







# How do we get people into contact? Predictors of intergroup contact and drivers of contact seeking

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## Abstract

Compared to the impressive amount of research on consequences of intergroup contact, relatively little work has been devoted to predictors of intergroup contact. Although opportunities for intergroup contact are constantly growing in modern diverse societies, these contact opportunities are not necessarily exploited. In the present review article, we describe current research on predictors of intergroup contact and drivers of contact seeking on a micro-, meso-, and macro-level. We provide an overview

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of predictors, while focusing on recent research that is especially relevant for designing interventions and planning social policies aiming at increasing contact between different groups in varied societies. On the micro-level, we discuss relational self-expansion motives and confidence in contact as predictors of intergroup contact. On the meso-level, we focus on the role of intragroup processes and historical intergroup conflicts in facilitating contact. On the macro-level, we reflect on changing societal norms as a potential tool to increase the frequency intergroup contact. By focusing on the applied value of research findings, discussing diverse predictors, and applying a multilevel approach, we also address recent criticisms of the intergroup contact literature and demonstrate the generative nature of contemporary research in this area.

Intergroup contact can make a difference: An impressive number of studies has provided evidence that contact between members of different social groups reflects positively on a number of outcomes relevant to harmonious intergroup relations, such as outgroup attitudes, empathy, and intergroup trust (e.g., Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011, Marinucci et al., in press). Less is known, however, about factors that facilitate intergroup contact. Although opportunities for intergroup contact are constantly growing in modern diverse societies, not all individuals and groups are equally willing to explore and exploit these opportunities (e.g., Turner et al., 2020; Wölfer & Hewstone, 2018). In fact, research indicates that not only do individuals not take up opportunities for contact, but some individuals even actively avoid intergroup contact (Al Ramiah et al., 2015; Bettencourt et al., 2019; McKeown & Dixon, 2017). Consequently, more attention should be devoted to the question of how we can get members of different groups into contact to realize the full potential of intergroup contact.

## **AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE**

In the present article, we discuss research on drivers of intergroup contact and contact seeking in an attempt to answer this question. Individual experiences and behaviors are influenced by factors situated on different levels of analysis (e.g., Pettigrew, 2018). By looking at these different levels, one can gain a better understanding of complex psychological phenomena (e.g., Paolini et al., 2018). Yet, in contact research, this multivariate approach has rarely been adopted. We believe that in order to decrease societal segregation or resegregation (i.e., renewed and, often, self-chosen segregation; Schofield, 1997), policy makers not only need to be informed about different precursors of intergroup contact and links between them, but they also need to recognize that they can be located on different levels of analysis (Christ et al., 2017; Pettigrew & Hewstone, 2017). In line with two recent review articles on predictors of individuals' willingness to engage in



intergroup contact (Paolini et al., 2018; Ron et al., 2017), we reflect on variables that imply varying units of analysis and spheres of reality, ranging from the most internal to the individual, to most outer spheres. On the *micro-level*, the focal units of analysis are the individuals, defined by their personal and interpersonal qualities. Hence, we discuss contact predictors associated with individuals' personality, social functioning, and experiences. On the *meso-level*, the units of analysis are social groups. Hence, we discuss factors related to intragroup and intergroup processes, such as ingroup support or the history of intergroup animosities between groups. On the *macro-level*, the unit of analysis is society. Therefore, we discuss contact predictors associated with the broader social context, such as societal norms.

Our review discusses a new generation of research that is purposely designed to investigate predictors of intergroup contact and contact seeking. Importantly, we focus on predictors that can be affected by interventions and/or social policy measures. Whenever applicable, we discuss concrete measures to increase intergroup contact. In contrast to the broad overviews of a multitude of predicting variables presented by Paolini et al. (2018) and Ron et al. (2017), the present article provides an in-depth discussion of a selected number of predictors that our research laboratories and other researchers are working on currently or have worked on very recently. As such, this review can be viewed as an overview of emerging themes in this recent area of research.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming evidence for the effectiveness of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice, the intergroup contact literature has recently attracted valid criticism from various sources (Paolini et al., in press). In aiming at expanding our understanding of factors facilitating intergroup contact, we consider and address some of these critical appraisals.

By discussing various ways to bring individuals from different groups into contact, we explicitly address a shortcoming of previous work in the field anecdotally referred to as "the leading-the-horses-to-water problem" (Pettigrew et al., 2011, p. 278). Pettigrew et al. argued that practically relevant intergroup contact research should not solely focus on the effects of contact, but also on the ways in which one can bring past adversaries together in optimal contact situations.

Another criticism was recently raised by Paluck et al. (2019), who questioned whether the intergroup contact literature is ready to deliver suggestions for policy makers. We demonstrate that some of the nascent research on predictors of contact is already sensitive to practical and policy objectives. We contribute to the existing literature by proposing general tools for evidence- and theory-based social interventions and policies on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level.

By discussing predictors and potential interventions on the different levels of analysis, we also address Dixon et al. (2005) critique of intergroup contact research being largely focused on individual-level processes and outcomes. Dixon and colleagues argued that the intergroup contact literature has been mostly concerned with outgroup attitudes held by individuals (i.e., prejudice) as the primary outcome measure and has not considered outcomes of intergroup contact on a broader societal level. In this article, we review not only antecedents of contact seeking on a societal macro- (and meso-) level, but also suggest ways of enhancing intergroup contact on this level (e.g., through societal norms).

Finally, we consider a more general criticism by Pettigrew and Hewstone (2017). Utilizing the expression "single-factor fallacy," these scholars argue that some work on intergroup contact relies on models that include insufficient variables and, therefore, delivers premature and potentially biased conclusions and policy recommendations. Our strategy to review and integrate various antecedents of intergroup contact and to derive policies and interventions aiming at getting people together through a multivariate and multilevel perspective addresses this particular critique.

Together, we believe that our overview of emerging research on predictors of contact and contact seeking offers a dynamic and fresh outlook on research that holds the potential of informing practical and scalable translations of significance.

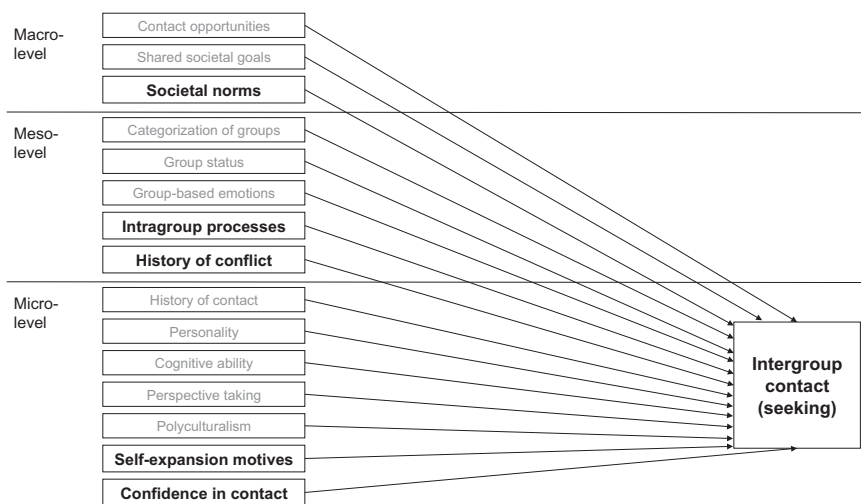
## DYNAMICS OF SEGREGATION AND CONTACT AVOIDANCE

A precondition to any form of direct face-to-face contact is the presence of outgroup members, that is the existence of contact opportunities (e.g., Kotzur & Wagner, 2020; Van Zalk et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2006). However, recent research indicates that contact opportunities do not automatically translate into actual intergroup contact.

Schlüter et al. (2018), for example, showed that ethnic majority members prefer neighborhoods that are characterized by a low number of ethnic minority members as a place of residence—even when other factors, such as house pricing, housing quality, and educational quality in a neighborhood are controlled for. Based on observational data from a cafeteria of an ethnically-mixed high-school in England, Al Ramiah et al. (2015) found segregationist behavior among ethnic majority and minority members: White and Asian students chose to sit in proximity to ethnically similar others and refrained from mixing with ethnic outgroup members in the school cafeteria (see also Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Using a different and highly innovative approach, Dixon et al. (2019) observed comparable results in a context characterized by a long history of intergroup conflict and high salience of group differences. The authors analyzed around 1,000 hours of GPS movement data from 181 Protestant and Catholic individuals living in Belfast. Although Belfast is a historically segregated city, Protestants and Catholics live in relatively close proximity to each other in some neighborhoods. Dixon et al. observed, however, that despite this “opportunity” for contact participants seldom visited outgroup areas and mostly used street networks and facilities within their ingroups’ residential areas.

Beyond these empirical examples, systematic reviews on so-called micro-level segregation (i.e., self-segregation on an individual level) further question the idea that an increase in contact opportunities automatically leads to an increase in actual intergroup contact (Bettencourt et al., 2019; Dixon et al., 2008). Therefore, based on the available evidence, it is clear that contact opportunities are often ignored and that many individuals stick to their ingroup rather than engage in intergroup contact. It is important, however, to recognize that such resegregation tendencies do not necessarily reflect active avoidance of intergroup contact but might result from a lack of interest in outgroup members and a homophilic preference for ethnic ingroup members (Al Ramiah et al., 2015; MacKinnon et al., 2011). In other words, one reasons for a lack of exploitation of contact opportunities are both lack of interest in the outgroup and individuals’ ingroup preference for the ingroup which does not automatically covary with outgroup animosity (Brewer, 1999; Schelling, 1971).

But why would some individuals *actively* avoid intergroup contact or fail to actively seek contact? One explanation are feelings of intergroup threat, anxiety, and insecurity (Bettencourt et al., 2019; Dixon et al., 2019). Contact avoidance often reflects threat avoidance (O’Donnell et al., 2019), that is people’s concerns that contact with outgroup members might be harmful to their physical, social, or emotional well-being (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan, 2014). A different line of research proposes that certain individual differences, such as high levels of prejudice (e.g., Hodson, 2008; Schlüter et al., 2018; Wölfer & Hewstone, 2018) or authoritarian attitudes (e.g., Pettigrew, 2016; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012), limit the exploitation of contact opportunities for some individuals (for an overview see Hodson et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2020). Individuals with



**FIGURE 1** Overview of different predictors of intergroup contact and contact seeking on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. *Note:* Predictors that are discussed in-depth in the present article are printed in bold

these characteristics might refrain from engaging in contact because they fail to anticipate a tangible or psychological benefit from the encounter or, again, anticipate high levels of threat. Hence, lack of contact approach might reflect the lack of salient and appetitive drives for contact and/or the existence of defense drives.

Research looking at contact in postconflict contexts points to the role of collective identity-based processes that might create barriers to intergroup contact. These barriers can be especially difficult to overcome in these unique circumstances. For instance, sense of collective victimhood, particularly in its most exclusive forms that portray the ingroup as a sole victim (and the outgroup as a sole perpetrator) in the conflict history, is one of the factors found to significantly lower intergroup contact intentions of groups with a history of violence (e.g., in Bulgaria, Green et al., 2017; in Poland, Bilewicz et al., 2013; in Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Also collective emotions evoked by reminders of past events might have adverse effects on willingness to engage in contact. Guilt for one's group's wrongdoings, for example, has been found to both reduce contact intentions (Green et al., 2017) and increase negative expectations about contact with members of the outgroup (Imhoff et al. 2012). Finally, intergroup relations might be affected by denial of responsibility (Bilewicz, 2016; Leach et al., 2013) and derogation of outgroup members (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Imhoff & Banse, 2009). Specifically, members of victimized groups might be unwilling to engage in contact with perpetrator group members as long as the latter do not acknowledge the harm they inflicted (Vollhardt et al., 2014).

In the following sections, we build on this literature, but focus on factors facilitating engagement in contact opportunities—that is variables that *positively* predict intergroup contact as well as contact seeking.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above, we distinguish between predictors on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level (see Figure 1).

## MICRO-LEVEL PREDICTORS OF INTERGROUP CONTACT

In this section, we will first provide an overview of variables that have been previously suggested to facilitate contact on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level, that is, factors associated with

individuals' experiences, personality, cognitive abilities, attitudes, beliefs (see Paolini et al., 2018; Ron et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2020). We will then present a more detailed analysis of emerging research on relational self-expansion motivation, and confidence in contact.

In terms of individuals' experiences, past research has demonstrated that one's history of direct intergroup contact (Paolini et al., 2006), as well as experiences of imagined contact (i.e., mental simulation of interactions with outgroup members; Asbrock et al. 2013; Turner et al., 2013) are positive predictors of intergroup contact intentions. Regarding personality variables, traits such as openness (Jackson & Poulsen, 2005; Stürmer et al., 2013; Vezzali et al. 2018), agreeableness (Vezzali et al., 2018), and extraversion (Stürmer et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014) have been found to positively predict future engagement in intergroup contact. Higher cognitive ability, conceptualized both in terms of a general ability factor or task-specific ability factors, has also been linked to greater engagement in intergroup contact (Hodson & Busseri, 2012). Moreover, individual differences in perspective-taking have been identified as predictors of intergroup contact (Wang et al., 2014), with high perspective-takers being more willing to engage in contact with outgroups. Furthermore, greater endorsement of a polycultural approach to interethnic relations (i.e., focus on past and present interactions and exchanges of ideas between different cultural groups) predicts willingness to engage in intergroup contact and intergroup friendships (e.g., Rosenthal & Levy, 2016). We contribute to this emerging body of work by examining two relatively new and especially promising predictors: self-expansion motivation and confidence in contact.

## Motivations for intergroup contact and relational self-expansion

Recent investigations have identified an array of appetitive motivations driving individuals toward intimate and beneficial cross-group encounters. Contact intentions increase when individuals believe the intergroup encounter will help achieve a specific goal, such as learn a new skill (Dunne, 2013; Migacheva & Tropp, 2012) or learn about the outgroup (Ron & Maoz, 2013), make new friends (Turner et al., 2014), acquire symbolic or material resources (Turner et al., 2020), or express intergroup solidarity (Paolini et al., 2020). In a detailed analysis of multiple motivations, Stürmer and Benbow (2017) classified distinct functional motivations for intergroup exploration into six categories: knowledge and understanding, value expression, professional advancement, social development, personal-, and group-image concerns.

While some of these motivations clearly stem from pragmatic or social needs, others are inherently linked to a desire for personal growth and development through relationships with others. According to the self-expansion model (Wright et al., 2002), contact with outgroup members offers unique opportunities to acquire new knowledge, perspectives, and skills. Intergroup contact is sought because it contributes to satisfying humans' fundamental need for "expanding" their sense of self and their resources toward increased self-efficacy. Self-expansion has started to attract considerable research attention in recent years. Experimental evidence has confirmed that salient opportunities (Paolini et al., 2020) and personal benefits of self-expansion (Paolini et al., 2016) lead to preferential interest in outgroup members as interaction partners. Moreover, contact experiences chosen due to high expansion motivation are especially positive, intimacy-building (Paolini et al., 2006) and generate a sense of self-growth and self-efficacy (Dys-Steenbergen et al., 2016).

While the positive rewards associated with self-expansion motivations are likely to sustain positive trajectories of contact seeking over time (Paolini et al., 2016, 2018), recent investigations have started to delineate some boundary conditions and a more nuanced perspective on self-expansion's effects, which implicate additional micro-level factors. Paolini et al. (2020a)



experiments found that relational self-expansion interacted with communication anxiety in shaping implicit intergroup approach and avoidance. Rather than hindering contact approach (Beatty, 1987), communication anxiety contributed to a readiness for outgroup approach when coupled with high self-expansion (see also Paolini et al., 2020b). These results for the approach-inducing effects of communication anxiety are consistent with social–neurophysiological evidence and the premises of the reactive approach model (RAM; Jonas et al., 2014; McGregor et al., 2010). According to RAM, most types of anxiety would initially instigate vigilance and threat avoidance. Hence, individuals might immediately display overt avoidance of threat-related stimuli, such as outgroup members in contact settings. Other individuals, however, might subsequently respond with (reactive) approach of threat-related stimuli (e.g., contact seeking) as a defense-oriented solution to reducing anxiety.

From this more nuanced stance, contact approach does not necessarily equate to an appetitive response by the individual. Factors, like communication anxiety, might not uniformly lead to contact avoidance; under specific conditions, the same factors might act as the catalysts for contact approach.

Contact facilitating programs that align contact opportunities to individuals' needs and motivations for contact should enjoy greater success. As demonstrated by Stürmer and Benbow (2017), when the context and the content of intergroup contact fulfill the individual's wants, intergroup contact experience becomes more likely to be selected over others. The authors observed, for instance, that individuals motivated by professional advancement were more likely to engage in intergroup contact when their contact partner cued the professional benefits of diversity. At the most basic level, programs aimed at encouraging intergroup contact could communicate contact's personal benefits for self-expansion, social development, and professional advancement (see Dunne, 2013; Paolini et al., 2016). More complex iterations of such programs could consider the specific context in which the contact occurs and the specific parties involved (for in-depth discussions see Halperin & Schori-Eyal, 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2020).

## Confidence in contact

Apart from showing interest in individual motivators, research on micro-level facilitators of contact has recently started paying attention to the potential role of individuals' self-efficacy in promoting intergroup encounters. The core assumption thereby is that seeking intergroup contact should covary with individuals' sense of self-efficacy, that is, an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a salient outcome. Derived from early work by Bandura (1977, 1982, 1997), self-efficacy has been found to be a key facilitator of behavior, having enormous predictive power across the domains of education, health, and work (Bandura, 1997).

The potential applicability of the concept of self-efficacy to the understanding of various effects observed in contact research has led Turner and Cameron (2016) to argue that individuals' contact self-efficacy (i.e., "confidence in contact") can synthesize a range of theoretical and practical approaches to intergroup contact. In support of this idea, Bagci et al. (2019a) found that cross-ethnic friendship self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that one can successfully form and maintain high-quality friendships with ethnic outgroup members) in a multiethnic school setting was enhanced by prior direct and indirect contact with members of other ethnic groups and low intergroup anxiety and that, in turn, cross-ethnic friendship self-efficacy predicted current cross-ethnic friendship quality. In a second study, the researchers replicated their model, while also finding that the quality of parents' intergroup contact predicted children's higher cross-ethnic friendship self-efficacy,

which, in turn, predicted the quality and quantity of children's current cross-ethnic friendships. Therefore, cross-ethnic friendship self-efficacy was a consistent predictor of maintaining high-quality intergroup friendships, and it was related to past experiences of direct and indirect contact.

In part, the potential utility of contact self-efficacy comes from its amenability to the effects of social learning. In their research in Germany, Mazziotta et al. (2011) demonstrated that the observation of successful interactions between ingroup and outgroup members can increase contact self-efficacy expectancy, which, in turn, reduces situational uncertainty, which then leads to more positive outgroup attitudes and greater willingness to engage in future intergroup contact. Similarly, Stathi et al. (2011) demonstrated that White British students who imagined a positive encounter with a Muslim outgroup member reported higher contact self-efficacy than their control-group counterparts.

In effect, its roots in social learning theory (Bandura, 1997) mean that contact self-efficacy lends itself well to a range of practical applications in educational and residential settings (Turner & Cameron, 2016). Moreover, its explanatory utility in indirect forms of contact, including imagined contact (Stathi et al., 2011), indicates its applicability in more challenging intractable conflicts as well (see also White et al., in press). Furthermore, contact self-efficacy opens the possibility of linking this micro-level factor to meso-level considerations, as group members acting together may potentially develop "collective contact self-efficacy" in their ability to engage in contact. We return to this point in the section below.

## MESO-LEVEL PREDICTORS OF INTERGROUP CONTACT

In this section, we provide an overview of variables that have been found to predict contact seeking and contact engagement on a meso-level, that is factors associated with intragroup and intergroup processes, such as group-based categorizations and emotions. We then focus on intragroup processes affecting intergroup contact such as social support by fellow ingroup members. After that, we discuss the effects of violent intergroup conflicts on willingness to engage in intergroup contact and our ideas for interventions in such settings.

One of the meso-level predictors that have received most attention in contact research is the type of self- and other-group-based categorization (e.g., Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Gómez, Dovidio et al., 2008). For instance, it has been demonstrated that emphasizing representations of ingroup and outgroup members as having one common identity (i.e., belonging to a superordinate group) or as having dual identities (i.e., sharing commonalities while also retaining some differences) leads to greater willingness to engage in intergroup contact, which is mediated by increased perception of shared values (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011). Group status has also been shown to affect contact intentions (for a review see Saguy & Kteily, 2014; for a more detailed discussion see below). Specifically, it has been found that members of high-power groups might be more willing to engage in intergroup contact if they know that the contact will focus on issues inconsequential to the status quo, while members of low-power groups might prefer encounters centered around issues challenging the status quo (e.g., Kteily et al., 2013). Other studies looking at intergroup factors have emphasized the role of group-based emotions such as fear, hatred, and empathy as facilitators (or barriers) of intergroup contact both in postconflict (e.g., Paolini et al., 2006) and in conflict settings (Halperin, 2008). Focusing on the latter context, Mazziotta et al. (2014) showed that intergroup contact is sometimes seen as a way to distance from past ingroup wrongdoing



and to express morality, which taps into recent research on contact willingness in the aftermath of violent conflicts that we discuss after we address the role of intragroup processes.

## **Intragroup processes**

Considerable attention has been paid to how ingroup support and collective efficacy can form the basis of intergroup conflict and social change (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2005; Reicher & Haslam, 2006). When it comes to how such intragroup processes can facilitate more positive intergroup perceptions and experiences of contact, the picture is less clear. In line with Dixon et al. (2005) critique of theoretical individualism in contact research, past work on intergroup contact has rarely framed ingroup processes as “collective” in nature and virtually no attention has been paid to how social identity processes can shape intergroup contact behavior.

A range of evidence across different domains of intergroup relations points to the interdependence of intragroup and intergroup processes. Some studies indicate that a stronger social identity might in itself allow for more positive intergroup relations: Interventions that allow participants to self-affirm a positive group identity have been found to facilitate more open intergroup engagement on difficult issues (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011; Cohen & Sherman, 2014), while maintaining a sense of ethnic identity has been found to facilitate more positive integration and intergroup contact among immigrant groups (Berry & Hou, 2019). Several studies have shed some light on the group processes through which this might occur. For example, Phinney et al. (2007) showed that a more secure and mature sense of belonging to one’s own ethnic group predicts more positive attitudes toward contact with members of other groups and a deeper insight into potential benefits of such contact (see also Boccato et al., 2015; Paolini et al., 2020). King, Magolda, & Massé (2011) qualitative study of minority students’ campus experiences found that feeling anxious might deter students’ intercultural engagement while support from peers and staff provides the safety and confidence required to engage openly with other groups, despite the anxiety. Similarly, Ng et al. (2018) revealed the importance of feeling supported by members of one’s own culture for the ability of international students to integrate effectively into their host society. However, while these studies are suggestive of the role of group support in providing a general sense of belonging, reducing feelings of vulnerability, and improving one’s ability to engage in intergroup contact, they do not unpack the specific mechanisms through which this occurs.

A series of studies of residential mixing in Northern Ireland and England have attempted to fill this gap. An initial qualitative investigation of Catholic residents’ experiences of moving to mixed residential areas identified high levels of intergroup anxiety among respondents, which was allayed by both maintaining strong ties to their previous communities as well as establishing fresh ties with their new neighbors (Stevenson & Sagherian-Dickey, 2016). These ties provided informational and practical support to deal with the everyday and unexpected challenges of an unfamiliar neighborhood and were reported to facilitate greater integration over time. A subsequent follow-up survey confirmed that within this mixed community, strong feelings of community belonging did indeed predict lower intergroup anxiety among new residents, a pattern replicated across the wider divided society of Northern Ireland (Stevenson et al., 2019b). A third study further explored this relationship, finding that in other residential areas of Belfast and in ethnically mixed neighborhoods of the English midlands, the impact of community identification on intergroup anxiety was mediated by perception of receiving emotional, informational and practical support from neighbors (Stevenson et al., 2020). In other words, perception of being able to rely on one’s neighbors for support when required predicted lower levels of anxiety and uncertainty when faced with

encountering outgroup members. A fourth article in this series examined how groups might provide their members with a sense of efficacy in their ability to undertake contact. Building upon the work of Turner and Cameron on contact readiness and Bagci et al. (2019a) on cross-ethnic friendship self-efficacy, Stevenson, Turner, and Costa (in press) asked residents in two U.K. urban areas about their perceptions of their local community's ability to successfully undertake positive contact with members of outgroups. They found that this *collective* confidence in contact was predicted by community identification via social support from neighbors (Study 1) and that this effect was further mediated by a reduction in intergroup anxiety (Study 2). In turn, collective confidence in contact predicted levels of outgroup contact and feelings toward the outgroups in both studies.

The implications of this work are twofold. First, in line with previous work showing an association between ingroup identification and positive intergroup relations (e.g., Berry & Hou, 2019; Phinney et al., 2007), this research identifies the specific intragroup processes through which this may occur. More precisely, the research suggests that groups can provide support to their members to enable them to cope with the challenges they face and, where these challenges include barriers to contact such as intergroup anxiety, this then can facilitate more positive intergroup relations. Second, it points to the need to consider intergroup contact as a "collective accomplishment" that constitutes both a shared experience among group members but also an achievement made possible by support from fellow members. Supportive neighbors can reduce the fear of outgroups thereby providing the confidence needed to undertake intergroup contact.

Interventions can benefit from considering the role of intragroup processes in facilitating better intergroup relations. Emerging evidence that stronger and more cohesive neighborhoods are associated with lower intergroup anxiety among residents of different groups (Stevenson et al., 2019a, 2020) underscores the potential of community capacity-building initiatives. Specifically, those designed to overcome intergroup anxiety and build community confidence in their ability to undertake positive intergroup contact should help foster positive intergroup relations in residential areas. It also suggests that governments would do well to carefully select the destination of vulnerable immigrant populations and refugee resettlements, in order to match them to the communities that have the appropriate resources and collective resilience to support their members to welcome and integrate these new residents.

## History of severe intergroup conflict

The history of severe intergroup conflicts substantially affects willingness to engage in intergroup contact (as well as the trajectory of actual intergroup encounters). As mentioned before, societies and nations experiencing wars, genocides, violent colonization, or occupation have a tendency to engage in narratives centered around their identity as a sole victim of the conflict (Bilewicz & Liu, 2020). Focusing on one's exclusive victimhood, leads to a decrease in trust, and makes people more likely to believe in conspiracies and malevolent plots. This process can ultimately lower contact intentions and make people distance themselves from outgroup members (Bilewicz & Liu, 2020; Bilewicz et al., 2019).

Historical conflicts have a negative impact on contact intentions also among members of the historical perpetrator group. When reminded of their past wrongdoings, perpetrator group members might respond with emotions such as guilt or shame (e.g., Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Doosje et al., 1998), or actively engage in more hostile behaviors, such as derogation of victim group members (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Imhoff & Banse, 2009) or overt denial of one's misdeeds (Bilewicz, 2016; Leach et al., 2013). All these reactions have been found to have adverse

effects on contact intentions and contact expectations (Green et al., 2017; Imhoff et al., 2012; Vollhardt et al., 2014).

Importantly, the processes described continue to occur many years after the conflict has long been resolved and can affect even distant descendants of perpetrators and victims (e.g., Bilewicz, 2007; Imhoff et al., 2012). As such, they might contribute to the emergence of new conflicts. Finding contact facilitators effective in such contexts is therefore of highest importance.

One way to overcome the above-mentioned problems in postconflict societies is an introduction of contact-based intervention programs, in which any encounters revolve around individual experiences and commonalities, rather than around historical grievances. For instance, Bilewicz (2007) found that Polish and Jewish students who engaged in conversations about contemporary issues (e.g., their interests, culture, politics) reported more positive attitudes toward both their contact partners and the generalized outgroup than those students who talked about history-related issues. In line with the learning-by-doing principle, members of historically conflicted societies who engage in positive intergroup contact in a safe environment seem to become more willing to accept further contact in real-life situations (Bilewicz, 2007; Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Shani & Boehnke, 2017; Voci et al., 2017). In contexts in which actual contact might be difficult or impractical to establish, interventions employing imagined contact scenarios seem to be promising. Past research has demonstrated that repeated imagining of positive encounters with members of the conflicted group leads to both a decrease in outgroup prejudice as well as to greater intentions to engage in future contact (e.g., in the context of Greek-Turkish relations in Cyprus; Husnu & Crisp, 2010, 2015).<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, contact intentions among historically victimized groups can be facilitated by encouraging victim group members to think about past victimization in a more inclusive, universal way rather than in the usual exclusive way (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). To give an example, Canadian Jews who were reminded about the Holocaust described as a universal crisis of humanity were more willing to accept contact with contemporary Germans than those who were reminded about the Holocaust as a genocide committed by Germans on Jews (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). On the other hand, contact intentions among historical perpetrator groups could be promoted by stimulating specific emotional responses. Specifically, it has been found that regret (in contrast to guilt) is a strong and systematic positive predictor of intergroup contact intentions among perpetrator group members (Imhoff et al., 2012).

Finally, contact intentions in the aftermath of violent conflicts could be increased through interventions affecting perceptions of outgroup variability and malleability—that is, showing that rather than being uniform entities, groups consist of individuals who differ from one another in terms of relevant characteristics, and that groups do not remain the same over time. For a few years now, work on the development of a new intervention strategy that focuses specifically on increasing awareness of historical moral variability of the perpetrator group has been progressing (Beneda et al., 2018; Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013; Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017, 2020; Witkowska et al., 2019). A strategy called “the moral exemplars approach” is based on exposing people to stories of perpetrator group members who acted morally, and in opposition to the majority, during times of intergroup violence. Witkowska et al. (2019) examined the effects of moral exemplars stories in the contexts of the Armenian Genocide, and of Polish-German and Polish-Russian relations during WWII. They found that an exposure to such narratives increased openness toward contact with the former adversary both among perpetrator and victim groups members, and that this effect was mediated by an increase in outgroup trust and a decrease in prejudice.

## MACRO-LEVEL PREDICTORS OF INTERGROUP CONTACT

Antecedents of intergroup contact on the macro-level are factors associated with the broader social context in which ingroups and outgroups are embedded. These can be related to societal policies, mass media, or historical developments within a society. As mentioned above, a self-evident factor on the macro-level is contact opportunities: the realization of intergroup contact correlates with the absence or presence of outgroup members in one's social environment. This holds true both for minority (Van Zalk et al., 2020) and majority members (Hewstone & Schmid, 2014; Kotzur & Wagner, 2020; Schmid et al., 2014; Van Zalk et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2003, 2006).

The differentiation between meso- and macro-level factors is not always clear-cut. Severe conflicts between groups, for example, can be regarded as an intergroup phenomenon and/or as a characteristic of a societal context. In line with the view that conflict between groups manifests itself on a macro-level, Ron et al. (2017) discuss the shared goal of a harmonious coexistence within a given society as one potential predictor of intergroup contact on a macro-level. In a similar vein, norms can be regarded as a meso-level phenomenon (e.g., when referring to group norms in an intergroup setting) or a macro-level phenomenon (e.g., norms in institutions, structures or the society as a whole). Here we regard societal norms, that is norms shared among larger contextual entities such as neighborhoods or societies (Pettigrew, 1997).

### Societal norms

We consider societal norms as a powerful and large-scale measure to increase individuals' willingness to engage in intergroup contact. Norms are standards shared among members of social groups that suggest certain attitudinal and behavioral patterns (e.g., Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Norms comprise implicit rules that direct group members' behaviors by means of social sanctioning—that is group members who do not adhere to norms might be devalued or excluded by other group members (McDonald & Crandall, 2015). Unlike laws, norms are not necessarily enforced by institutions. Institutional behavior, however, can inform societal norms as we outline in more detail below.

A plethora of studies—of both correlational and experimental nature—has demonstrated that norms reflect on intergroup attitudes and behavior (e.g., Brauer & Er-rafy, 2011; Crandall et al., 2002; Schlüter et al., 2013; Stangor et al., 2001). One example that demonstrates the power of societal norms is a field study by Paluck (2009). Paluck found that norms implying tolerance toward ethnic outgroup members communicated through a daily radio program resulted in positive change of intergroup behavior between Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda. This study shows that tolerant societal norms can influence intergroup relations even in high-conflict settings like the deep-rooted ethnic conflict in Rwanda. It also demonstrates that societal norms are not only effective but also very efficient in changing intergroup behavior: Norms communicated via mass media, policies or institutional decisions are capable of changing perceptions of shared norm and attitudes of a great number of individuals (e.g., Tankard & Paluck, 2016).

Changes in norms have been considered important mediators of extended intergroup contact effects (e.g., Mazziotta et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2008). Extended intergroup contact refers to the knowledge that an ingroup member has a (close) relationship with an outgroup member (Wright et al., 1997), and it has been shown to improve intergroup attitudes (Zhou et al., 2019). Building on these findings, Christ et al. (2014) emphasized the role of the normative context in which

individuals are situated. They found that individuals with a lack of direct intergroup contact who lived in neighborhoods in which neighbors frequently engaged in intergroup contact showed more positive outgroup attitudes compared to individuals having neighbors that also lacked intergroup contact. Focusing on the social context in which individuals are embedded, Christ et al. (2014), hence, demonstrated the importance of norms as signaled by the behavior of close others.

Norms not only play an important role in predicting intergroup attitudes and behavior in general, they have also been suggested as predictors of contact seeking and intergroup contact specifically. A few studies that test this notion provide first evidence for a positive association between tolerant norms and intergroup contact. Indirect evidence comes from studies linking extended contact to direct contact intentions (Gómez et al., 2018; Mazziotta et al., 2011) and contact (Wölfer et al., 2019). Moreover, focusing directly on the role of norms, Tropp et al. (2014) studied willingness to engage in interethnic contact among 9- to 12-year-old students. They found that students were more interested in close intergroup contact (i.e., becoming friends with the outgroup) when they perceived inclusive peer norms for cross-ethnic relations, that is when their friends endorsed interethnic contact (see also Tropp et al., 2016). In an organizational context, Koschate and van Dick (2011) demonstrated that work group managers' support for intergroup contact increased cooperation between work group members from different ethnic groups. Moreover, Kende et al. (2017) presented evidence that, on a societal level, intergroup contact is more likely in countries with more egalitarian (vs. hierarchical) values. Relatedly, Kauff et al. (2020) investigated the influence of societal norms transmitted via institutional policies and decisions on the frequency of intergroup contact. They considered antidiscrimination policies as a source of egalitarian societal norms (Hooghe & De Vroome, 2015; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Utilizing survey data from the United Kingdom, the authors showed that, on a neighborhood level, institutions' equal treatment of ethnic minority members was positively related to ethnic majority members' egalitarian beliefs and their frequency of intergroup contact. In a second study at the national level, countries' antidiscrimination policies were positively associated with ethnic majority members' intergroup contact frequency. Taken together, the research on (societal) norms and contact seeking as well as actual contact suggests that inclusive, tolerant, and egalitarian norms among peers in organizations, neighborhoods, as well as in different countries can facilitate intergroup contact.

As mentioned above, interventions addressing societal norms can have large-scale impact—or as Tankard and Paluck put it: “Because individuals' perceptions of norms guide their personal behavior, influencing these perceptions is one way to create social change” (Tankard & Paluck, 2016, p. 181). Interventions addressing norms can be implemented in various institutions, that is within schools, organizations, neighborhoods, cities, districts or countries, as (societal) norms are influenced by attitudes held by teachers (Grütter & Meyer, 2014), court rulings (Tankard & Paluck, 2017), national policies (Guimond et al., 2013), and political leaders' actions (Crandall et al., 2018). Moreover, societal norms can be transmitted via mass media: The radio program used in Paluck's (2009) field study represents an example of an intervention using mass media communication of societal norms. Moreover, because it portrays positive intergroup contact between members of different ethnic groups it can be considered as an intervention building on extended intergroup contact (Christ & Kauff, 2019).

Tankard and Paluck (2016) differentiated three general types of sources that influence norm perception: behavior of other ingroup members, summary information about the ingroup, and institutional signals. In line with this taxonomy, interventions aiming at increasing willingness to engage in intergroup contact and contact seeking could build on (a) experiences of extended contact (i.e., intergroup contact of friends and fellow ingroup members), (b) information about the likelihood of intergroup contact in society, and (c) pro-contact policies implemented by

institutions such as governments. One important precondition for the effectiveness of these interventions is that they refer to an ingroup of high relevance for individuals. In other words, recipients of societal norm interventions need to identify with the reference group that is implied in the intervention (e.g., Crandall et al., 2002; Terry & Hogg, 1996).

## WHAT WE DO AND DON'T KNOW AND WHAT SHOULD COME NEXT

We began by pointing out that opportunities for intergroup contact do not necessarily translate into actual encounters between members of different groups. We then suggested a number of predictors of intergroup contact and contact seeking located on different levels of analysis. Importantly, we focused on variables that are modifiable and therefore relevant for interventions and social policy measures aiming to bring members of different groups together.

We suggest that contact-based interventions should be most effective when they not only communicate benefits of intergroup contact for individuals but also address individuals' idiosyncratic needs or individual characteristics (see also Turner et al., 2020). Furthermore, social learning theory suggests that the observation of others' intergroup contact and support for contact among fellow ingroup members could constitute important modules of effective intergroup contact programs. In settings with a history of violent and severe intergroup conflict, interventions should focus on individual experiences as well as on commonalities between members of different groups. Importantly, social policies need to provide individuals with opportunities to engage in contact. In line with research on the role of social support of intergroup contact, such opportunities are likely to lead to actual contact in cohesive neighborhoods. Finally, societal norms communicated via mass media, or societal and political leaders and institutions are an especially effective measure to address individuals' contact seeking, as well as readiness and willingness for intergroup contact.

While we outlined interventions and social policy measures for most of the predictors of intergroup contact separately, we want to emphasize that interventions and policies ideally consider all levels of analysis together (for a similar point see Paolini et al., 2018). Interventions and policies that are aimed to change societal norms on the macro-level, for example, must take into account also inter- and intragroup variables on the meso-level such as the history of conflict and a sense of community shared within a group, as well as micro-level factors like outgroup attitudes and motives.

Interventions and policies that simultaneously focus on critical (and changeable) variables at multiple levels of analysis might be most effective in ending tendencies for (re)segregation. In fact, upcoming theoretical work outlines the benefits of combining person- and group-centered approaches when developing programs aimed at increasing contact seeking (Halperin & Schori-Eyal, 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2019). Accordingly, societal norms should not only communicate that intergroup contact is frequent and desirable but could also state that intergroup contact can be beneficial in a way that satisfies individuals' needs and motives such as self-expansion. Similarly, societal norms can aim at increasing feelings of social support amongst ingroups.

Policy makers can actively harness motivations to promote social cohesion by identifying the fit between the needs of specific groups and potential benefits of contact. Communications highlighting these specific benefits can then be directed toward particular groups, essentially focusing on micro-level motivators on a meso-level (e.g., college students moving interstate could be informed about the friendship potential of cross-group encounters). Similarly, targeted communication programs have been implemented successfully in other areas of behavioral change (e.g.,

smoking cessation, Boyd et al., 1998; fruit and vegetable consumption, Snyder, 2007). However, more research is needed on cross-level approaches to contact seeking and predictors of contact.

Future research should also more strongly consider questions of group status. According to Ron et al. (2017) some predictors might work differently for high- and low-status groups. For instance, Saguy and Dovidio (2013) showed that high- and low-status groups differ with regard to their expectations regarding the content of intergroup contact. While high-status groups prefer to discuss commonalities during intergroup encounters, low-status groups strive toward a discussion of status differences (see also Hässler et al., 2020). Moreover, results by Shelton and Richeson (2005) point out that the type of threat-driven rejection of intergroup contact might differ between groups of different status.

While high-status groups are primarily threatened by the idea of appearing prejudiced, low-status groups fear being perceived according to negative stereotypes (see also Shelton, 2003). Status difference might also be a relevant factor with regard to the predictors we have discussed in this review. However, initial evidence suggests that some motivational effects on contact seeking do not necessarily vary as a function of group status (Paolini et al., 2016, 2020). Adapting societal norms to increase intergroup contact, however, could be more effective for high- than for low-status groups because high-status groups might feel more strongly represented by societal institutions that communicate norms than members of low-status minority groups.

Moreover, most studies addressing factors that facilitate or hinder intergroup contact tend to consider (at least implicitly) contact avoidance and contact seeking as opposite sides of a continuum. In line with this, factors promoting and hindering contact would compensate each other (e.g., Halperin, 2008; Paolini et al., 2006). An alternative model assumes that contact seeking and avoidance are independent variables (e.g., Greenland et al., 2012; Trawalter et al., 2009). Accordingly, influences that usually decrease contact avoidance would be expected to potentially change their effect when combined with a contact promoting influence, and vice versa. Above we have reported on findings by Paolini et al. (2020a), which are in line with this model; they show that communication anxiety combined with high self-expansion can facilitate readiness for contact. However, the conditions of such combinations of contact promoting and hindering factors have not yet been studied systematically, and remain a task for future research.

Also, research on predictors of intergroup contact have mostly neglected the valence of intergroup contact. Contact does not necessarily take positive courses (e.g., Árnadóttir et al., 2018; Graf et al., 2014; Paolini et al., 2010) and it would be interesting to see whether some predictors of intergroup contact are specific for positive intergroup contact while others are more strongly associated with negative intergroup encounters. In fact, some research demonstrated that under certain circumstances the presence of outgroup members can also lead to an increase in levels of negative contact (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2007; Kotzur & Wagner, 2020; Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2007; for an overview see Schäfer et al., in press).

Finally, although we were able to extrapolate recommendations for interventions and social policies, more high-quality research on concrete intervention programs addressing willingness to engage in intergroup contact is needed (Paluck et al., 2019). This research should ideally make use of innovative behavioral and observational methods of measurement of intergroup contact (e.g., Dixon et al., 2019).

The evidence concerning predictors of intergroup contact on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level we have presented certainly helps to establish intergroup contact research as a reliable guide for social policies. The findings we have discussed provide early confidence that, pending future research, the approaches we sketched above could be effectively deployed to increase the uptake of (naturally occurring) contact across a variety of settings.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Importantly, not all the studies we discuss measure actual intergroup contact; some examine the influence of varying predictors on (self-reported or behavioral) willingness to engage in intergroup contact or on contact intentions. In the following sections, we will indicate whether studies looked at actual contact or contact intentions.
- <sup>2</sup> Recent studies conducted among Turks and Turkish Kurds (Bagci et al., 2019c) suggest, however, that interventions employing imagined contact might backfire in contexts in which the conflict is ongoing, especially when one of the groups is a target of consistent and open discrimination. Therefore, more research on imagined contact interventions is needed in order to understand what conditions need to be fulfilled for such interventions to be effective in facilitating direct contact.

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