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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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From cooperation to conflict: The role of collective narratives in shaping group behaviour

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Abstract

In this paper, we review the concept of collective narratives and their role in shaping group behaviour. We see collective narratives as 'meta-stories' embraced by groups that incorporate values and beliefs about social reality, therefore providing a blueprint for group norms which, in turn, inform group members' behaviour. Our aim is to both describe the psychological processes underpinning the relation between collective narratives and group behaviours and develop an integrative typology of the functions of collective narratives (as they connect to various collective behaviours). We start by discussing definitions in the recent literature and propose an integrative conceptualisation which positions collective narratives in the context of collective action research. Next, we focus on the process by which collective narratives provide the bases for identity formation, development, and change, thus shaping group behaviour. We see collective narratives as central in understanding group behaviour, as they function as 'meta-stories' that incorporate moral codes and values, and beliefs about the ingroups and outgroups—providing a blueprint for group norms which, in turn, inform group members' behaviour. In the second part of the article, we describe a typology of collective narratives according to their functions, structured around two core dimensions: the context/s in which collective narratives develop and are

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shared (i.e., intragroup vs. intergroup) and their effects within these contexts (i.e., driving consensus vs. driving dissent). We identify four distinctive types of collective narrative functions and review research showing how each of them shapes specific social identity content, including behaviour prescribing norms. We then show how these specific norms shape behaviours ranging from cooperation and pro-social action to hostile intergroup conflict. The implications of this contribution are twofold. First, by providing a systematic account and categorisation of how collective narratives function in society and of their connections to social identities (and their content), we can more accurately deduct group norms and predict behaviours in specific circumstances, including in relation to political violence. Second, by better understanding the narratives that provide the bases of identity formation, development, and change, we can improve attempts to create alternative narratives that unify rather than divide people, so that pathways to co-operation might be chosen over conflict.

> It is not the atomic bomb that will destroy civilization. But civilized society can destroy itself – finally, no doubt, with bombs – if it fails to understand and to control intelligently the aids and deterrents of co-operation (Elton Mayo, 1945/2014)

1 | INTRODUCTION

Humans are "moral, believing, and narrating animals" who thrive in the moral order created by shared stories "about who we are, what we ought to do, and what is sacred" (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010, p. 65; Smith, 2003). Throughout history, shared stories have shaped cultures and societies. These stories include *collective narratives* about the creation of the universe and the meaning of life which underpin various religions, interpretations of historical events, political thought, and conflict. As such, collective narratives play a key role in shaping individual identities (Hammack, 2008, 2011). As for their influence at a societal level, they have been used in explanations of intractable historical conflicts (Adisonmez, 2019; Bar-Tal, 1998, 2011) and polarisation on social issues of high public interest, such as climate change, Brexit, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Bain et al., 2012; Hobolt et al., 2021; MacCarron et al., 2020). Despite the implicit recognition of the importance of collective narratives in understanding major intergroup conflict, we do not currently have a cohesive theoretical framework that brings together explanations of group behaviour (as a driver of major social change) with collective narratives (which shape social identities).

In this article, we introduce such a framework and describe an integrative process of how collective narratives may shape a wide range of group behaviours. We discuss a typology of collective narratives and their respective

functions where different narrative categories are connected to behaviours ranging from cooperation to conflict. From a theoretical viewpoint, our understanding of this process is derived from the social identity approach (Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner et al., 1987). It relies on constructs such as social identity content (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006a, 2006b) and group behaviour as understood within social identity theory. The typology we propose is based on a systematic assessment of connections between different categories of narratives that we identify and specific group behaviours ranging from cooperation as "the act of working together to one end", to competition as the act of seeking to gain what another is seeks to gain at the same time (Mead, 2002).

2 | CONCEPTUALISING COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES

Narratives can be conceptualised at either an individual (personal) level or at a societal (collective) level. Individual narratives are seen as being embodied in the cultural practices that individuals take part in and represent a cognitive process of meaning making which helps people gain a sense of personal coherence (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012, p. 78). However, their function goes beyond that. When shared within and across groups, these narratives fulfil a need for collective solidarity through shared meaning (Hammack, 2008; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). They incorporate beliefs about social categories and the relationships between them in society, reside in the collective memory of groups and are anchored in interpretations of history. They can take the form of cohesive stories about social reality, congruent with particular sets of values and systems of beliefs (Bliuc, Smith, & Moynihan, 2020), therefore, helping position the individual in a broader intergroup context. However, when they are contested across groups and within groups, they provide the bases of dissent, division, and conflict. How may collective narratives shape group behaviour?

As a general definition, group behaviour refers to actions of individuals unified under a common group membership (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Group behaviour can be understood as attempts to change the world according to a specific collectively shared narrative about social reality (Bliuc, Smith, & Moynihan, 2020). Within the social identity approach, the psychological mechanism that makes all forms of group behaviour possible is group identification (Turner et al., 1983), a construct conceptually distinct from 'social identity' which is represented by "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his (or her) membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this." (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Group identification as a reflection of social identity strength helps individuals define themselves (understanding who they are in a socially constructed context) and assess their self-worth (Deaux, 1996; Tajfel, 1974). That is, the more strongly people define themselves in terms of their group memberships, the more likely it is that their group status will affect their feelings of self-worth (Doosje et al., 1999). The implication is that people are socially invested in ensuring that their group differs from outgroups in positively distinct ways, so that group members are motivated to construct the group as not only distinct but also superior to outgroups. This process also applies to the group narrative—that is, group members may be motivated to see their group narrative as having greater validity compared to alternative narratives endorsed by outgroup/s.

The idea that group behaviours are derived from social identification with groups constitutes one of the key tenets of the social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner et al., 1987; Turner & Reynolds, 2001, 2011). Building on these classic ideas, our aim is to expand on the understanding of the relationship between the historical and socio-political context and group behaviours. We do this by considering the role of collective narratives—which are highly sensitive to and reflective of these contexts in the process of social identity formation, development, and refinement.

2.1 | Collective narratives as bases for group formation

Collective narratives can provide a basis for category differentiation and therefore represent a platform for group formation. The distinction between sociological groups and psychological groups is important here: while sociological groups and many social categories include members that share characteristics which they might not have control over (e.g., ethnicity), psychological groups exist and are cohesive to the extent that the members perceive themselves as "pursuing promotively interdependent goals" (Deutsch, 1949, p. 150). In other words, group members in psychological groups are bound together by common goals rather than shared characteristics, so the basis of similarity for these group members may be solely ideological. This means that identification with psychological groups is self-determined and therefore possibly more meaningful to the individual than many sociologically ascribed categories. Compelling collective narratives about important societal issues such as relationships between social groups, power imbalances, and inequality are often more relevant as platforms for psychological group formation and engagement in collective action than biological and cultural bases of differentiation (McGarty et al., 2009), as the quote below illustrates:

> (...) I am a feminist first, not a woman, and a socialist first, not a Scot....unite with people who share your ideas not your accent [or] your genitals (Harpies & Quines, quoted by Hopkins et al., 2006)

Often, even when identifying with social categories, it is the narratives we support within these categories which are the most meaningful to our self-definition, and this seems to apply particularly well to identities associated with collective action—for example, if we consider narratives associated to the social category 'woman', we realise that they are too general to be conducive to collective action (they may be connected to individual behaviour, but not specific forms of collective action). In the generic social category 'woman', either feminist or non-feminist norms can be included, together with constructions of what being a woman means (Mikołajczak et al., 2022; Uysal et al., 2022). The differences in how the narrative about (gender-based) intergroup relations and womanhood is interpreted can effectively divide women into ideologically opposed camps sharing different sets of values, beliefs, norms and collective behaviours (Bliuc et al., 2021; Mikołajczak et al., 2022). In other words, groups are characterised by different *identity content*, a concept referring to the definitions and meaning of a group identity incorporating beliefs, values, and norms which are inextricably linked to relationships between groups in a given social context (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008). However, the feminist narrative about gender relations and womanhood can also have a unifying function—bringing together people regardless of ideology and gender categorizations who are in consensus with the feminist collective narrative (Uluğ & Uysal, 2021; Uysal et al., 2022). In this context, we can see how collective narratives are relevant to collective action because they incorporate prescriptive, non-ambiguous norms (informing behaviour) about how to address the root issues. In the case of the #MeToo movement for example, early engagement in action to achieve the group goal of increasing awareness of gender discrimination and sexual harassment of women in workplaces meant posting the #metoo message on social media. Because collective narratives incorporate values, beliefs, and norms, groups which are based on these narratives are also often connected to specific visions about what the world should be like and therefore highly relevant to various forms of collective action (Smith et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2019).

Thus, who we are (in terms of our personal and social identities) is determined by the narratives we believe, but, in turn, this is determined by social and cultural constraints, or in other words by the sociological categories that people may belong to (e.g., ethnic, gender, religious identities). This is a self-reinforcing and cyclical process (feedback loop) whereby the narratives that people have access to and are predisposed to believe are the ones shared in the groups that they belong to and socialise in. That is, a Palestinian born and raised in the Gaza strip would be exposed to a particular story about history and current social reality shared by their family and community; this would lead to a particular understanding of history and their identity that would be very different from that of an Israeli. These broader group narratives can be further refined within the group and in turn inform new or transformed social

identities. In this case, physical segregation is one contributing factor to ideological polarisation that likely dominates the evolving narratives of each of the groups in conflict (Bliuc et al., 2021; Hammack, 2006).

2.2 | From collective narratives to group behaviour

In unpacking the connection between collective narratives and group behaviours, we start from the idea that collective narratives shape the social identity content of groups—in terms of group beliefs, values, and norms (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Reicher et al., 2006). The observation that social identity content is not fixed and can be re-defined in situations that require that social creativity strategies to be used (Haslam, 2004; Turner et al., 1987) is important here. That is, in low status groups for example, when group boundaries are impermeable and prevent social mobility, social identity content is redefined in ways that can help group members maintain their positive self-regard as group members (Haslam, 2004; Reynolds & Turner, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When engaging with collective narratives people derive meaning—that is, *beliefs* about ingroup and society, which in turn become part of the identity content of social categories, such as a national identity, for example, National identities incorporate specific narratives that help build the bigger picture of a group's history and identity (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). It is through the internalisation of these narratives that individuals can make sense of their lives and what happens in society; collective narratives are used to interpret socio-political events and other aspects of social reality through the lens of values and beliefs contained in these narratives. For example, COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is closely related to beliefs reflecting a lack of recognition of the collective importance of reducing the spread of the virus, and beliefs about the vaccine being neither safe nor effective (Aw et al., 2021). In turn, vaccine hesitancy is linked to decreased intentions to vaccinate (McClure et al., 2017).

Social identity content tends to be cohesive, so that group beliefs are aligned to specific *moral values*, so that 'what we must do' from a moral point of view (the moral imperative of the group) is informed by 'who we are' as a group. As with collective narratives, moral values are not static—both can co-evolve in conjunction with changes in society (Enke, 2019; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Moral values such as care, fairness, purity, ingroup loyalty, authority, and liberty (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt et al., 2009; Hofmann et al., 2014) are incorporated into collective narratives which in turn shape interpretations of social reality, so that the transformed narratives continue to evolve within a rapidly changing social context. Social reality in the form of significant socio-political events and information, interpretations, and explanations of these events are constantly incorporated into emerging narratives which are updated to reflect what is happening in the social world. Again, looking at COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, there is evidence that new and emerging narratives based on conspiracy theories and beliefs valuing purity and libertarian moral foundations over care and fairness, can foster mistrust in vaccines, erode social cohesion, and undermine the value of the civic responsibility of taking the vaccine, potentially leading to lower vaccine up-take (Hornsey et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2021).

Group norms can manifest as consistent attitudes and behaviours within a group which are characteristic to that group and differentiate it from other groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Within the social identity theory approach, it is assumed that when an internalised group membership becomes salient, depersonalisation and self-stereotyping occur—this, in turn, leads to group members adopting their group's norms and other prototypical aspects of group membership (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Reicher et al., 2006; Turner et al., 1987). Norms are connected to group behaviours, including cooperative behaviours which are adopted because they are consistent with the identity information received from the group—for example, experiences of procedural fairness in the group (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

Group norms are contextually activated, so which norms are relevant would depend on the intergroup comparisons in a particular situation and point in time (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008). They form and change in line with the group narrative and ultimately determine the type of collective behaviour adopted by group members in a specific social context. Therefore, collective narratives are central in understanding group behaviour, not only because they function as 'meta-stories' that incorporate group-relevant values, but also because they incorporate beliefs about

the outgroup and how the group should position itself in relation to outgroup/s (Bliuc et al., 2012, 2019; Faulkner & Bliuc, 2016). Both moral values and group beliefs provide a blueprint for the norms of the group which in turn shapes the group members' behaviour. Referring the same example about COVID-19 vaccine uptake, norms are viewed as one pathway to reducing vaccine hesitancy. In particular, by publicly endorsing pro-vaccination norms (for instance by getting high valued members of the group, such as health workers, to display vaccination badges), members of the public may be more inclined to get vaccinated (Chevallier, et al., 2021).

3 | A TYPOLOGY OF THE FUNCTIONS OF COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES IN RELATION TO GROUP BEHAVIOUR

The functions of collective narratives in society can be categorised across two dimensions (as illustrated in Table 1): a) the (group level) *context* in which collective narratives develop and are shared—*intergroup* vs. *intragroup*; and b) *the narrative drivers—dissent* (diversity of opinion) versus *consensus* (homogeneity of opinion). By applying these dimensions to the concept of collective narratives, four categories of functions connected to different narrative types emerge: a) *intergroup unification* (collective narratives underpinning allyship and ingroup expansion); b) *intragroup cohesion* (collective narratives underpinning group efficacy and empowerment/influence); c) *intergroup division* (collective narratives underpinning the formation and evolution of ideologically opposed camps and conflict between these); and d) *intragroup fragmentation* (collective narratives underpinning schism, factionalisation, and radicalisation).

Each of these narrative types can explain different types of behaviours: 1) (intergroup) unifying narratives are connected to cooperative, altruistic, and pro-social behaviours (e.g., contributions to end child poverty, etc.), 2) (ingroup) empowering narratives to collective action in social movements that gain momentum through attracting allies from across social categories and group memberships (e.g., Black Lives Matter), 3) (intergroup) divisive narratives to behaviours and collective action in line with competing social movements (e.g., pro-life vs. pro-choice, etc.), and 4) (ingroup) factionalising narratives to fringe or extreme behaviours by radicalised splinter sub-groups. It is important to note here that the application of this typology is highly-perspective dependent, so how a narrative is categorised would depend on the group membership of the social actor. This means that in a classic intergroup conflict context (between a disadvantaged minority and an advantaged majority), an empowering narrative from the perspective of the disadvantaged and allies' groups, could be seen as divisive by members of the advantaged majority.

1) **Intergroup unification—unifying narratives underpinning cooperative behaviour.** Narratives achieving intergroup unification are based on consensus that goes beyond group boundaries, so they come to be shared across social categories and group memberships. Because they highlight what unifies us as humans, they are connected to identification with superordinate, non-polarising social categories such as 'humanity' and speak to unifying emotions, such as compassion and care for those vulnerable. Because, in most cases, these narratives are based on universal principles and pro-social beliefs connected to the survival of us as a species, they speak to the most basic human values around cooperation. As a result, these narratives incorporate aspects of social reality on which people across groups, social categories, and political fault-lines can all agree on—universal fears about human vulnerability in the face of the force of nature (i.e., the possibility of being obliterated by a tsunami or hurricane) is something shared across cultures and geo-political boundaries. Therefore, natural disasters even in remote parts of the world can elicit emotions which are consistent with moral values such as ingroup loyalty

TABLE 1 The dimensions of categorization of narratives and the emergent narrative types

	Consensus—harmony & cooperation	Dissent—conflict & violence
Intergroup	Unifying narratives	Divisive narratives
Intragroup	Empowering (group expanding) narratives	Factionalising narratives

and care/harm. The driving narrative here incorporates calls to solidarity across group boundaries and endorses pro-social behaviour and cooperation, these narratives being often associated to benevolent support including acts of charitable giving and shows of empathy (Louis et al., 2019) as well as socio-political action in the form of allyship (Radke et al., 2020; Uysal et al., 2022; Van Leeuwen & Zagefka, 2017).

Because of these characteristics, unifying narratives fulfil the role of providing the basis for *solidarity across groups*: "if societies are to hold together in the presence of the centrifugal, individualistic pull of markets, then something must replace the old ties of kinship, family, and traditional religious practice. That something was thought to require a form of fellow-feeling between strangers, in which each is prepared to share in the good and bad fate of all the rest" (Sangiovanni, 2015, p. 340). Being based on universal values, that most people would likely uphold, with goals that go beyond individual and group interests, these narratives further promote intergroup consensus.

In a sense, when the ingroup becomes the whole of humanity, the applicability of moral values that these narratives incorporate extends beyond political fault lines and corresponding ideologies. That is, even if ingroup loyalty is a typical conservative value while care/harm is a typical liberal value (Graham et al., 2009, 2013), they can both be equally part of intergroup unifying narratives, and in turn shape the norms of cooperation. Unifying narratives are congruent not only with cooperative and helping norms, but also with norms of altruistic behaviour—a type of behaviour driven by the motivation to ensure the welfare of others even if one's own welfare is at risk (Elster, 2006) and is predicted by an interaction of moral norms (moral obligation) and self-ascription of responsibility (Zuckerman & Reis, 1978).

It follows that the concept of *identification with all humanity* (IWAH) is highly relevant here (McFarland et al., 2013). IWAH refers to "a deep caring for all human beings regardless of their race, religion, or nationality" (p. 194). It was found that one of the most distinguishing qualities of those who saved Jews during the Holocaust was that they possessed a "sense of belonging to one human family" (Monroe, 1996, p. 208) and "a concern for others that extended across all boundaries of race and religion" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Therefore, IWAH can be viewed as an important moral concept negatively related to generalised prejudice (ethnocentrism), right wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation (McFarland, 2010), while being positively related to dispositional empathy and principled moral reasoning. As a moral concept, IWAH can be constructed as an ideal, or moral intuition about the preservation of humans as a race, highlighting similarities between people while making the differences irrelevant. IWAH is underpinned by logic and rationality rather than by emotions—a fundamental difference from the moral judgements that are driven by moral foundations as argued by Haidt et al.'s Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt et al., 2009; McFarland & Brown, 2008). The type of outcomes found to be predicted by IWAH include concern about global warming and support for sustainability, concern about humanitarian needs including support for refugees and asylum seekers, and support for universal human rights (Bassett & Cleveland, 2019; McFarland et al., 2012; McFarland & Mathews, 2005; Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013).

2) **Intragroup cohesion—empowering narratives underpinning group efficacy and collective action.** This category of collective narratives may both reflect the existing consensus between ingroup members about core identity issues and function as further enhancers of that consensus. As a result, they can strengthen the group's internal cohesion. Because these narratives contain strong and often highly specific messages about a group's aims, core values, and its strength (i.e., much more specific than unifying intergroup narratives which naturally seek to broaden the ingroup support base with more generic/universal messaging) they can provide the bases for the formation and mobilisation of more targeted activism.

These narratives often incorporate beliefs about the collective efficacy of the group—that is, project a strong capacity to fulfil the group's goals (Van Zomeren et al., 2004, 2010, 2012)—therefore making the group seem more

appealing to (ideologically) like-minded outsiders. This explains why beliefs of group efficacy are not only central in these narratives but also clearly communicated to potential supporters. This means that they can serve the group to both strengthen it from within (through enhancing its internal cohesion) and facilitate its *expansion*, via increasing group membership (as outsiders who share specific aspects of the collective narrative may join the group). For example, collective narratives promoting gender equality can provide a basis for identification for progressive men who come to identify as pro-feminist, therefore also providing a platform for allyship to develop (Kutlaca et al., 2020). While this narrative type might promote consensus among like-minded people regardless of their gender category membership, they are also shaped by dissent in relation to competing narratives (through opposition to the outgroup—i.e., anti-feminists). Put differently, cohesive narratives can achieve mobilisation to action across social categories of people united under a common cause (reflected in a specific group narrative), but which is more specific than in the case of intergroup unifying narratives, as for example, when common cause is provided by shared experiences of oppression (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

To be successful in projecting a sense of group efficacy, these narratives must incorporate moral values that underpin group cohesion, such as ingroup loyalty—in addition to moral values aligned to the core aims of the group. That is, a progressive group narrative which is about social change to address inequality, would likely incorporate moral values such as fairness and care (Graham et al., 2009), while anti-progressive, exclusive groups aiming to strengthen national or religious values would be based on a narrative incorporating moral values of purity and respect for authority (Faulkner & Bliuc, 2018).

Strong ingroup consensus and clarity about the group narrative means that ingroups based on these types of narratives cohere around achieving their goals. This quality is what makes these groups appealing to outsiders beyond shared narratives, but paradoxically, it can also undermine group cohesion once new members join the group and bring about changes in the social identity content of the group—as shown in research on how the collective identity of an online far-right community changes as new members join (Bliuc, Betts, et al., 2020; Bliuc et al., 2019). An analysis of group norms within the same community shows that group members recognised the need to broaden group boundaries to attract people from other groups not traditionally associated with the far-right to join the community, based on the similarity or sharedness of their values and narratives, rather than ethnicity (i.e., forming alliances and expanding group boundaries to include ideologically similar others).

3) **Intergroup division—divisive narratives underpinning conflict.** These narratives are based on dissent and develop when there are at least two opposing versions of social reality available; furthermore, these opposing versions should have the ability to appear as equally valid from the differing group's perspectives. They can be seen as mutually exclusive by the members of the groups in conflict—there is more than one story or interpretation of social reality, and they are both powerful in relatively equal degrees from different viewpoints. Because of this, these types of narratives are intrinsically polarising. Mutually exclusive narratives create conditions for the formation of *ideologically opposed camps* (Bliuc, Betts, et al., 2020, 2021). These narratives create ideal conditions for intergroup conflict and polarisation in the form of psychological and ideological distancing because they are based on mutually exclusive versions of social reality which are connected to norms and behaviours that aim to achieve competing group goals (Bliuc et al., 2021). The dichotomy between climate change deniers and believers clearly illustrates this—on the one hand climate change is seen as an urgent anthropogenic crisis that demands attention, and on the other it is dismissed as an exaggerated or even invented issue. These two views are mutually exclusive interpretations of recent climate phenomena and, furthermore, any increase in the number of deniers is a commensurate loss for consensus to mitigate climate change. Other examples of ideologically opposed camps that are mutually exclusive include asylum-seeker supporters and their opponents (Burke & Goodman, 2012) and pro-life and pro-choice supporters (John, 2017).

Collective narratives that reflect alternative world views about how the world should be are particularly effective in dividing society (McGarty et al., 2009). They have been used to explain different levels of conflict intergroup conflict between Kurds and Turks in Turkey (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2019), tensions within the Turkish society manifested in the Gezi Park protests (Baysu & Phalet, 2017), and the Brexit divide in the UK (Hobolt, 2016; Hobolt et al., 2021). A powerful illustration of the deeply divisive function of collective narratives is the intractable conflict between Jews and Palestinians in Israel where divergent historical narratives are reproduced through cultural products from both groups, including educational materials used to shape children's beliefs about the conflict (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2009, Hammack, 2008, 2011). The collective narratives of Israeli Jews and Palestinians are intrinsically polarising in the sense that they imply not only competition over material resources, but also competition over the legitimacy of their identities (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) as "(…) the acceptance of one's group identity and aspiration for self-determination is often interpreted as necessarily invalidating the identity of the other." (Hammack, 2006, p. 388).

These group narratives tend to be highly specific (at the group and subgroup level) and incorporating specific rather than universal moral values (e.g., ingroup loyalty). While the moral foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, and emotions such as empathy and outrage are likely to underpin unifying narratives, in the case of divisive narratives, it would be expected that any of the moral foundations could be underpinning the narrative according to the specific content of the narrative.

4) **Intragroup fragmentation—factionalising narratives underpinning schism and radical behaviours.** Fragmentation within groups stems from dissenting intragroup narratives on issues which are central to the group's social identity. These narratives can explain schisms in established groups, factionalisation, and radicalisation. In a sense, intragroup conflict can be conceptualised as driven by internal narrative differentiation; through intragroup deliberation and debate, group members refine the meaning of group identity, and as such, continuously refine and change the social identity content of a group. Research by Sani and colleagues (Sani, 2008; Sani & Reicher, 1998, 2000; Sani & Todman, 2002) shows how dissent about issues which are core to the group's identity can lead to schism within a group as for instance, within the Church of England. According to research on schism, one of the main bases for dissent within a group is the meaning attributed to the particular identity or social category (Sani & Todman, 2002). In other words, the meaning of a particular social identity can be contested within the group—one of the best illustrations of this process is provided by the many variations in the representation of nationhood within a national context. That is, within the same nation, representations that include recent immigrants to the country and representations that exclude them can co-exist (Pehrson et al., 2009; Reicher et al., 2006; Teichman & Bar-Tal, 2008). For example, in research by Pehrson et al. (2009), within one nation prejudice and discrimination on one hand, and openness to immigrants on the other, can align to different definitions of national identity (indicating intragroup fragmentation at the level of a nation). In the context of the Australian national identity, beliefs about social categories and the relationships between them were found to shape group behaviours including support for and opposition to racist riots (Bliuc et al., 2012). In this research, support and opposition to riots were aligned to different narratives about national identity: one incorporating values and beliefs typical to an Anglo-Saxon, White version of national identity and one incorporating inclusive narratives based on multicultural values.

Within US political parties, intragroup fragmentation was shown to lead to polarization between ideologically moderate and ideologically extreme party members in both Democrats and Republicans (Groenendyk et al., 2020), a process that can facilitate the formation of ultra-radical factions and terrorist cells in contexts beyond US politics (Bliuc et al., 2021). That is, ingroup fragmenting narratives can explain radicalisation and political violence through fragmentation into splinter factions, which become more extreme than the parent group (through opposition to the former ingroup).

Not all factions would become more extreme in a negative sense (linked to political violence). That is, progressive factions promoting social innovation as shown in research on schism within the Anglican Church where the splinter faction disagree about a core identity point—the ordination of women priests in the Anglican Church (Sani & Reicher, 1999, 2000). The positive function of dissent within groups is also well documented in research on group creativity and productivity—innovative factions within a group can push the group as a whole to achieve a higher and improved status (Jetten & Hornsey, 2010, 2014). Similarly, the effect of minority influence on societal progress and innovation is well established through research building on the classic work of Moscovici and colleagues (Martin, 1996; Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici & Lage, 1978; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1983; Peterson & Nemeth, 1996).

4 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

The over-arching implications of this contribution are twofold. First, by providing a systematic account and categorisation of the functions of collective narratives and their connections to social identities, we can more accurately deduct group norms and predict behaviours in specific circumstances, including in relation to hostile intergroup conflict and political violence. By applying the narrative typology proposed here, research on ideological division and polarisation can more precisely identify how social identities linked to particular narratives may inform specific group behaviours and outcomes. Second, by better understanding the narratives that provide the bases of identity formation, development, and change, we can improve attempts to create alternative narratives that unify rather than divide people, so that pathways to co-operation might be chosen over conflict-driven solutions. Thus, our proposed typology can help advance research on pathways to cooperation and hostile competition (including in cases of intractable intergroup conflict).

4.1 | A different perspective on group unification and fragmentation

In an era of widespread and generalised online communication, understanding narratives as a driver of cooperation holds promise for better understanding how particular narratives can unify and mobilise people for goals beyond personal and group interests, while others can divide and fragment leading to conflict and violence. Through a more thorough exploration of the development of collective narratives that form the bases of group formation, including those incorporating (personal and collective) trauma we can add to our understanding of social identity change (Muldoon, 2013; Muldoon et al., 2019). More specifically, this framework can be applied in the assessment of social identity change by observing how the collective narratives for a particular group change to become, for example, either more specific (divisive) or more general (unifying).

4.2 | A new way of understanding cooperation

This contribution also lends strength to research on how certain collective narratives will resonate more strongly with certain groups if framed in a particular way. For example, research from Feinberg and Willer (2013) shows that conservatives are more likely to commit to pro-environmental causes if they are framed as consistent with typically conservative moral foundations, such as purity, sanctity and (ingroup) loyalty, rather than the moral foundations of fairness and care, which are more typically associated with pro-environmental narratives. Further research could continue to explore the framing of collective narratives and how this pertains to social identity content and drives group behaviour. With a global pandemic still active in many parts of the world, our society is faced with numerous challenges. Now, as we focus on stopping the spread of COVID-19 infections, we need to combine our efforts to understand and control both challengers to cooperation and factors which may facilitate it (Mayo, 1945). A better

understanding of the underpinning psychological process of ideological intergroup division and fragmentation is needed now more than ever—we have seen the influence of divisive COVID-19 narratives of blame, anti-vaccination, and conspiracy undermine public health efforts through rejection of vaccines and non-adherence to rules (Baeza-Rivera et al., 2021; Chayinska et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020).

Improving our understanding as to the role of collective narratives on increasing and promoting pro-social group behaviour, is crucial in relation to another pillar of human survival—mitigating climate change. Crafting and communicating collective narratives that unify rather than divide, fragment, and polarise can help build wider support for mitigating policies (political behaviours) and encourage individual pro-environmental behaviours in people across the climate change divide. Our contribution to this growing field provides a clear blueprint for understanding the role of collective narratives in the development of social identity content and thus group behaviour and highlights the significant role that social and political psychology can play in affecting positive change in the world.

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