

Introduction

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Introduction to Intergroup Helping

Putting the ‘intergroup’ into research on helping

The act of helping is a way of taking care of others who are seen as temporarily or chronically unable to take care of their own needs. Helping can take various forms, from giving directions to a stranger on the street, taking care of a hospital patient, to teaching a student or donating to charity. The act of helping is in many respects the glue that keeps a group together. Human beings live together in social groups, and they prosper in these groups because of highly advanced systems of task distribution and care-taking. It should therefore come as no surprise that a sizeable body of research in psychology has been devoted to the phenomenon of helping.

What may be more surprising, however, is the realisation that most of this research has focused on helping behaviour between individuals, largely ignoring the importance of social group memberships in helping situations. From research on bystander intervention (Darley & Latané, 1968), the negative-state relief model (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976), and the arousal: cost-reward model (Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981), to research on empathy and altruism (Batson, 1991) and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) – the traditional focus of helping research has been on the individual, not the group. This is remarkable, as acts of helping as well as our interpretation of these acts is coloured by the social context in which they occur.

Consider John, who is helping Cindy with filling out her tax form. At first glance, this may appear an act of helping from one individual towards another. But what qualifies John to help Cindy with her tax form? Is John an accountant and Cindy his client? If so, we would consider John a professional in the field of taxes. His group membership therefore affects how we interpret the situation. The fact that John was hired by Cindy does not mean that she is in any way incompetent – more likely, her tax situation is so complicated that she needed the aid of an expert. How different our interpretation would be if John wasn't Cindy's tax

accountant, but her neighbour. In this case, we might be more inclined to interpret the situation in terms of traditional gender roles. We would perhaps conclude that John, being male, is better with numbers than Cindy. The Cindy who is being helped by her male neighbour might be seen as less competent than the Cindy who is being helped by her accountant. This example illustrates that an exchange of help between two individuals is rarely just that - more often, it is an interaction between two group members, and this social context shapes our interpretation of the interaction.

To take our argument one step further, we propose that the act of helping serves to highlight important differences between helpers and recipients, and that these differences become a salient basis for categorisation at the time of the help exchange. Groups and social categories are far from static – how we categorise people largely depends on the context (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991; see also Dovidio, Gaertner, & Abad-Merino, this volume; Ryan, Reicher, & Haslam, this volume). If we return to our example of John-the-accountant and Cindy-the-client, their different roles as accountant and client are highly salient when John is helping Cindy with her taxes, and these roles likely shape their interaction such that both parties acknowledge John's higher status in that context. But when John and Cindy find themselves on opposite sides of the net during a tennis match, their interaction would be entirely different. Since John's expertise as accountant does not stretch to the tennis court, he no longer by default holds a higher status position. Our interpretation of the act of helping is thus not only determined by the social categories that are salient at the time of the exchange, but the exchange itself highlights social categories that might not be salient in another context. Given the pivotal role of the social context in helping exchanges, it is important that group memberships be taken into account when investigating the exchange of help.

Over the past two decades, researchers have gradually come to acknowledge the importance of social groups in their investigations of helping. Whereas the highly influential

book “The psychology of helping and altruism”, edited by Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, and Piliavin (1995), still focused predominantly on individual phenomena, the more recent volume “The psychology of prosocial behavior: Group processes, intergroup relations, and helping”, edited by Stürmer and Snyder (2010), includes several chapters that focus explicitly on the intergroup nature of helping. The current book takes this development a step further by providing a current and comprehensive overview of the latest insights from research that explicitly focuses on *intergroup* helping.

The current book also distinguishes itself from the aforementioned volumes by its clear focus on studies of *helping*, as opposed to more general investigations of altruism and prosocial behaviour. In line with Nadler (2012) and McGuire (1994), we define helping as the provision of aid through acts that may or may not be motivated by the intention to benefit the recipient. We therefore do not equate the act of helping with altruistic or prosocial intentions. As the various sections in this book will elucidate, helping *can* be motivated by a genuine concern for the other’s wellbeing (e.g., Sierksma & Thijs, this volume; Stürmer & Siem, this volume), but this is certainly no prerequisite (e.g., Wakefield & Hopkins, this volume; Halabi & Nadler, this volume).

Putting the ‘helping’ into intergroup relations research

In the previous, we argued that helping research has often failed to acknowledge the intergroup nature of helping interactions. It would make sense, then, to look for such investigations in the research domain of intergroup relations. But here, too, very little attention has been devoted to the act of helping – or positive intergroup behaviour in general. The almost exclusive focus of intergroup relations researchers on negative phenomena such as discrimination, racism, prejudice, and hostility is unfortunate, but makes sense if we take into account the historical context in which the dominant theoretical frameworks in this research field were developed.

Henri Tajfel, the founding father of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), developed his interest in intergroup relations as a result of his own experiences in the second World War. A Polish Jew, he studied chemistry at the Sorbonne in France when the outbreak of the war made him enlist in the French army. After his captivation by the Nazis, he survived the war in a series of prisoner of war camps by hiding his true identity. His experiences shaped his thinking about human nature, and ultimately resulted in a switch from chemistry to the field of psychology in order to answer the fundamental question: what is it about social groups that causes people to engage in atrocities such as the persecution and genocide of other groups? His research on discrimination led to the development of social identity theory, and its extension, self-categorisation theory, which even today dominate European research on intergroup relations. Meanwhile, on the other side of the ocean, the United States had its own problems to deal with. Racial issues in the fifties, sixties and seventies spurred a wave of research on discrimination, racism, prejudice, and stereotyping, and these topics continue to receive vast research attention to date (e.g., Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). Although the theoretical foundations of these two historical lines of intergroup relations research may differ somewhat, they have one thing in common: a clear and almost exclusive focus on negative phenomena.

This emphasis on negative phenomena is readily evidenced in numerous textbooks and overviews of intergroup relations. For example, Brewer and Miller's (2003) classic book titled "Intergroup Relations" contains six chapters – four of which focus on negative phenomena, and only one focuses on positive intergroup relations. Similarly, a recent edition of *Current Opinion in Psychology* (2016) that focuses on 'current issues and new directions in intergroup relations' counts twenty-five articles – and the ratio of negative to positive topics of these is approximately 4:1. To be clear, we do not contest the value of research on these negative phenomena. However, the emphasis on negative phenomena that characterises

intergroup relations research may give rise to the conclusion that most intergroup emotions, cognitions, and behaviours are characterised by hostility, mistrust, aggression, and discrimination. In our opinion, this conclusion is unjustified.

The world is full of concrete examples of positive behaviours occurring in a clear intergroup context. The recent directive from the German chancellor Angela Merkel that Germany can, must, and will accept refugees fleeing the war in Syria is an example of intergroup help at a national level. This political stance is echoed by thousands of acts of ordinary Germans welcoming the refugees, and donating old TV sets and other household items to help the refugees build a new home. Another example constitutes the tsunami of unprecedented proportions that affected wide areas of Southeast Asia in 2004. This natural disaster triggered a surge of international relief efforts which are, to date, referred to as illustrations of nations' genuine concern for other nations. These examples clearly illustrate that often intergroup behaviour is not all negative. They also illuminate the need for a clearer research focus on the causes, moderators and consequences of positive instances of intergroup behaviour.

The informed reader may, at this point, wish to counteract our argument that positive intergroup phenomena have been understudied, by citing, for example, the highly influential work of Sherif and colleagues (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961), Allport's work on the Contact hypothesis (1954), or Gaertner and colleagues' work on the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; see also Dovidio et al., this volume). This work is indeed among the roughly twenty-five percent of intergroup relations research that has focused on more positive phenomena. And yet, if we take a closer look at this research, it still originates from the study of negative phenomena. In all this research, cooperative goals, intergroup contact, or recategorisation were investigated as tools to reduce or eliminate intergroup prejudice and discrimination. But reducing negative phenomena is not the same as

promoting positive phenomena. The motivation to help another group is not, de facto, the opposite of the motivation to harm another group. Although the aforementioned work is unquestionably important, we call for more research studying intergroup helping as an act in and of itself. By advancing our understanding of what drives intergroup helping, and what drives the willingness to receive intergroup help, we may be able to ultimately contribute to the promotion of real positive behaviour that breaches the intergroup divide.

Intergroup helping

In this book, we aim to provide an overview of current research on intergroup helping. We show the development of research on intergroup helping from a demonstration of ingroup bias and discrimination to identifying strategic motives for outgroup helping, to research on intergroup helping in natural contexts. Contributions are grouped into three sections. *Section 1* (entitled ‘Intergroup helping as subtle discrimination’) covers those approaches which are most closely aligned with the historic view of intergroup helping in intergroup relations. These are contributions which tend to interpret the omission of intergroup helping as acts of subtle discrimination. As such, these approaches stay true to the original emphasis on negative intergroup behaviour in intergroup relations research: acts which often appear positive on the surface might be interpreted to reveal subtly discriminatory attitudes underneath. A central message of this type of research is that people are inclined to favour their own group over other groups in acts of helping, particularly when their behaviour is anonymous or can easily be legitimised. However, this section will also show that an assumption of an overall ingroup favouring bias in helping is too simplistic.

Section 2 (entitled ‘Strategic motives for intergroup helping’) then moves on to discuss a range of motives for helping which are broader and more sophisticated than a simple desire to derogate and discriminate against the outgroup. Contributions in this section emphasise that decisions to help (or not) are often borne out of strategic considerations. For

example, helping decisions might derive from ulterior motives such as a desire to demonstrate ingroup qualities or wealth, to express how warm and friendly one's own group is, or to strengthen ties with the other group. Some central messages of contributions with this focus are that ingroup favouritism in helping does not necessarily always emerge, that there are a range of reasons why people would be motivated to help other groups, and that an array of complex motives can sometimes even prompt a preference for outgroup over ingroup helping. As such, this section will argue that intergroup helping must be studied as a phenomenon in and of itself, not as a mere expression of ingroup bias or discrimination.

Finally, *section 3* (entitled 'Intergroup helping in the field') gathers research which looks at intergroup helping in a wide range of field contexts, ranging from help offered to the poorest in society to victims of humanitarian disasters, war and genocide. This section broadens the focus yet again, and investigates factors that might prompt intergroup helping that go well beyond ingroup preference/ subtle discrimination and strategic motives. A central message is that intergroup conflict, war and genocide are not inevitable, but that often intergroup relations are characterised by positivity, and that there are certain conditions under which such positivity will be allowed to blossom. As such, the emphasis is very much on how intergroup harmony can be achieved, rather than on how intergroup conflict can be kept at bay. These contributions truly look at the positive side of intergroup relations, and provide practical points for how intergroup helping can be promoted. An implication of the research reviewed in this volume is that research can and should focus more on factors that can promote outgroup helping in intergroup contexts.

Taken together, then, the contributions in this volume aim to demonstrate the historic development this research domain. Although a reluctance to help outgroup members can sometimes be an expression of subtle discrimination (section 1), intergroup helping can also be motivated by other strategic considerations which might actually motivate actors to

engage in outgroup helping (section 2), and intergroup helping can also be observed in a range of real-life contexts (section 3), to an extent which suggests that we should refocus our research attention from a sole concern with how to prevent the lamentable to a concern with how to engender the desirable.

There are some obvious reasons why we hope that this volume can make an important and timely contribution. As many of the contributors outline, human suffering due to war, terrorism, and natural disasters is on the increase, and inequalities between social groups along economic, ethnic, and gender fault lines persist. We hope that this volume can act as a reminder that this state of affairs is not a foregone conclusion. Promoting behaviour which reaches out across intergroup divides is an achievable goal, and the work summarised in this volume sets a research agenda which can illuminate a path that will lead towards this goal.

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