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Introduction to Intergroup Contact and Collective Action: Integrative Perspectives

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Abstract

The bodies of research on intergroup contact and on collective action have historically remained separate in their pursuit to understand how to promote social equality. In recent years, however, researchers have begun to explore the extent to which contact and collective action work together or against each other in the pursuit of social change. To date, there is mixed evidence on the relation between these two constructs, with some suggesting that intergroup contact can have ironic effects by reducing the likelihood that disadvantaged group members will engage in collective action in favour of their own group. The goal of this Special Issue is to better understand the effect that intergroup contact can have on collective action and ignite a new body of research that directly considers the relation between the two. The papers comprising this Special Issue offer unique and yet complementary perspectives, highlighting the importance of moving beyond dyadic relations, the need to consider intergroup friendships and social embeddedness, the value of promoting inclusive identities and how support for collective action not only differs by group status but is also influenced by individual differences. Together, the papers offer theoretical and methodological suggestions to move research in this important field forward.

There are two main research traditions investigating psychological pathways to securing harmonious and equal intergroup relationships. The first originates in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, proposing that positive contact between members of antipathetic groups can promote favourable intergroup attitudes. This body of research has focused primarily on changing prejudicial attitudes of majority or advantaged group members. The second research tradition has sought to identify the psychological precursors to collective action or social protest, primarily among members of marginalised or disadvantaged groups (see e.g. Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Research in both areas has been flourishing for decades, yet very little work has sought to integrate the two approaches until recent years. Some commentators have proposed that despite the shared goal of achieving a just and equal society, the two traditions are incompatible and "in direct conflict" (Wright & Lubensky, 2009, p. 4; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012). Specifically, researchers have cautioned that the celebrated effects of intergroup contact have "ironic" (Wright, 2001) "sedative effects" (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwar, & Heath, 2011) on members of marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The goal of this Special Issue is to provide a venue to consider whether these two bodies of literature are necessarily adversarial in the pursuit of positive social change. In other words, how do the present contributions inform whether contact and collective action are a "match made in hell, or in heaven" (van Zomeren, 2019 this issue).

Collective Action

Collective action is as any act intended to improve the conditions of a group (Wright et al., 1990). Whether the act involves a single individual, or a group is irrelevant; what matters is that the action seeks to improve a group's (ingroup or outgroup) circumstance or thwart unfair treatment (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009; Wright, 2010). In this way, collective behaviours such as

mass protests, as well as person-level behaviours including voting or signing a petition, represent collective actions. Joining coordinated social movements (Klandermans, 1997), like the MeToo movement or Black Lives Matter movement also reflect collective action. Collective action research has mainly been concerned with identifying the motivations for challenging social inequality among marginalised populations. However, members of privileged groups, and groups that cut across basic social categories, such as opinion-based groups (McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009), can also engage in collective action, and the mechanisms that underpin when and why these groups pursue collective action have increasingly received scholarly attention (e.g. Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Postmes & Smith, 2009).

In identifying motivations of collective action, three socio-psychological variables have received significant attention, namely, social identity, perceptions of injustice, and group efficacy (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; van Zomeren, 2013). The three variables are rooted in three distinct lines of inquiry. The notion that perceptions of injustice drive collective action is based in relative deprivation theory (e.g. Crosby, 1976, 1982; Folger, 1986, 1987; Runciman, 1966; Walker & Smith, 2002). The concept of relative deprivation dates to Stouffer et al. (1949) who observed that despite faster career advancement than Military Police, members of the Air Corps reported greater discontentment with their promotion system. Stouffer et al. attributed this phenomenon to relative deprivation: the idea that perceptions of injustice stem from subjective rather than objective assessments of deprivation. Relative deprivation theorists distinguish between group and personal deprivation (e.g. Runciman, 1966), as well as affective and cognitive relative deprivation (Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983). Whereas affective judgments tap feelings of anger, resentment and dissatisfaction, cognitive judgements represent appraisals of a discrepancy between oneself or group and another person or group. Group (vs.

personal) and affect (vs. cognitive) judgements are more robust predictors of collective action (Smith & Oritz, 2002; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Observing that relative deprivation can be ubiquitous, social scientists, principally sociologists, highlighted the relevance of available resources to tackle social inequality. In particular, according to research mobilization theory (e.g. McCall, 1970; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; see also Klandermans, 1984), collective action is the result of a careful analysis to determine how to maximize gains and minimize costs. Resource mobilization theorists focused mostly on involvement in social movement organizations; however, their general assertion that belief that one's group can change the status quo through collective efforts was adopted by others who examined collective action more broadly. Mummendey et al. (1999), adopting a more psychological approach, argued that group efficacy, or a belief that collective action can bring about social change, inspires involvement in collective action (see also Drury & Reicher, 2005). Researchers comparing the relative contributions of relative deprivation and group efficacy found that both factors were important predictors (e.g. Foster & Matheson, 1995; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

Identification with the group is the third variable to have received considerable empirical attention. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people are motivated to hold a positive view of themselves and their group, and can maintain a positive view via comparisons with other groups. The importance of a group to the self, and the strength of attachment to the group, are proposed to motivate collective action when individuals cannot or will not cross group-boundaries (i.e. boundaries are impermeable), when the groups status is assessed as illegitimate or unfair, and when the status quo seems unstable (i.e. change is possible). Klandermans et al. (2002) argued that a politicized social identity, not merely the

identification with one's group, is necessary to motivate collective efforts. Explicit in a politicized social identity is an intention to advance the interests of the group. In 2004, Sturmer and Simon showed that a politicized social identity predicted collective action better than social identity.

Integrating the three traditions on collective action, van Zomeren et al. (2008) proposed the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA). According to their model, perceptions of injustice, group efficacy, and social identity uniquely underlie collective efforts. Critically, the model positions social identity as the driving force, predicting greater perceptions of injustice and group efficacy, which in turn motivate collective action. In a meta-analysis of 182 samples, van Zomeren et al. found support for the proposed pathways of SIMCA. Further, they also found that affective (versus cognitive) measures of injustice, group versus personal measures of efficacy, and politicized versus social identity measures, were stronger predictors of collective action. Finally, they also compared the predictive ability of the variables for structural (i.e. based on basic social categories) compared to incidental (i.e. issue-based) disadvantages. Whereas identity predicted collective action for both types, injustice and efficacy better predicted incidental compared to structural.

Researchers utilizing SIMCA as a framework for understanding collective action have found support for the model (e.g. Cakal et al., 2011; Tabri & Conway, 2011). Researchers have also found support for models positioning injustice perceptions and group efficacy as predictors of social identification, and in turn predicting collective action (e.g. Encapsulated Model of Social Identity in Collective Action, EMSICA; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009, Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012). More recently, van Zomeren and colleagues have called for the expansion of SIMCA to include moral beliefs (see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012; van

Zomeren, Kutlaca, & Turner-Zwinkels, 2018). Others have noted the importance of accounting for ideology (e.g. Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017). While the theoretical frameworks that aim to comprehensively reflect the underpinnings of collective action will no doubt continue to evolve, to date, they share an absence of attention to the impact of contact with the outgroup (Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Yet, an extensive literature shows that intergroup contact is a strong predictor of intergroup relations.

Contact

Before Allport (1954) proposed his contact hypothesis, social scientists wrote about the presumed benefits of intergroup contact. Lett (1945), for instance, touted the notion that cross-group contact could facilitate "mutual understanding and regard" (p. 35), and Brameld (1946) argued that "prejudice and conflict grow like a disease" in the absence of group contact (p. 245). In the 1940s and 1950s, studies began to emerge documenting positive attitudinal outcomes of intergroup contact. Many of these studies examined effects of bringing together White and Black men in military or police force environments (e.g. Brophy, 1946; Kephart, 1957). In response to the growing body of literature, in 1947, an American sociologist named Robin Williams Jr. published *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions* specifying 102 predictions related to intergroup contact. Of particular note, he identified shared group interests, status or tasks, and opportunities for personal or intimate contact as being most important for intergroup contact to cultivate positive outcomes.

Allport's (1954) chapter detailing his contact hypothesis in his influential book *The Nature of Prejudice* built on Williams' (1947) book and new empirical studies. According to Allport (1954), contact between antagonistic groups could foster favourable attitudes under 'optimal conditions'; namely, equal status between groups in the intergroup contact context,

shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities. Reigniting empirical research on intergroup contact in the late 1990s, Pettigrew (1997, 1998) identified a fifth condition, that intergroup contact should present an opportunity to develop friendship, and proposed two pathways, an affective route (i.e. greater empathy, lower intergroup anxiety) and a cognitive route (i.e. decategorisation, recategorisation, etc.), by which intergroup contact leads to favourable intergroup attitudes.

One of the most influential publications following Allport (1954) is a meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006; see also Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Using data from 713 samples across 515 studies, they examined the effects of intergroup contact between advantaged and disadvantaged racial, physical disability, mental health, elderly, and sexual orientation groups. Results revealed a significant effect of contact on lower prejudice (r=-.21); and this effect was stronger under 'optimal conditions' (r=-.29). Hence, the contemporary prejudice researchers consider the conditions are facilitating, rather than essential in the pursuit of prejudice reduction. Recently, a meta-analysis illustrated the effectiveness of real-world contact interventions, and that the benefits hold over time (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015). There is also meta-analytic evidence endorsing the significance of intergroup friendship as a strategy for lowering prejudice (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Further, empirical inquiry confirms that contact facilitates lower prejudice by promoting lower intergroup anxiety, greater empathy, and more knowledge about the outgroup (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Indirect forms of contact have also proven effective for lowering prejudice. Extended contact, or the knowledge that a friend has a friend who belongs to an outgroup, is proposed to foster lower prejudice (Wright et al., 1997). A meta-analysis by Vezzali et al. (2014) showed that extended contact lowers explicit prejudice, lowers stereotyping, dampens physiological stress

reactions, and promotes positive intentions to engage with the outgroup. Their meta-analysis also found that extended contact works through processes such as lowered intergroup anxiety, modified social norms, lowered fear of rejection, altered stereotypes, and more empathy, trust, and knowledge of the outgroup. Introducing another form of indirect contact, Turner, Crisp, and Lambert (2007) proposed imagined contact as a strategy for reducing prejudice when face-to-face contact is not possible, or as a way to prepare people for intergroup contact. Imagined contact is the "mental stimulation of a social interaction with a member or members of an outgroup category" (Crisp & Turner, 2009, p. 234). Miles and Crisp (2014) investigated the effects of imagined contact in a meta-analysis of over 70 studies. They reported that imagined contact leads to more favourable outgroup attitudes, greater outgroup trust, lower intergroup anxiety, positive intergroup behaviours, as well as intentions to engage in contact. Studies have also shown that imagined contact is effective for preparing people for face-to-face contact (e.g. Choma, Charlesford, & Hodson, 2014; Vezzali et al., 2015). Contact has been criticised for not always being facilitated in the real world, where group differences are underpinned by political instability, geographical segregation and unequal relations (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005; McKeown & Dixon, 2017). However, evidence demonstrates that when intergroup contact (face-to-face, physical, imagined, or extended) occurs, it is a robust strategy for promoting harmonious intergroup relationships (Hodson & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Collective Action and Intergroup Contact: A Paradox?

An important caveat to the celebrated effects of intergroup contact is the "ironic" consequences that the resultant more tolerant outgroup attitudes can have on collective action (Wright, 2001). Specifically, positive contact can have "sedative effects" by disarming members of disadvantaged groups and stifling their motivation to engage in collective efforts (Cakal et al.,

2011; see also Dixon et al., 2012; McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Wright, 2001; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). A growing number of studies have documented a negative association between positive contact with advantaged groups and less collective action among disadvantaged groups (e.g. Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013; Cakal et al., 2011; Tropp, Hawi, van Laar, & Levin, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Tausch, Saguy, and Bryson (2015), as one example, reported that having more White friends predicted less collective action among Latino American university students. Positive contact seems to "demobilize" disadvantaged groups by targeting the factors known to motivate collective action including group-based anger, perceptions of group injustice, and identification with one's group (e.g. Dixon et al, 2010; Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2018; Saguy et al., 2009; Tausch et al., 2015; Tropp et al., 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Of note, there are studies that have not replicated the disarming effect of positive contact. Tropp et al. (2012) did not find that positive contact related to lower collective action among Asian Americans, Hayward et al. (2018) found positive contact with Whites related to greater collective action at the zero-order level along African Americans, and Reimer et al. (2017) did not find a significant association in two samples of sexual minorities.

The relation between intergroup contact and collective action can be complicated further by the fact that contact can affect a range of collective actions. Indeed, there is evidence supporting that different processes underlie whether an individual engages in nonnormative (e.g. throwing a petrol bomb) or normative (e.g. signing a petition) forms of action (Becker & Tausch, 2015). Becker, Tausch, Spears and Christ (2011), for example, found that participation in radical action (but not moderate action) was associated with ingroup dis-identification. Becker and colleagues explain these differences through two key processes: (1) appraisals of the political

situation and (2) levels of efficacy (Becker et al., 2011; Becker & Tausch, 2015). The authors find support for these ideas whereby emotions such as anger and higher levels of efficacy are associated with normative action and by contrast, contempt and lower levels of efficacy are associated with nonnormative action. It stands to reason, therefore, that intergroup contact might differentially affect normative and nonnormative forms of action and it is vital to understand how these differential effects come about (Wright, 2009).

Some preliminary evidence attests to this proposal. In their study on collective action and contact in Northern Ireland, McKeown and Taylor (2018) found that amongst both Protestants and Catholics, intergroup contact was associated with lower levels of support for political violence (as aggressive action) but was not associated with political participation (as non-aggressive action). And although they did not examine different forms of action, Schmid et al. (2014) found that intergroup contact was associated with realistic threat and in turn, lower levels of aggressive action tendencies in two separate studies (one cross-sectional, one longitudinal). Together, these preliminary findings suggest that understanding the role of contact on collective action necessitates consideration of for *whom* the contact might affect collective action, as well as what *forms* of collective action contact might exert a positive or negative effect.

Research on intergroup contact, both with respect to intergroup attitudes and collective action, has mainly be restricted to the effects of *positive* intergroup contact. Recently, there has been a call to acknowledge positive as well as negative contact to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of contact (e.g. Barlow et al., 2012; Hayward et al., 2018; Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). Members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience negative contact compared to their advantaged group counterparts (e.g. Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Moreover, there is some work suggesting that the effect of negative

contact has a stronger relation to prejudicial attitudes than positive contact (Barlow et al., 2012); however, others have not replicated this asymmetry (Arnadottir, Lolliot, Brown, & Hewstone, 2018). Negative contact might serve as a catalyst for motivating collective action (e.g. perceptions of discrimination; McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Wright, Tropp, & Mazziotta, 2017). For example, negative contact with Whites led to more anger at Whites and perceptions of group discrimination, and this in turn predicted collective action among African Americans (Hayward et al., 2018). Similarly, Reimer et al. (2017) found that negative contact with heterosexual students related positively to collective action among sexual-minority students.

Existing literature to date predominately supports a sedative effect of positive intergroup contact on collective action among marginalized or disadvantaged group members. However, the handful of studies that have considered both positive and negative intergroup contact, and the impact of contact on the collective action intentions among disadvantaged and advantaged group members, signals that it is too early to draw firm conclusions. The research by Reimer and colleagues, in particular, serves as a cautionary tale of early conclusions. Reimer et al. (2017) observed that when negative contact is accounted for, the sedative effects of positive contact disappeared. They also found that positive contact with LGBT+ individuals predicted intentions to participate in collective action related to LGBT+ rights among heterosexual participants (see also Dixon et al., 2007; Selvanathan et al., 2017). At a minimum, it is evident that the nature of the relation between intergroup contact and collective action warrants empirical and theoretical consideration. There is a multitude of ideas concerning how these two traditions relate (or do not). The responses to the Dixon et al.'s (2012) paper calling into question the value of intergroup contact serve as examples.

Contributions of the Present Special Issue

The contributions of the present issue tackle the nature of the relation between collective action and intergroup contact. In the first paper, Cara MacInnis and Gordon Hodson directly address the tension in the literature between contact and collective action and offer intergroup friendship formation as the missing link in the conversation between these two bodies of research. Specifically, the authors argue that contact (when it reaches a specific threshold) can be associated with positive social change attitudes through promoting intergroup friendship formation. They posit that such intergroup friendships facilitate awareness of discrimination faced by outgroup friends, and as a result can motivate collective action intended to secure equality for the outgroup friend's group. This paper offers up an invitation for researchers consider more closely the role of intergroup friendships in collective action.

Investigating the impact of contact on advantaged groups members' collective action, in the second paper of this issue, Emma Thomas, Rachael Hoskin and Craig McGarty present a longitudinal study testing whether contact predicts solidarity-based collective action among advantaged group members via shared social identity (based on opinion-based social identities). Novel to much of the literature on collective action, Thomas and colleagues account for contact as well as sociopolitical ideology. Specifically, the authors consider transnational contact and the moderating role of social dominance orientation (SDO; i.e. the belief that groups should be organised hierarchically with some groups dominating others; Ho et al., 2015) amongst advantaged group members. Findings offer support for contact as being a means to promote collective action, but only for people lower in SDO. Their results highlight the need to account for individual differences in order to truly understand why individuals engage (or not) in solidarity-based collective action.

By focusing on identification with all humanity and global crises, the third paper by Anne Rompke, Immo Fritsche, and Gerhard Reese offers a new perspective on research on intergroup contact and collective action. By focusing on identification with all humanity Rompke and colleagues arguably capture processes associated with the broadest and most inclusive of social identities. In their paper, the authors evaluate and find support (across two studies) for the idea that intergroup contact can promote identification with all humanity that in turn, can influence the extent to which individuals support collective action that addresses global crises. This work offers a platform for researchers to focus more narrowly on how these processes work when examining international and global issues that transcend traditional group boundaries, such as those based on race or religion.

In part answering MacInnis and Hodson's (2019) call to harness the potential power of intergroup friendships, Evelyn Carter and colleagues examine the relationships between same and different race friendships and involvement in collective action on University campuses. This paper moves beyond participant reports of quality and quantity of contact and instead, considers friendships that (when intergroup) are arguably the ideal consequence of meaningful intergroup contact. Findings support the idea that having a higher proportion of minority group friends (regardless of own racial group) was associated with more involvement in campus-based collective action, whereas having a higher proportion of White friends was associated with less involvement in collective action. Consistent with relative deprivation literature on collective action, injustice perceptions mediated the reported effects. Here, findings seem to suggest that intergroup friendship works well in pursuit of equality for higher status groups, but not for lower status groups- supporting previous research documenting ironic effects of contact.

With the exception of work by social scientists such as Simon and Klandermans (2001) on politicised identities, research in the collective action and intergroup contact literatures has predominately focused on relationships between two groups, or members from two groups. Hanna Zagefka makes a unique contribution by questioning and providing a solution for considering triadic relations in experimental studies on intergroup contact and collective action. This methodological contribution is particularly important because as societies diversify, theories of two group relations become increasingly detached and problematic. Social psychologists therefore need to expand their methodological toolkit to address these contextual changes and better understand the social psychological processes underlying the pursuit (or not) of social change. This, however, is a challenge and Zagekfa offers practical and theoretically-based suggestions on how to do this in practice.

The Special Issue concludes with a discussant piece by Martijn van Zomeren. In his paper, van Zomeren questions the extent to which intergroup contact is a “match made in heaven or one made in hell”. In critically reviewing the papers in the Special Issue, he calls for researchers to consider contact and collective action in terms of relational processes through which individuals seek to regulate their social networks. And, like a number of papers in the Special Issue, van Zomeren speaks to the need for a comprehensive investigation of how social relations, social embeddedness and friendships influence the extent to which contact and collective action are a match made in heaven or a match made in hell.

Conclusion

At the outset of planning this Special Issue, we hoped that in bringing together research on intergroup contact and collective action, this Special Issue would provide a venue for researchers to share latest research and ideas at the crossroads of these important fields, and in

doing so, inspire new lines of inquiry. It is our hope, therefore, that the present contributions alongside other emerging theory and research will encourage researchers to reconsider the nature of the relation between these two research traditions in a way that facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which and for whom they work together or in opposition in the pursuit of social change. We call for researchers to use the papers that comprise this Special Issue as a springboard to explore the complexity of the relationship between intergroup contact and collective action considering how processes work for different groups and different forms of action both locally and globally. Doing so will not only improve our scientific understanding of these important social psychological processes but will also make a difference to our changing social world. Critically, not all collective action is in the spirit of advancing equality among groups. Indeed, far-right movements are on the rise and intergroup relations seem as though they are becoming increasingly fraught – reflecting ongoing power struggles between groups. A social psychological understanding of how to best bring groups together in a way that promotes social justice through peaceful means is a challenge facing us all.

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