# Reflections on prejudice and intergroup relations

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Intergroup relations examine how people of different backgrounds and groups interact with one another. Intergroup encounters can range from highly positive (e.g., friendships) to extremely negative (e.g., genocides) so the charge of intergroup relations is to illuminate the social psychological processes that influence such encounters. The present review highlights four themes: (1) intergroup prejudice as ingroup love versus outgroup hate; (2) contemporary forms of intergroup prejudice; (3) how contact between groups may reduce intergroup prejudice; and (4) how material concerns (e.g., distribution of resources) and psychological processes (e.g., group identification) further influence intergroup relations. The review concludes with thoughts on the state of intergroup relations research and its relevance to contemporary society.

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The smartphone videos documenting police violence toward African Americans, the xenophobic rhetoric of certain U.S. presidential candidates during the 2016 race, the student protests advocating the need for greater diversity and inclusivity on college campuses, and the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized same sex marriage, indicate the relevance of intergroup relations research to contemporary society. Researchers studying intergroup relations examine how groups, and their individual members, relate to each other — including the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors they have in relation to members of one's own group (ingroup) and other groups (outgroups). We present a review of this literature centered around four themes: (1) whether intergroup prejudice reflects ingroup love or outgroup hate; (2) how indirect forms of intergroup prejudice are assessed; (3) how contact between groups affects intergroup prejudice; and (4) how structural and psychological factors influence intergroup relations. We end the review with thoughts on the state of intergroup relations research and its relevance to contemporary society.

## Ingroup love versus outgroup hate

A goal of intergroup relations research is to understand the nature of prejudice — that is, the ways in which we exhibit biases toward other groups [1,2]. This research identifies factors that produce and maintain prejudice, so that we can ultimately reduce it [3••,4]. There are many prominent historical examples of intergroup relations defined by extreme subjugation and derogation of other groups: the Holocaust, Japanese Internment Camps during World War II, the Rwandan genocide, and slavery in the U.S. [5,6], however, motivational perspectives suggest that we are principally driven to protect and prefer our own groups [7]. Biased intergroup perceptions and behavior are often guided by feelings of warmth and preferential treatment toward ingroup members compared to outgroup members [8]. Examples of ingroup love occur in a variety of domains including helping behavior, hiring and housing, and policing [9–11]. The general pattern across these spheres is that individuals demonstrate more favorability (e.g., helping) toward ingroup members than outgroup members.

Ingroup love does not necessitate outgroup derogation but this does not mean that ingroup love and outgroup hate do not feed on each other. There are numerous contemporary and historical examples in which ingroup love is rallied into outgroup derogation and intergroup conflict [8]. Outgroup derogation becomes more likely to the extent that there are other factors present [12] — such as when we perceive that other groups pose threats to the welfare of our own groups [13], or the presence of social norms that legitimize negative treatment of outgroups [14].

Lay perceptions of prejudice are arguably defined in terms of outgroup hostility with relatively less consideration of how ingroup love is a significant basis for intergroup relations in society [15]. Defining prejudice as predominantly about outgroup antipathy creates blind spots. For example, while over the course of time there have been legal and normative constraints attenuating the prevalence of hostile intergroup relations in the U.S., there are few parallel constraints against forms of group favoritism that also contribute to inequity [16]. Intergroup relations research can continue to illuminate such contours of

prejudice to underscore the need to improve intergroup relations and promote intergroup equality.

## Direct and indirect forms of intergroup prejudice

Given shifts in social norms over the past half century that have increased support for intergroup tolerance and diversity, in many Western countries, people are generally less willing to openly espouse prejudice toward people on the basis of race and gender [17]. However, this does not mean that there is no direct expression of prejudice toward people on the basis of categories such as weight, age, or religious identity [18,19]. In cases where there is less open expression of prejudice, researchers argue that prejudice is suppressed by prevailing norms (e.g., egalitarianism), and that prejudice will be expressed when it can be justified — for example, when people have previously demonstrated that they are not prejudiced [20•,21].

Correspondingly, intergroup relations research has evolved to examine how people express both direct and indirect forms of prejudice [22,23]. For example, prejudice can manifest in indirect ways when it can be rationalized [24]. In one study by Dovidio and Gaertner [25], White participants were shown a resume of either a Black or White applicant whose credentials were either low, moderate, or high, and they were then asked whether they would recommend the applicant for an interview. When the applicants' credentials were either strong or weak, participants did not differ in their recommendations for the Black and White applicants. However, when the applicants' credentials were moderate, participants were significantly more likely to recommend the White applicant than the Black applicant — presumably, because the moderate credentials afforded participants the opportunity to express bias under the guise of merit.

In seminal intergroup relations work, research has examined prejudice in terms of the automatic association of groups with certain characteristics — or what is known as implicit prejudice [26]. The paradigmatic measure in this area — the Implicit Associations Test (IAT) — typically shows that White, Asian, and Latino participants more quickly associate pleasant words with the racial category *Whites* and unpleasant words with the racial category *Blacks* [27]; at the same time, patterns of results are mixed among African American participants [26]. Researchers have also tested associations between racial categories and stereotypes of violence and criminality [28,29]. Correll *et al.* [28] asked participants to make rapid decisions to shoot (or not shoot) racial targets that are armed (or unarmed). Across studies, participants more quickly shoot armed Black targets than armed White targets, and mistakenly shoot unarmed Black targets more so than unarmed White targets. The effect is mediated by increased concurrence with the stereotype that African Americans are violent.

Indirect measures, like those described above, locate the assessment of prejudice at the individual level but researchers recognize that implicit prejudice reflects the particular socio-cultural contexts in which individuals are raised, and which promote certain associations and stereotypes of particular groups [30]. Prejudice is not solely located in individual minds but also resides in features of everyday reality (e.g., news, neighborhoods, holidays) that comprise people's lives [31].

## Prejudice reduction through intergroup contact

A long-standing area of intergroup relations research has focused on how contact between groups can transform relations to promote intergroup harmony and reduce prejudice [4]. A seminal meta-analysis revealed that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice [32]. These effects are especially likely to emerge when the contact situation embodies several optimal conditions such as establishing equal status and interdependence between groups, with support of institutional authorities [33]. Contact reduces prejudice between groups through encouraging members of different groups to identify with a superordinate group (see Schellhaas and Dovidio, this issue), establishing cross-group friendships, enhancement of knowledge about the outgroup, reduction of anxiety related to the outgroup, and increasing intergroup empathy [34].

However, not all contact experiences result in prejudice reduction. The more members of different groups interact with each other, the more likely they are to experience negative intergroup encounters along with the positive ones [4]. Recent research shows that negative contact is more predictive of negative intergroup attitudes than positive contact is of positive intergroup attitudes [35]. Nonetheless, positive contact tends to occur more frequently and may therefore outweigh the influence of negative contact on intergroup attitudes [36].

Can strategies be employed to offset the effects of negative intergroup experiences and enhance the potential for contact to produce positive intergroup outcomes? One approach would be to explore strategies by which we can minimize negative expectations for and associations with intergroup contact prior to the contact situation. If we can alleviate people's anxious expectations and concerns, it becomes more likely that intergroup contact reduces prejudice and promotes more positive orientations toward cross-group relationships [37,38].

More generally, research suggests we rethink strategies and goals in our efforts to improve intergroup relations. Rather than simply relying on intergroup contact as a vehicle for prejudice reduction, greater attention should be given to group members' motivations and goals at different stages of the intergroup relationship.

## Material and psychological factors can exacerbate prejudice

While contact between groups can reduce prejudice, concerns about access to material resources can exacerbate prejudice. Realistic group conflict theory [39] proposes that intergroup relations are often framed in a zero-sum fashion, where the more resources available to one group (e.g., money) the less access another group has to those resources. Group conflict arises as a function of finite resources; the higher the resource disparity between groups, the higher the likelihood of conflict (but see Anier, Guimond, and Dambrun, this issue).

However, others argue that group-based inequalities are not necessarily linked to conflict, but rather are justified by individuals (see also Kay and Brandt, this issue). Social dominance theory (SDT) argues that modern industrialized nations are defined by status- and power-based social hierarchies marked by unequal distribution of desirable resources (e.g., education, home ownership) in which dominant groups have more than subordinate groups [40,41]. These hierarchies are fortified through ideologies that legitimize differences (e.g., meritocracy), and they may be attenuated by ideologies that challenge these differences (e.g., egalitarianism). As societies vary in the proportion of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating ideologies, they correspondingly vary in the relative stability of these social hierarchies. The higher the proportion of hierarchy enhancing (vs. hierarchy attenuating) ideologies in a given society the more stable and legitimate the social hierarchy will be perceived to be.

Moreover, social identity theory (SIT) argues that, beyond any effects of group-based hierarchies, the mere categorization of individuals into social groups can lead people to identify with and highlight the favorable and unique attributes of their group in comparison with other groups [42\*\*,43]. Striving for positive distinctiveness often results in attitudes and behaviors favoring their ingroup over outgroups [44], and a tendency to defend the ingroup when it is threatened [45\*]. Indeed, even in the absence of long-standing conflicts between groups, individuals will evaluate their group more positively, and allocate more resources to it than an outgroup (see Otten, this issue). As individuals come to value their group more, they increase their adherence to the group's normative beliefs, values, and behaviors. This shows a motivated desire to serve as representatives that promote the group's welfare and social standing [46].

Intergroup relations theories like SDT and SIT highlight the centrality of groups to individuals and society. Material and structural realities (e.g., wealth distribution) influence intergroup relations but so do the symbolic and socio-psychological realities of how one perceives one's group and how it is treated in society [47].

## Conclusions

Intergroup relations research must examine *both* the psychologies of the dominant and subordinate groups. While early research typically emphasized dominant group perspectives and the goal of reducing prejudiced attitudes, the past couple of decades has seen increasing attention to the perspectives of the subordinate group [1,31]. The growing inclusion of subordinate group perspectives in intergroup relations has resulted in insights such as understanding academic achievement gaps via stereotype threat [48\*] and the role of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being [49]. A 'full circle' intergroup relations approach that includes multiple group perspectives ensures that we examine social issues and problems from the point of view of the disadvantaged and privileged.

Inclusion of subordinate group perspectives within intergroup relations research has arguably recast the goals from a primary emphasis on prejudice reduction to enhanced consideration of collective action and social justice [50]. Prejudice reduction interventions are typically designed to: (1) weaken the tendency to view the world in 'us vs. them' and strengthen a more inclusive sense of 'we'; (2) nurture empathy and trust; and (3) diminish the potential for intergroup conflict. In contrast, collective action interventions are designed to: (1) encourage members of subordinate groups to form a strong sense of group identity; (2) recognize injustice; and (3) take collective action in order to challenge the status quo [51,52]. Research shows that contact may yield opposing patterns of effects for members of dominant and subordinate groups: for example, whereas more positive interracial contact may lead White South Africans to become *more* supportive of government efforts to achieve social change, positive interracial contact may lead Black South Africans to become *less* supportive of such efforts because it attenuates racial identification [53].

Although there has been progress toward improved intergroup relations as demonstrated by laws that prohibit formal segregation and oppression, and increased norms in support of equality, harmful group relations are not mere relics of the past. Systemic inequities, instances of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation, direct and indirect forms of prejudice continue to define our societies. Many of society's pressing issues like anti-immigrant sentiment [54], group-based disparities in imprisonment and interactions with the criminal justice system [41], and social protest [51,52] are about intergroup relations. Today, more than ever before, we need intergroup relations research to understand the society we have created.

## Conflict of interest
Nothing declared.

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