimension (warmth versus competence) and respondent educational background. Specifically, we expect that the less educated will use the

warmth dimension (*Hypothesis 4a*) and the higher educated will use the competence dimension to differentiate educational groups (*Hypothesis 4b*).

Data

In order to test the different hypotheses we rely on data from a survey of a simple random sample (drawn from the National Register which contains records of all Belgian citizens) of the Flemish population (the Dutch speaking people of Belgium) aged 18–75 years. The data were gathered in the fall of 2010 by way of a mail questionnaire. At the end of the fieldwork 1967 properly filled out questionnaires were returned (response rate: 49.4%). The data were weighted by the combination of age, gender and the educational level (for the technical report, see Claeys et al., 2012). The questions we use were specifically designed to test our hypotheses, which is a rare strength in research using representative samples.

For the people who were no longer in full-time education, the *level of education* was measured as the highest diploma or certificate attained. For respondents still at school ($n = 70$) their current grade or level of education was considered as the highest diploma obtained. For both groups educational levels were coded into three categories: lower secondary education or less, higher secondary education and higher (tertiary) education. While preparing this article we also explored the relevance of the *field of study*. Since this variable neither had an important effect on the outcome variables nor mediated an effect of other relevant variables, we excluded it from our final model.

In order to test the hypothesis derived from social identity theory we used an indicator for *education-based group identity*, developed by Stubager (2009). People were asked whether they felt attached to people with high or low education. In Flanders, this indicator yields a lot of ‘missings’ ($n = 141$), ‘don’t knows’ ($n = 281$) or ‘do not feel close to these educational groups’ ($n = 697$). Analysis reveals that the less educated people are overrepresented in these categories (see Appendix). That finding corresponds with a broad literature showing that people have never been inclined towards an identity with a deficiency, i.e. the lower class (Centers, 1961 [1949]; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). We include these three options as separate categories in our models. The same table also demonstrates that although the relationship between actual educational attainment and subjective identification is consistent, it is not particularly strong.

In this article we focus on the educational issue and use age, gender and economic position as control variables. Although these turned out to be not very relevant, we kept them in the models in order to avoid spurious correlations between the educational variables and the different stereotypes. *Economic position* was measured by a composed indicator based on the average monthly disposable family income, house ownership, monthly savings and the last occupation (EGP-classification). A categorical principal component analysis on these characteristics revealed one dimension that captured 55% of the variance (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.729). Age is used as a continuous variable.

Results

Scholars working with the stereotype content model typically rely on the ratings respondents give of the extent to which different traits apply to the groups under study. The

search for relevant traits was undertaken along two tracks. First, deductively, we used stereotypes/traits that are frequently used in the literature on stereotype content. As we intended to apply this model to a new subject area, we used stereotypes/traits that are commonly used as indicators for warmth and competence. Thus, we chose 'sociable/social' and 'kind' for the warmth dimension. The selection of appropriate terms for the competence dimension was more difficult as we wanted to avoid the traits 'smart' or 'intelligent'. The latter are often used in the literature but would be in conflict with other questions in the questionnaire. Therefore, we chose 'organized' and 'capable'. The latter is commonly used in the literature (Cuddy et al., 2008). During a second (inductive) phase we asked 25 respondents (alone or in small groups of a maximum of four persons) to fill out our questionnaire together with an interviewer. Besides identifying possible errors or difficulties with the questionnaire, this exercise was used as a starting point for a more general discussion about the topic of the survey. During that discussion respondents were asked what other traits they would use to characterize less or higher educated people or what they saw as the most important differences between the two groups. Especially among the higher educated respondents the trait 'impulsive' was mentioned several times. When respondents were asked what they meant by that, they referred to both 'suggestible' and 'rash'. Both meanings are closely related to the idea of incompetence. 'Hard-working', obviously related to competence, was mentioned more often among the less educated respondents as typical of the less educated. 'Arrogant' was indicated both by higher and less educated as characteristic of 'some' higher or less educated people. Used in that context, 'arrogant' meant 'provocative' or 'condescending'. The higher educated referred also to 'polite', and used it in the exact opposite sense to arrogant. 'Boring' was used by less educated people as a characteristic of the higher educated, but does not correspond to either warmth or competence and will not be considered in this analysis.

In this way, we ended up with eight traits respondents rated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) for *both* the higher and less educated. By collecting data from the same participants under varying objects (less or higher educated) individual differences can be eliminated or reduced as a source of between-group difference. Analyses showed that although the reliability of the scales with the reversed coded traits 'arrogant' and 'impulsive' was acceptable, excluding them would improve the scales. Therefore, for both educational groups, we summed the ratings of the three remaining traits referring to warmth and competence respectively (0–100).

Table 1 presents the reliability statistics for the four different scales as well as the Pearson correlations. All correlations are positive, substantial and highly significant (Table 1). They are strongest when the educational group is the same ($r = 0.849$ and 0.769). People who judge the less educated as warm are also inclined to judge them as competent and vice versa. The same applies when the higher educated are rated. At first sight that finding seems to contradict the idea of differentiated stereotypes. It is, however, of course perfectly possible that the general pattern conceals different patterns among subgroups.

At the descriptive level, two findings are worth noting. First, in line with previous research (Fiske et al., 2002) we found that the higher educated were judged more competent (62.1) than warm (56.7). The less educated are considered almost equally

Table 1. Reliability statistics of and Pearson correlations between scales measuring perceived warmth and competence of the higher and less educated in Flanders ($N = 1939$).

Educational groups	Cronbach's alpha (mean, SD)			
	Warmth	Competence		
Less educated	0.849 (62.7, 15.1)	0.800 (61.4, 14.6)		
Higher educated	0.842 (56.7, 16.6)	0.805 (62.1, 16.3)		
Bivariate Pearson correlations				
Warmth Less educated	1.000 ^a			
Competence Less educated	0.820	1.000		
Warmth Higher educated	0.403	0.329	1.000	
Competence Higher educated	0.395	0.331	0.769	1.000

^aAll correlations significant at $p < 0.001$.

competent (61.4) as warm (62.7). Second, and in contrast with the expectations derived from the literature on symbolic capital, the perceived competence of the higher educated (62.1) did not significantly exceed that of the less educated (61.4) (rejecting hypothesis 1). These overall means might of course depend further on people's educational attainment and their education-based identification, which is the analysis we turn to now.

We first fitted a model without identification. A two (target group: less educated, higher educated) by two (stereotype dimension: warmth, competence) by three (educational attainment: lower secondary or less, higher secondary and higher (tertiary) education) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed with target group and stereotype dimension as repeated measures factors. Age, gender and economic position were added to the model as control variables.

There was a significant interaction between target group and educational attainment, $F(2,1933) = 18.37$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$ (see Figure 1). Looking at the three categories of educational attainment separately, people with lower or higher secondary education evaluate the less educated (62.7 and 62.1) more positively than the higher educated (58.0 and 59.4), $F(1,1933) = 39.119$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.020$, and $F(1,1933) = 21.745$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.011$. Higher educated people, however, evaluate the higher educated (61.1) more positively than the less educated (59.8), $F(1,1933) = 4.241$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.002$. In sum, we found more indications of a legitimate conflict than support for the education as symbolic capital perspective.

Even though the three-way interaction between stereotype dimension, target group and educational attainment was not statistically significant, $F(2,1933) = 2.85$, $p = 0.06$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$, Figure 1 shows a clear pattern. All educational groups judged the less educated as warmer when compared to the higher educated but the difference in perceived warmth between both decreased from 8.3 to 5.6 and 2.5 points (all three significant at $p < 0.001$) with increasing educational level (the target group by educational attainment interaction for warmth stereotypes is significant, $F(2,1980) = 12.598$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.013$). So in accordance with hypothesis 2b, we observed that the lower people's

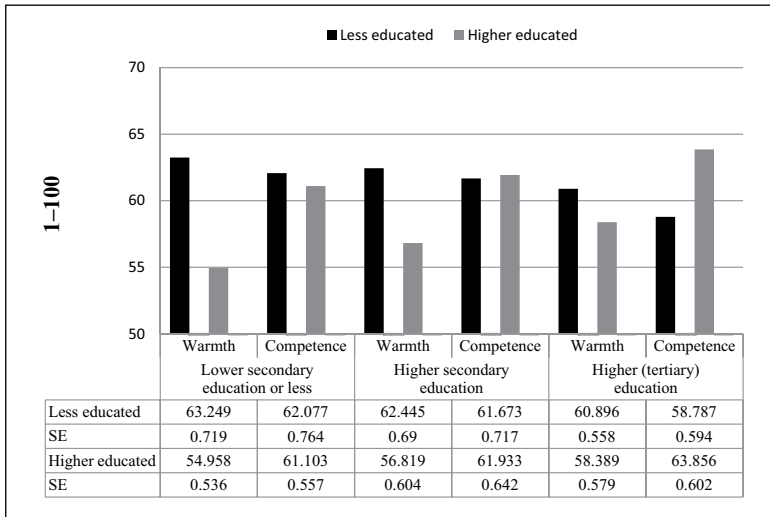


Figure 1. Perceived warmth and competence of the higher and less educated according to actual educational attainment (controlled for gender, age and economic position).

educational attainment the more difference was perceived in terms of the conflict loaded warmth dimension between the higher and less educated.

For competence stereotypes, there was also a target group by educational attainment interaction, $F(2,1963) = 18.915, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.019$. Respondents with lower or higher secondary education did not perceive any difference in competence between less and higher educated people (both $ps > 0.22$, rejecting hypothesis 1), but respondents with higher (tertiary) education evaluated higher educated people as more competent (63.9) than less educated people (58.8), $p < 0.001$. Even though these results for warmth and competence are not very strong, the overall picture in Figure 1 is that less educated people seem to distinguish themselves on warmth and higher educated on competence (thereby providing some support for hypotheses 4a and 4b).

Next, we added education-based identification to the model. As explained earlier we expected that identification and feelings of attachment with a particular group (higher or less educated) would foster perceived warmth for that particular group.

We found an interaction between target group and education-based identification, $F(6,1927) = 10.882, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.033$. The pattern of this interaction was similar to the interaction between target group and educational attainment: the more people identify with one group, the more positively they evaluate this group and the more negative their evaluation of the other group (see Figure 2). The simple effect of target group is significant for all groups (all $ps < 0.01$) except for people who feel slightly attached to the higher educated. Importantly, when identification was added to the model, the effect size (η^2) for the target group by educational attainment interaction decreased from 0.019 (see above) to 0.005, $F(2,1927) = 4.998, p < 0.01$, indicating that the effect of the actual educational attainment to an important extent runs through subjective identification.

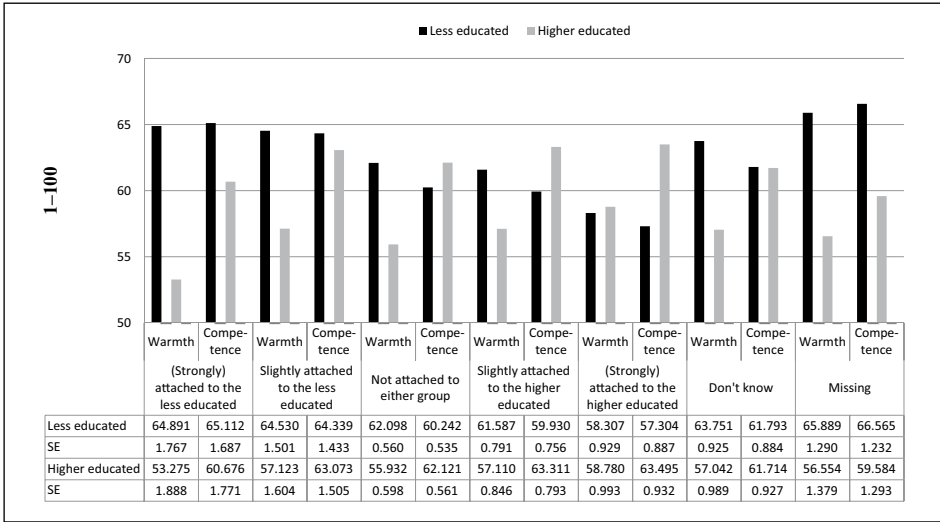


Figure 2. Perceived warmth and competence of the higher and less educated according to education-based group identity (controlled for gender, age and economic position).

The target group by identification interaction was qualified by a three-way interaction between stereotype dimension, target group and identification, $F(6,1933) = 3.843, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.012$ (see Figure 2). People who feel (highly) attached to the higher educated saw no difference between the higher and lower educated in terms of warmth, $p = 0.56, \eta^2 = 0.000$, but judged the higher educated as more competent, $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.018$, confirming hypothesis 4a. Similarly, people who feel somewhat attached to the higher educated see themselves as more competent, $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.008$, but the less educated as warmer, $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.013$. In contrast, people who strongly identify as less educated evaluated the less educated more positively on both warmth, $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.017$, and competence, $p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.003$, but the effect was strongest on the warmth dimension (confirming hypothesis 4b). People who feel somewhat attached to the less educated positively differentiated themselves on warmth, $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.010$, but not competence, $p = 0.45, \eta^2 = 0.000$. Earlier analyses showed that the less educated are overrepresented in the categories ‘don’t know’, ‘missing’ or ‘do not feel attached to either group’ (see Appendix). It is therefore not surprising to find that these groups evaluate the less educated as much warmer than the higher educated, $\eta^2 = 0.021, 0.021$ and 0.047 , respectively, all $ps < 0.001$. These findings for identification support social identity theory’s emphasis on subjective identification as an important factor influencing intergroup attitudes.

In general, our findings support the theory of asymmetric group relations. They clearly show that people who identify as higher educated use a different stereotype dimension to differentiate educational groups as compared to people who feel attached to the less educated. Moreover, the choice of stereotype dimension turned out to be consistent with theory. Members of the dominant group opt for an essentially non-conflict

loaded dimension (i.e. competence). Their position is backed up by a society in which education is represented as a 'universal problem solver' (Spruyt, 2012). That representation – distributed and reproduced through education, politics and media –however does not reach universal acceptance.

Conclusion and discussion

Current debates about the nature and consequences of educational differences in highly developed countries have arrived at the question to what extent these differences become the object of group-based behaviour and opinions. In this article we engaged with this topic by assessing how people in Flanders perceived the higher and less educated in terms of two fundamental dimensions of social perception, warmth and competence.

Our results allow for a better interpretation and integration of the existing literature on education-based groups. Stubager (2009) found for the educational issue what Jackman (1994) demonstrated for race, class and gender: dominated groups (here: the less educated) perceive more conflict between the dominant (here: the higher educated) and dominated group, and their evaluation of the socio-political position of the dominant is far more negative than the evaluation made by the dominant about the position of the dominated. Our results support that interpretation by showing that less educated people, in particular people who feel attached to the less educated, perceive the higher educated as less warm and see no important differences between the higher and less educated in terms of competence. No important differences in perceived warmth of higher versus less educated people were found among the higher educated and people who identify as being higher educated. Jackman and Muha (1984) warned against interpreting the latter finding as a self-evident indication of education's capacity to foster generalized tolerance and instead pointed to the possibility that ideological refinement was at play. Dominant groups, according to Jackman, are caught between the need to differentiate themselves from the dominated and the need to cooperate with them. The dominant will use the resources their symbolic environment provides them to differentiate the higher and less educated in an essentially non-conflict loaded manner. In current societies education is represented as a universal 'problem solver' (Meyer, 1977), and consequently education almost naturally becomes a source of status.

Our results indeed demonstrate what Jackman described theoretically: the higher educated, in particular people who feel attached to the higher educated, use the competence dimension to differentiate between educational groups and positively distinguish themselves from the less educated. That finding suggests that the perceptions of the higher educated do not necessarily result from personal motivations but instead can be the product of information processing in a symbolic environment. The latter is also emphasized by Bourdieu, but he expected that this would push the dominated group to accept the social status of the higher educated. That proved to be too strong an assumption.

All in all then, our results show that (1) there exists no stereotype consensus with respect to the higher and less educated and (2) the differences found deliver partial support for both strands of thought this article started from, depending on whether one looks at warmth or competence stereotypes. The combination of both elements will prove to be fertile ground for further research. That research should start off from the pertinent question authors like

Bovens and Wille or Stubager raised about the importance of education-based categories. It should, however, pay more attention to the implications of the institutionalized nature of the position of both categories.

One of the limitations of our study is that we had to rely on the discursive knowledge of respondents. We explicitly asked people to rate the higher and less educated on a number of traits. As mentioned earlier, that practice contrasts to some extent with the emphasis authors working in the area of symbolic capital put on practical *non-discursive* knowledge. Although we feel confident that our within-subject design is a first step to overcome this problem because it allows studying how people differentiate both groups as compared with the raw scores given to each group separately, we acknowledge that our method does not cover the full reach of the notion of symbolic capital because it does not measure unconscious processes or constructs. However, our research provides a starting point for further research. Future research should study practices rather than states and search for answers to questions like ‘In what situations and under what circumstances are these stereotypes used? And what then are the likely outcomes?’ With respect to the social relevance of negative stereotypes Goffman (1973 [1963]) points in this context to the importance of ‘mixed contacts’ – situations in which people of different social categories encounter each other. In such situations, both actors feel uncertain. The uncertainty among actors prone to negative stereotyping results from not knowing whether one is perceived as an individual or as a member of a social category (see also Crocker et al., 1991). Withdrawal from social interaction or increased and exaggerated efforts of impression management are the most likely outcomes of this process. Both types of behaviour increase the likelihood that social categories are activated and dominate the social perception of both individuals. Indeed, one of Goffman’s (1973 [1963]: 30) crucial contributions is the idea that such situations *also* affect the actor who is not stigmatized: ‘Each potential source of discomfort from him [the stigmatized] when we [the not stigmatized] are with him can become something we sense he is aware of, aware that we are aware of, and even aware of our state of awareness about his awareness; the stage is then set for the infinite regress of mutual consideration that Median social psychology tells us how to begin but not how to terminate.’

A very promising body of research in that context is followed by scholars working on so-called ‘stereotype threat’ (Steele, 2010). Experiments showed that the mere awareness of the presence of stereotypes held by others in a particular context – a purely cognitive matter which does not assume that the person agrees with or even internalizes a stereotype – has been shown a sufficient condition to produce stereotype threat effects (Croizet and Claire, 1998). Thus far this literature has mainly focused on effects on demanding tasks (such as difficult math tests) assuming that the threat effects result from the combination of stress related to the stereotype threat and the difficulty of the test. Further research needs to assess more subtle effects of that knowledge. Such research will expand our understanding of the role education plays in the production and reproduction of existing inequalities. More specifically it bears the potential to open the black box that underpins notions like symbolic capital. As mentioned earlier, the notion of symbolic capital is primarily used to explain processes of self-selection and self-exclusion. The emphasis on the unconscious, habitual way of acting central in that reasoning has been criticized for assuming what has to be explained (e.g. Jenkins, 1992: 73, 82). Studying

the stereotypes people hold and use provides interesting opportunities in that context, because stereotype threat research suggests that the mere awareness of the existence of stereotypes might be the mechanism behind the self-selection and self-exclusion processes that symbolic capital aims to explain. The fact that we found no stereotype consensus with respect to the higher and less educated only further complicates matters by begging the question in what types of situations a particular stereotype dimension is activated.

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Notes

1. This article is the outcome of a research project on education-based group identity. The project aims to assess how education-based social categories are used in daily interactions and contribute to the social reproduction of educational differentials in among other things political behaviour, social participation and opinions.
2. Bourdieu points among other things to (1) the repeated testing of educational outcomes throughout the educational career, (2) the increasing use of intelligence tests which 'naturalize' educational outcomes, (3) education's focus on creativity and an individual-centred approach and (4) 'limited' social mobility which conceals the strong intergenerational reproduction in educational outcomes (Bourdieu, 1976 [1974], 1984 [1979]: 415, 1990: 21–22).

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Résumé

Les croissants écarts de niveaux d'instruction constatés dans différents domaines ont incité certains chercheurs à se demander si un conflit éducatif et une conscience de groupe d'instruction associée pourraient naître de ces différences. Dans ce travail, cette question est mise en perspective avec un corpus d'articles scientifiques qui considèrent les diplômes comme une forme de capital symbolique, c'est-à-dire, un statut social institutionnel. Des pistes théoriques inspirées du modèle de contenu des stéréotypes en psychologie sociale sont explorées pour résoudre ce paradoxe apparent. Dans la section empirique, des données d'enquête de Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium; N: 1967) sont exploitées pour évaluer les perceptions de niveaux supérieurs et inférieurs d'instruction par le grand public. Un projet de recherche sur ce même sujet, dans lequel les personnes interrogées ont évalué les niveaux supérieurs et inférieurs d'instruction en termes de chaleur et de compétence, révèle des indications de différences de statut de légitimité et de conflits entre groupes en fonction de la dimension utilisée pour comparer les personnes les plus et les moins instruites. En outre, nous démontrons que les groupes plus et moins instruits utilisent une dimension de stéréotype différente pour distinguer les groupes d'instruction. Nous analysons les conséquences de nos résultats dans notre conclusion.

Mots-clés

identité de groupe d'instruction, stéréotypes, capital symbolique, chaleur, identification, compétence

Resumen

Crecientes diferenciales educativas en diferentes dominios han hecho que algunos estudiosos se pregunten si estas diferencias tienen el potencial de generar convertirse en un conflicto educativo y asociadas grupo de conciencia. En este trabajo esa pregunta se contrasta con un cuerpo de literatura que considera las credenciales educativas como una forma de capital simbólico, es decir, la condición social institucionalizada. Aproximaciones teóricas derivadas del modelo psicológico-social de contenido de estereotipos se utilizan para desentrañar esta aparente paradoja. En los datos de la sección empírica de la encuesta de Flandes (la parte de Bélgica de habla holandesa; N: 1967) se utilizan para evaluar las percepciones de la población en general acerca de los más y menos educados. Dentro del diseño mediante el cual los encuestados calificaron los más y menos educados en términos de rasgos relacionados con la afectividad y la competencia, se muestra que los indicios de diferencias de estatus legítimos, tanto como los conflictos entre grupos se pueden encontrar en función de la dimensión en la que se comparan personas con mayor y menor nivel educativo. Además, se demuestra que los grupos de más y menos instruidas utilizan una dimensión estereotipo diferente para diferenciar los grupos educativos. En la conclusión elaboramos sobre las implicaciones de nuestros hallazgos.

Palabras clave

Identidad de grupo basada en la educación, estereotipos, capital simbólico, calidez, identificación, competencia

Appendix

Table AI. Bivariate relationship between actual educational attainment and education-based group identity in Flanders (column percentages).

Education-based group identity	Educational level			Total
	Lower secondary or less	Higher secondary	Higher (tertiary) education	
(Strongly) attached to LE	8.1	3.7	0.6	4.2
Somewhat attached to LE	12.5	5.0	0.4	6.0
Not attached to either group	34.8	45.0	27.7	36.9
Somewhat attached to HE	11.0	16.5	23.6	16.8
(Strongly) attached to HE	2.9	7.1	35.2	13.7
Don't know	18.9	17.3	6.9	14.9
Missing	11.8	5.4	5.6	7.5
<i>N</i>	592	762	534	1888

Cramer's V: 0.354.