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Chapter 11
Dismantling an Ethos of Conflict: Strategies for Improving Intergroup Relations

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Relations between groups are not static and do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are continuously influenced by sociohistorical events that occur and the experiences group members have in their social environments. Relations between groups can also shift either in positive or negative directions as social conditions and contexts change, providing glimmers of hope for achieving trust and social integration, or becoming breeding grounds for suspicion and conflict.

Moreover, simply because the potential for improved intergroup relations exists does not mean that positive shifts in intergroup relations will always be achieved easily. Numerous social forces and psychological processes enable group conflicts to become entrenched and protracted, through what has been described eloquently by Daniel Bar-Tal and his colleagues as an "ethos of conflict" (Bar-Tal 2000; 2013; Bar-Tal et al. 2012). This ethos is based in a set of beliefs about the legitimacy of ingroup goals and concerns and the delegitimization of the outgroup and its actions. Bolstered by group members' identities, collective memories, and legacies of victimization, the ethos serves as a guiding orientation to the conflict, and to one's present and future views regarding social relations in the larger society. As such, an ethos of conflict can serve as a lens through which group members perceive others and interpret events in a manner that reinforces and perpetuates intergroup conflict, rather than fostering alternate perspectives and prospects for peace (Bar-Tal et al. 2012, see also Cohrs et al., this volume; Jost et al., this volume; Oren, volume 2; Sharvit, volume 2; Nahhas et al., volume 2).

Over many decades, social psychological theory and research have proposed numerous strategies that can be used to promote more positive and peaceful relations between groups (see Tropp and Molina 2012 for a review). Well-established approaches to improve intergroup relations involve promoting contact between groups and creating common group identities, among others. Yet, these kinds of strategies have typically been examined in the absence of protracted intergroup conflict,

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or long after fervent intergroup conflict has dissipated, once members of different groups may be more willing to engage in processes of reconciliation (see Wagner and Hewstone 2012 for a related argument). More work is therefore needed to clarify how such approaches can contribute to the dismantling of conflict between groups, as well as the social and structural factors that may limit their effectiveness.

Social psychological perspectives have pointed to a range of approaches that may help to promote positive relations between groups (see Stephan and Stephan 2001; Tropp and Molina 2012, for reviews), including those that aim to share perspectives between groups (Bruneau and Saxe 2012), affirm the value of one's own group (Sherman et al. 2007; Čehajić-Clancy et al. 2011), and shift one's beliefs about other groups (Halperin et al. 2011, 2012), among others. This chapter focuses on two key strategies to improve intergroup relations from the social psychological literature—promoting intergroup contact and creating a common group identity in order to (a) discuss ways in which these particular strategies may be usefully applied in conflict settings; and (b) articulate some of the challenges that may be associated with their application in contexts of protracted conflict.

Strategies for Improving Intergroup Relations

Promoting Intergroup Contact

One of the most widely studied strategies to improve intergroup relations involves intergroup contact, including a range of approaches that may encourage members of different groups to interact with each other (see Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). Importantly, early perspectives assumed that contact between groups held the potential either to heighten or reduce intergroup tensions (Allport 1954; Williams 1947; see also Hewstone 2003; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). Thus, rather than assuming that any or all forms of contact would be beneficial for intergroup relations, research has highlighted the conditions and processes of contact that are especially likely to facilitate positive relations between groups.

Optimal Conditions for Intergroup Contact A great deal of social psychological research has focused on the importance of establishing optimal conditions within the contact situation to promote positive intergroup outcomes (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). These conditions typically include establishing equal status between groups in the contact situation, encouraging cooperative interdependence, and fostering support for cooperative, equal status contact through institutional authorities, laws, and customs. Equal status might be achieved through providing members of each group equal opportunities to participate in activities, offer opinions, make decisions, and/or have equal access to resources that are available in the contact situation (see Riordan 1978). Cooperative interdependence might grow from having groups work together toward shared goals, where members of the different groups must actively rely on each other in order to achieve those shared

goals (e.g., Sherif 1966). Institutional support can be induced by having authorities establish norms of mutual tolerance and acceptance and guidelines for how members of different groups should relate to each other (e.g., Cohen and Lotan 1995). Intergroup research highlights the value of structuring contact situations in line with such optimal conditions: decades of research indicate that greater contact between groups typically reduces intergroup prejudice, and particularly when conditions of equal status, cooperation, and institutional support exist in the contact situation (see Pettigrew and Tropp 2011 for a review). Some theorists have also emphasized that these optimal conditions are best conceptualized as functioning in tandem to promote positive intergroup outcomes, rather than functioning independently as separate factors (see Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) .

Emotional Processes in Intergroup Contact Other research approaches have focused on how emotional processes can enhance or inhibit the potentially positive effects of contact. For example, people can feel threatened by the presence of other groups in their social environments (e.g., Pettigrew et al. 2010; Stephan et al. 2009), and they often experience a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about navigating relations across group boundaries (Stephan et al. 1999). Feelings of threat and anxiety may in turn lead people to avoid intergroup contact (Plant and Devine AQ1 2003), or may provoke intergroup hostility and prejudice (e.g., Lee et al. 1994). At the same time, positive contact with members of other groups can help to diminish feelings of anxiety and threat, and nurture positive intergroup attitudes and a greater willingness to engage in further intergroup contact. For instance, in a nationally representative sample of Germans, Pettigrew et al. (2010) observed that larger proportions of foreigners can simultaneously increase both perceptions of intergroup threat and opportunities for intergroup contact, the former predicting greater intergroup prejudice, and the latter predicting lower intergroup prejudice. Other work by Paolini et al. (2004) shows that friendly contact between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland also predicts lower anxiety between members of these communities, which in turn predicts lower intercommunity prejudice. Using a multiethnic longitudinal undergraduate sample in the USA, Levin et al. (2003) have also found that, over time, positive intergroup contact predicted both significant reductions in intergroup anxiety and intergroup prejudice. Meta-analytic research further corroborates these findings (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008), showing that anxiety reduction mediates the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction, accounting for almost a third of contact's effects on prejudice. Overall, then, more positive intergroup contact typically reduces people's feelings of threat and anxiety toward the outgroup, and reduced threat and anxiety typically predict lower levels of intergroup prejudice.

Although decades of research suggest that positive outcomes may be achieved through intergroup contact, relatively little of this work has focused on the effects of intergroup contact in historical contexts of conflict (see Ron and Maoz, volume 2). It is possible that contact processes and outcomes would differ in contexts of intractable conflicts as compared to other contexts of less intractable intergroup tensions. In part, prolonged, violent conflicts are likely to enhance the salience and

experience of intergroup threat and, therefore, make positive outcomes from contact more difficult to achieve (see Stephan et al. 2009; Wagner and Hewstone 2012). Additionally, the competing narratives, the well-entrenched societal beliefs (i.e., an ethos of conflict), as well as the extremely negative collective emotions involved in such conflicts (Bar-Tal 2007, 2013) pose a serious challenge for a successful implementation of intergroup contact strategies.

Nonetheless, a number of studies show some cause for optimism regarding the positive effects of intergroup contact that may be achieved in post-violent conflict settings. Nearly 20 years following the fall of apartheid, White South Africans' positive contact with Black South Africans predicts their greater support for compensatory and preferential policies that would promote the interests and welfare of Black South Africans (Dixon et al. 2010). Findings from the last decade also reveal that positive contact is associated with a greater willingness to forgive among ethnic communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Čehajić et al. 2008), greater trust toward Palestinians among Jewish Israelis (Maoz and McCauley 2011), and greater forgiveness and trust among religious communities in Northern Ireland (Hewstone et al. 2006; Tam et al. 2008). Studies with Black and White South Africans, and with Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, also show that friendly, cooperative, and equal status contact with members of the other community predicts not only more positive attitudes and greater trust but also more positive beliefs about the other community's intentions in working toward peace (Tropp et al. 2014) .

Potential Limitations of Intergroup Contact in Conflict Settings It is important to note, however, that there are a number of challenges associated with the facilitation and enactment of positive contact in conflict settings (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011; Wagner and Hewstone 2012). Indeed, conflict itself—and particularly violent conflict—likely involves the experience of intergroup threat (Stephan et al. 2009), as well as varied forms of negative contact, ranging from intergroup hostility and aggression to displacement, violations of rights, and loss of life (Esses and Vernon 2008; Maoz 2011). Studies of White respondents in Australia and the USA also indicate that greater negative contact may be more strongly associated with prejudice than positive contact is with its reduction (Barlow et al. 2012); this effect is likely bolstered by the tendency for negative contact to make group differences especially salient, thereby exacerbating the degree to which negative contact experiences will generalize (Paolini et al. 2010).

At the same time, some research suggests that prior positive contact may facilitate reconciliation after conflict and such forms of negative contact. Classic research by Oliner and Oliner (1988) supports this general trend, showing that rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust were more likely to have reporting having Jews as friends and neighbors before the war than nonrescuers. More direct evidence comes from surveys of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, which indicate that positive contact experiences with members of the other groups before the breakout of intergroup violence predicted greater readiness for reconciliation following the violence (Biro et al. 2004). Additionally, recent work supports the notion that extensive prior positive contact can buffer against the effects of current negative contact between members of different groups (Paolini et al. 2014) .

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Nonetheless, because of conflict—and the distrust, hostility, and negative experiences it can breed—members of conflicting groups often continue to feel threatened by each other (Riek et al. 2006; Stephan 2008). Intergroup conflict tends to be rooted in negative interdependence between groups, whereby the resources, identity, and well-being of one group are threatened (or perceived to be threatened) by the presence or actions of another group (e.g., Deutsch 1949). Such conditions of competition and threat are in direct contrast to the optimal conditions of cooperation and common goals proposed for achieving positive outcomes from intergroup contact. Reducing threat and anxiety between groups is key mechanism through which positive contact can lead to prejudice reduction (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008, 2011), whereas the presence of competition and threat can bolster support for intergroup violence and perpetuate an ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2007; Tausch 2009). Perhaps, then, it is understandable why voluntary patterns of segregation between groups are still likely to occur in post-conflict settings (e.g., Alexander and Tredoux 2010; Tredoux and Dixon 2009), as members of different groups have grown accustomed to distrusting each other and remain wary of engaging in cross-group contact. Even when people from conflicting groups are positively inclined toward intergroup contact, threats to one's safety must also be considered, as people may be putting themselves at risk by attempting to travel from one community to the other (e.g., Institute for Conflict Research 2005) .

Here, institutional norms, authorities, and community leaders can play particularly important roles. Group norms and leaders are instrumental in defining relations between groups and helping group members to learn whether and how they should engage with members of other groups (Abrams and Hogg 1988). In many cases, community norms and authority figures can facilitate positive intergroup outcomes by supporting friendly, cooperative relations between groups when members of different groups interact directly with each other (e.g., Pettigrew 1998), as well as through more indirect channels (e.g., Wright et al. 1997). Yet when long-standing conflicts exist between groups, it becomes a greater challenge for authority figures and community leaders to openly support such efforts, as they are compelled to represent the interests and identities of their own groups, and this often takes precedence over supporting cross-community relations (e.g., Bekerman 2009). Further, if and when authority figures and community leaders reach out across group boundaries, their status and legitimacy as respected authorities and leaders may then be questioned by members of the groups they represent, which can ultimately reduce their influence (Hogg 2001). Thus, a key challenge for establishing institutional support involves how leaders can promote positive relations across groups, while also maintaining status and legitimacy within their own groups.

An additional challenge relevant to the role of intergroup contact involves attempts to establish equal status between groups who have experienced protracted conflict. According to traditional perspectives in intergroup contact theory (e.g., Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998), equal status might be established during contact by providing members of each group with equal opportunities to participate, offer opinions and input, and/or receive access to available resources; thus, under conditions of equal status, members of each group would have equal involvement and power to

shape the course and nature of their interactions with each other. But, the concept of equal status can be defined and operationalized in various ways (see Riordan 1978), and status relations may be understood differently among groups approaching each other from opposing sides of a conflict (e.g., Eibach and Ehrlinger 2006) .

In part, opposing groups commonly construe perceptions of the conflict, its history, and each other in different ways, such that each is likely to make judgments that allow their own group to be seen in a more positive light. In Burundi, both Hutus and Tutsis have attributed less responsibility to their own group for the instigation and consequences of violent ethnic conflict between the groups, instead attributing greater responsibility to members of the other group (Bilali et al. 2012). Religious communities like Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, as well as right-wing and left-wing political groups in Chile, have been shown to engage in competitive victimhood, whereby members of one community seek to establish that their group has suffered more than members of another community; such biased perceptions of victimization tend to predict conflict escalation rather than its peaceful resolution (Noor et al. 2008; see also Vollhardt et al., this volume; Shchori-Eyal and Klar, volume 2). Groups may also have different perceptions of progress toward equality, where the historically advantaged tend to focus on how much progress has been made, whereas members of historically disadvantaged groups tend to focus on how much more progress is needed (e.g., Eibach and Ehrlinger 2006).

Moreover, even when objective attempts are made to establish equal status in a contact situation, groups may subjectively experience the contact in different ways in relation to the prevailing status and power relations between groups in the larger society (Saguy et al. 2012; Tropp 2006). Groups that experience power asymmetries prior to contact may inadvertently enact power asymmetries during contact. For example, Jewish Israeli facilitators of intergroup dialogues between Jewish and Arab participants have shown tendencies to dominate, and Jewish participants tend to be more engaged in discussions of coexistence, relative to their Arab counterparts (Maoz 2004). As such, some have argued that groups should be of equal status coming into the contact situation, in order for contact to promote truly positive and cooperative relations between groups (Foster and Finchilescu 1986); otherwise, positive contact between groups of different status may inadvertently lead members of lower status groups to expect equal treatment even in the presence of injustices (e.g., Saguy et al. 2008) .

Creating a Common Ingroup

A second key strategy to improve intergroup relations involves processes of recategorization, where members of distinct groups are encouraged to recognize their common membership in a superordinate category that can include both groups, thereby creating a common group identity (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). Gaertner, Dovidio, and their colleagues have conducted numerous studies in laboratory and field settings showing how the development of a common group identity can promote beneficial intergroup outcomes (e.g., Gaertner et al. 1989, 1994, 1996; see Gaertner and Dovidio 2000 for a detailed discussion).

In large part, attitudes toward former outgroup members become more positive due to the same categorization processes that govern other forms of ingroup bias: once former outgroup members become part of a common ingroup, they are afforded more positive attitudes such as those that are typically reserved for fellow ingroup members (Abrams and Hogg 1988). For instance, Jews induced to think of themselves and Germans as common members of "humanity" showed a greater willingness to forgive Germans for the Holocaust (Wohl and Branscombe 2005). Moreover, research suggests that the creation of a common ingroup can contribute to the reduction of intergroup threat: in the US-based studies with different racial groups (Black and White Americans) and political groups (Democrats and Republicans), perceptions of common group identities predicted lower levels of threat, which in turn predicted more positive attitudes toward members of the other group (Riek et al. 2010).

Studies have also clarified how, to promote positive intergroup outcomes, the goal of identifying with a common ingroup should be introduced and supported by members of one's own group, rather than being imposed by the outgroup in question (Gómez et al. 2008). In studies with high school students from rival schools in Spain, these authors observed that students reported greater threat when outgroup members represented the groups in terms of a common group identity; this threat was only alleviated when members of their own group also endorsed the inclusion of both groups within a common ingroup.

Recent extensions of common ingroup identity research have been conducted in settings of protracted conflict in different parts of the world. For example, greater identification with a common "Chilean" identity predicted greater intergroup empathy and trust among right-wing supporters and left-wing opponents of Pinochet (Noor et al. 2008). Similarly, Bosniaks' identification with the common group of "Bosnians" has been shown to predict greater intergroup forgiveness and lower levels of social distance (Čehajić et al. 2008), while Kosovar Albanians' identification with the common group of "inhabitants of Kosovo" predicts greater intergroup trust and lower competition in views of one's own group and others' victimization (Andrighetto et al. 2012); yet, these authors importantly note that it is the relative identification with the common national or regional group over identification with one's ethnic subgroup that predicts such positive outcomes (Čehajić et al. 2008; Andrighetto et al. 2012).

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Potential Limitations of Common Identities in Conflict Settings There are also a number of challenges associated with creating common group identities in contexts of protracted conflict. Common group identities may be difficult to envision or maintain among groups embroiled in conflict, as group members would likely be more invested in the interests and identities of their distinct groups as they pertain to the conflict (Bar-Tal 2007). Indeed, conflicting groups often have distinct historical narratives pertaining to the conflict, such that they are likely to interpret the trajectory and nature of the conflict in different ways (Bilali and Ross 2012). These processes could hinder the development of a common identity, even among groups that seek to reconcile following conflict, as they may not agree on the characteristics that should ultimately define the common group (Mummendey and Wenzel 1999).

Members of groups that are lower in status or power may also feel the need to protect themselves against being subsumed by and underrepresented within the larger common group (Hornsey and Hogg 2000). While high-power groups often desire for groups to be represented simply as part of a common group, members of groups with less power often show a preference for dual group identities—where both their own group and common group identities are emphasized—to ensure that each group's identity and experience are not lost in representations of the larger group (Dovidio et al. 2009; Hornsey and Hogg 2000). Such preferences for representations of groups may, in turn, feed into distinct motivations for engaging in intergroup contact. For example, in the context of Israeli–Palestinian workshops, Rouhana and Korper (1997) observed that while Israeli participants expressed a willingness to participate to the extent that the workshops focused on mutual liking and understanding, Palestinians expressed greater interest to the extent that the workshops addressed structural inequalities. Similar patterns of findings have been observed in studies with laboratory-generated groups high and low in status, and with respondents from relatively high- and low-status Jewish communities in Israel (Ashkenazim and Mizrahim); in each case, members of both the high- and low-status groups were generally interested in discussing points of commonality between their groups, yet members of the low-status group showed a much greater preference for discussing inequalities and differences in power (Saguy et al. 2008).

The need for acknowledgment and representation of one's own group's experience also has implications for people's willingness to recognize the extent to which others have suffered due to ethnoreligious conflict. For instance, Vollhardt (2013) found that Jewish participants were more likely to acknowledge others' suffering due to collective violence when their own group's victimization was uniquely acknowledged (Jews) as part of a broader category of victims (Holocaust victims), as compared to when only the superordinate categorization of victims was used. This suggests that the perspectives and identities of each group must be acknowledged in order for group members to become more willing to recognize that their group's experience of victimization is shared with other groups (see also Noor et al. 2012).

Given the challenges of implementing common group identities successfully in contexts of conflict and unequal status relations, new strategies for their implementation are now being considered. A promising approach has recently been offered by Shnabel et al. (2013), who suggest that framing common identities around shared experiences may be more effective than common identities framed at the level of region or nation. For example, in studies with Israelis and Palestinians, these authors found that inducing a common identity as "victims" or "perpetrators" can decrease competitive victimhood and foster intergroup forgiveness, while such positive intergroup outcomes were not achieved when a common regional identity ("Middle Eastern peoples") was induced. This work indicates the importance of taking into account specific features of the intergroup context—such as status and power relations between the groups, and the nature and contested dimensions of the conflict—when creating common identities, in the hopes of fostering improved relations between groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two key strategies often proposed for improving relations between groups—promoting intergroup contact and creating common group identities—and discussed both potential strengths and challenges that may be associated with their use in contexts of protracted intergroup conflict. Although these strategies have received a great deal of research attention and empirical support, relatively little attention has been given to the ways in which their effectiveness may be constrained by the contours of conflicts between groups. It is important to emphasize that these challenges involve not only points of dispute and differential access to resources but also long-standing differences in perspective, identity, and historical narratives that guide group members' construals of the conflict and of their relations with each other (Bar-Tal 2007). Moreover, strategies such as promoting intergroup contact and creating common group identities are not designed to overlook these differences in order to improve relations between groups. Rather, applications of these strategies in contexts of conflict require attention to the distinct experiences and motivations that members of each group have had in the conflict, as they consider engaging in contact with each other and exploring shared bases of identity. Moreover, consideration of these and other strategies designed to improve relations between groups must be oriented toward fostering alternate perspectives on the conflict in order to dismantle an ethos of conflict and promote the potential for peace.

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