

5 The role of group power in intergroup contact

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In November, 2005, an Israeli peace center brought together Palestinian and Israeli architecture students to design hypothetical joint-housing projects. In the course of the encounters, the students learned about housing prototypes in Palestinian and Israeli societies, and then worked in mixed Palestinian-Israeli groups to design a building that could house both Palestinian and Israeli families. Interviews with the participants a few months later revealed that while the project seemed to have a positive impact on the perceptions and feelings of Israelis, who reported enjoyment and satisfaction with the encounters, it did little to change those of the Palestinians, whose main reactions were frustration and disappointment (Zandberg, 2006; see Nadler & Saguy, 2004).

These different reactions of Israelis and Palestinians are in line with findings from an extensive meta-analysis of the contact literature (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; see also Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), summarizing over five hundred studies across a wide range of contexts and countries. Although contact was related to improved attitudes among members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, it was found to be significantly less effective for improving the outgroup attitudes of disadvantaged group members than those of advantaged group members¹ (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Furthermore, optimal conditions in the contact situation (e.g., cooperation, equal status, institutional support; see Allport, 1954) were found to facilitate the effect of contact *only* for members of advantaged groups; the presence of these conditions did not have a significant impact on disadvantaged group members involved in intergroup contact.

Despite the richness of the contact literature (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005), few studies offer explanations for these power-based differences in the efficacy of contact. Because differences in group power have traditionally been considered an obstacle that should be overcome in contact situations, the emphasis has been on creating and maintaining equal status between interacting group members (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969). This emphasis resulted in limited understanding of how power dynamics, those that mark the relations between the groups *outside* of the encounter, might still impact processes that occur *within* contact situations, even when attempts are made to achieve equal status (see Foster & Finchilescu, 1986; Riordan, 1978). Moreover, the vast majority of studies on intergroup contact have examined the responses of advantaged and disadvantaged group members sepa-

rately from one another (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), offering few opportunities to test the role of group power on the effects of intergroup contact.

More recently, researchers have begun to consider differences in how advantaged versus disadvantaged group members approach, experience, and are affected by intergroup contact (see Devine & Vasquez, 1998; Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Tropp, 2006). For instance, findings from a U.S. national survey show that while positive effects of contact are typically observed among White Americans, they are significantly inhibited among Black Americans who perceive high levels of discrimination against their racial group (Tropp, 2007). Experimental and diary studies further indicate that exposure to prejudice and discrimination can undermine minorities' willingness to engage in contact with members of the advantaged majority group (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Tropp, 2003). Still, such findings offer little information regarding the ways in which group differences in power are enacted in contact settings, or how intergroup contact can either perpetuate or ameliorate group differences in power.

In this chapter, we review emerging evidence that can advance our understanding of the intersection of power and contact between groups. We begin by considering how psychological processes associated with group position (i.e., advantaged versus disadvantaged group membership) relate to how people approach contact situations in terms of their goals and preferences for the content of intergroup encounters. We then describe research that links the consequences of intergroup contact to power asymmetries between groups and to processes that promote social change. We conclude by discussing the implications of this work for research and practice on improving intergroup relations.

Group position and approaches to intergroup relations

Without exception, societies are hierarchically organized such that at least one group controls a greater share of valued resources (e.g., political power, economic wealth, educational opportunities) than do other groups (Jackman, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Group-based hierarchy is reflected in almost every aspect of social life, from poverty rates and school attrition rates to prison sentences and mortality rates – favoring members of advantaged over disadvantaged groups (Feagin, 2006; Jackman, 2001; Smootha, 2005; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Members of disadvantaged groups, compared with members of advantaged groups, also encounter discrimination and social injustice in a wide range of domains, such as when interviewing for jobs and being quoted a price for a house or a car (e.g., Ayres, 1991; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). The differential control over resources accompanied by differential social treatment produces divergent daily realities for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Whereas members of disadvantaged groups find many doors to economic opportunities closed, have a difficult time climbing the social ladder, and experience legal authorities as a source of intimidation, advantaged group members experience far more economic security, opportunities to advance, and social acceptance (Jones, Engelman, Turner, & Campbell, 2009).

Because advantaged and disadvantaged group members encounter vastly different realities, they also tend to view the status quo in different ways. Members of advantaged groups, who benefit both practically and psychologically from hierarchical social arrangements, are likely to perceive the status quo as reasonable and even “natural”, and to have little opposition to group-based hierarchy. Instead, because they have more to gain from changes toward greater equality, members of disadvantaged groups are generally more likely to perceive the status quo as problematic and to desire a change in current social arrangements. These group-based orientations toward the status quo are implicated in prominent theories of intergroup relations such as the Group Position Model (Blumer, 1958; see also Bobo, 1999; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996), Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), Realistic Group Conflict Theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and are supported empirically. For example, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994) demonstrate that individuals who hold more power in society tend to view the social hierarchy as natural and necessary, while members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to see the hierarchy as in need of change. This effect has been replicated in a variety of intergroup contexts including ethnic groups in Israel (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008, Study 2), India (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, Pratto, & Singh, 2010) and the US (Pratto et al., 1994), and also among experimental groups for whom group position was experimentally manipulated (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 1).

Consistent with their group-based motivations toward the status quo, advantaged group members are likely to behave in ways that would help them maintain their relative dominance and undermine change, such as by promoting ideologies that make hierarchy seem legitimate and reasonable (Jackman, 2001; Reicher, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). By contrast, members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to engage in behaviors that would challenge current social arrangements, such as by supporting or participating in collective action efforts aimed at promoting equality (van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). These different tendencies also manifest themselves in the psychological needs that members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups bring to relations with each other. Positions of disadvantage pose a threat to one’s status and power and motivate people to seek empowerment and voice in relations with the advantaged group; by contrast, positions of advantage pose a threat to one’s moral image and motivate people to seek acceptance from the disadvantaged (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009).

Studies conducted across different intergroup contexts reveal that advantaged and disadvantaged group members tend to further differ in what they regard as the preferred form of intergroup relations (see Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2009; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Advantaged group members show relatively strong support for relations in which differences between groups are minimized and the emphasis instead is on common ties among the groups within one, superordinate, category (e.g., “we are all Americans, rather than Blacks and Whites”); (Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Conversely, even though they might also appreciate commonalities, members of disadvantaged groups show a consistent

preference for relations through which group differences are also acknowledged and valued (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko et al., 2000). For example, native-Dutch (the advantaged majority) have been shown to prefer assimilation of immigrants to the host culture, whereas immigrants prefer to become part of the dominant (host) culture while retaining their original cultural identity (van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; see also Pfafferott & Brown, 2006; Verkuyten, 2006). Similarly, Blacks in the U.S. have been shown to endorse an emphasis on racial identities more than colorblindness, whereas Whites tend to endorse colorblindness more than Blacks (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007; see also Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kafati, 2000).

These group-based preferences for emphasizing common ties or differences can be seen, at least to some extent, as strategic – that is, serving motivations for social change among disadvantaged groups and for stability among advantaged groups. In order to advance action that could bring about social change, some conditions must be met. As proposed by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), when disadvantaged group members come to think of the social hierarchy as legitimate and just, they become less motivated to support efforts toward social change (Wright, 2001). This notion is echoed in System Justification Theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), which asserts that disadvantaged and advantaged group members alike are motivated to justify and defend the existing system (Jost, 2001; Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001). Beyond the recognition of injustice, disadvantaged group members must also be strongly committed to their group in order to collectively challenge their group's inferior position in the social hierarchy (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 2002; Veenstra & Haslam, 2000; Wright & Tropp, 2002). Thus, factors that both promote the legitimacy of the hierarchical system and loosen disadvantaged group members' ties with their group can jointly work to undermine potential for social change.

As discussed by Wright and Lubensky (2009), a focus on commonalities across groups can provoke a reduction in identification with one's own group, including less commitment to the ingroup's goals, norms, and particular interests. Furthermore, the focus on commonalities can reduce the salience of group differences, including those pertaining to status and power, thereby rendering potential injustices less apparent (Saguy et al., 2009). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that an emphasis on similarities and commonalities may better serve advantaged group members' motivation to maintain the status quo, whereas attention to differences and inequalities can serve disadvantaged group members' motivation for social change (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009). We next consider how these different orientations toward commonality and difference may inform group members' goals and preferences in intergroup contact.

Group position and goals in intergroup contact

The contact that has traditionally been considered “optimal” for changing attitudes involves a focus on a common goal, or cooperation between groups (see Allport, 1954; Sherif, 1966). However, intergroup contact can take different forms,

and given their different orientations toward intergroup relations, advantaged and disadvantaged group members may differ in their preferences for addressing commonalities versus group differences during intergroup contact.

Consistent with these ideas, Tropp and Bianchi (2007) found that disadvantaged group members responded more positively to intergroup contact than advantaged group members when an outgroup member explicitly mentioned how group membership might be relevant to a future interaction. When the outgroup member (confederate) mentioned how “Whites” or “ethnic minorities” might have different ideas during the upcoming task, ethnic minority participants expressed more interest in interacting with the outgroup member than did ethnic majority participants. These findings suggest that, in contact settings, members of disadvantaged groups positively value an acknowledgement of group differences (Eggs, Haslam, & Reynolds, 2002) and the preservation of their group identity (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), whereas advantaged group members may be relatively more threatened by discussions of group difference (see also Trawalter & Richeson, 2008).

Indeed, due to legacies of disadvantage and a stronger motivation for change, disadvantaged group members may be more likely than advantaged group members to want intergroup encounters to bring to light differences in the experiences and positions of the groups (Maoz, 2011). As suggested previously, this focus could serve the disadvantaged group’s interest in drawing attention to structural inequalities and the need for social change. In contrast, members of advantaged groups might be more in favor of attending to commonalities during contact, through which group members could engage in discussions of similarities without addressing potential differences between the groups. This focus can not only promote affection between the groups but also disguise power relations, which together can reduce the likelihood of resistance and undermine social change (Jackman, 2001).

Still, while advantaged and disadvantaged group members may diverge in their willingness to emphasize differences, they may diverge less when it comes to emphasizing commonalities. Beyond serving the needs of the advantaged group, an intergroup encounter that focuses on commonalities could also, at least partially, serve the interests of the disadvantaged groups, particularly if issues of power are also addressed. By emphasizing common connections between the groups while simultaneously making group disparities salient, members of disadvantaged groups could sensitize the advantaged group to issues of common humanity and social injustice. Consequently, advantaged group members’ support for social change toward equality can potentially increase the more they come to know and care about the concerns of the disadvantaged (see Dixon et al., 2010b; Saguy et al., 2008). Thus, whereas members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups may differ in their tendencies to emphasize aspects that distinguish their group identities (such as differences in group power), they can have similar tendencies to focus on aspects that they share (such as national or cultural commonality).

In summary, the content of cross-group interactions can be viewed as strategic and functional for serving group-based goals. This proposition can have important implications for understanding how group members approach and experience

intergroup encounters. As a function of group position, group members may perceive certain types of encounters as more beneficial to their group than other types and, consequently, would have different preferences for the content of discussions during intergroup contact. Moreover, the desire for certain contents is likely to increase the more goals regarding the status quo (i.e., change vs. stability) are pronounced. Finally, if a focus on particular content serves the interest of those who wish to stabilize the status quo, then encounters that focus on such content should ultimately reduce the chances of social change to occur. In the remainder of this chapter, we present evidence in line with these ideas.

Perceptions of group benefit

Given the different goals advantaged and disadvantaged group members have regarding the status quo, certain types of interaction contents may be more in line with the needs of advantaged group members and some may better meet the needs of disadvantaged group members. An interaction content that involves a focus on differences in terms of illegitimate power asymmetries (e.g., job opportunities favoring majority over minority group members) can serve the group-based interests of disadvantaged groups, whereas an interaction content that centers on commonalities in terms of dimensions that people from different ethnic groups share can serve the group-based interests of advantaged groups. As suggested previously, the focus on commonalities might also be beneficial for promoting the interests of disadvantaged groups by sensitizing advantaged group members to issues of social inequality. Thus, although for disadvantaged group members, a focus on power differences during contact (*power-focused contact*) may be perceived as more beneficial than a focus on commonalities (*commonality-focused contact*), both advantaged and disadvantaged group members may perceive comparable benefits in commonality-focused contact.

Recent evidence provides support for these propositions. White and Latino Americans were presented with one of two intergroup contact programs (presented as a list of discussion topics), focused either on commonalities or on power differences (Saguy & Dovidio, 2011). The topics presented in the power-focused contact condition were linked to social disparities between the groups (e.g., “Discussing ways to fight past and current discrimination against minority groups”) and the commonality-related topics emphasized salient, shared cultural aspects with no reference to power (e.g., “Discussing interests and hobbies that members of different ethnic groups in America share in common”). Participants were asked to evaluate whether discussing the topics in a future intergroup encounter could benefit their own ethnic group.

As predicted, for Latinos, power-focused contact was rated as more likely to benefit the ingroup than commonality-focused contact; by contrast, for Whites, commonality-focused contact was rated as more likely to benefit the ingroup than power-focused contact. There was also a significant difference between Whites and Latinos in the perception of power-focused contact as beneficial to the ingroup, but there was no significant difference between the groups in the perceptions of

commonality-focused contact as beneficial to the ingroup (see Figure 5.1). We further examined whether advantaged and disadvantaged group members recognize the potential benefits of commonality-focused or power-focused contact for the outgroup. Latinos believed that Whites would benefit more from commonality-focused contact than from power-focused contact, whereas Whites believed that Latinos would benefit more from power-focused contact than from commonality-focused contact. As such, endorsement of these contents reflects common strategic orientations in cross-group interactions, such that group members not only recognize potential benefits to their own group as a result of each type of contact, but they also seem to recognize potential benefits for the outgroup.

These results were replicated in a laboratory experiment in which group position was manipulated by giving one group control over valued resources (experimental credit) for both groups (Saguy & Dovidio, 2011). Participants believed they were about to interact with members of the other group and were presented with the list of topics to be discussed. Consistent with the results involving Whites and Latinos, members of the low power group believed their group would benefit more from discussing power over commonalities, with no differences between the groups obtained with regard to perceptions of benefits due to commonalities. Furthermore, and consistent with the previous study, members of the low power group believed that high power group members would benefit more from discussing commonalities than from discussing power. As expected, the opposite pattern was obtained for the high power group, who believed that low power group members would benefit more from discussing power than from discussing commonalities.

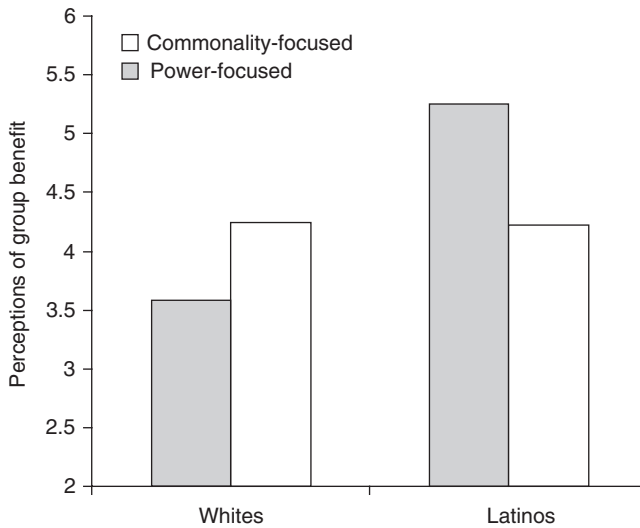


Figure 5.1 Perceptions of ingroup benefit as a function of group position and contact type (Saguy & Dovidio, 2011)

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Preferences for the content of cross-group interactions

Given that advantaged and disadvantaged group members are aware of the utility that different types of interaction content have for serving both the ingroup's and the outgroup's needs, they may also exhibit corresponding preferences for the content of interactions between their groups. Saguy et al. (2008) provided support for these ideas in a variety of intergroup settings. In a laboratory study (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 1), group power was manipulated by giving one group (the advantaged group) control over a resource that was desired by both groups (i.e., course credits, which are the incentive for participating in studies), while the disadvantaged group had no control over the resource. As they approached intergroup contact, both groups showed an equivalent interest in discussing topics of commonality. However, advantaged group members exhibited significantly less interest in discussing power differences between the groups than did disadvantaged group members, whereas disadvantaged group members displayed equivalent interest in talking about commonality and difference. Moreover, disadvantaged group members' greater preference for discussing differences in power was mediated by their greater motivation for a change in the power structure, relative to the advantaged group members. These findings were replicated with groups differing in social status in Israel, including Ashkenazim (Jews of American or European descent) and Mizrahim (Jews of Asian or African descent); (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2). In addition, members of the advantaged group who identified more strongly with their group displayed even greater interest in talking about commonality, whereas highly identified disadvantaged group members showed a greater preference for talking about differences (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2).

These ideas are further supported by data collected in field settings involving actual encounters between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. In an analysis of conflict resolution workshops involving Israelis and Palestinians, Rouhana and Korper (1997) found that Israeli participants (i.e., advantaged group members) expressed desire to participate in the workshop if the interactions were based on interpersonal processes that could lead to attitude change, whereas Palestinians wanted to address structural and political issues during the encounters (see Maoz, 2011; Nadler & Saguy, 2004, for additional qualitative evidence). Related findings were observed in a study of interactions between Jewish and Arab educators (Maoz, 2000). When discussing issues related to the educational system, a topic clearly common to both groups, Jewish participants were more active and dominant in the interactions, whereas Arabs were passive and uninvolved. However, when the discussion shifted to issues concerning the political conflict in the region, Arabs were more involved in the interaction and also expressed more positive attitudes towards it (Maoz, 2000).

Taken together, the findings reviewed thus far suggest that group position shapes group members' goals and preferences regarding the *content* of cross-group interactions. Furthermore, these different preferences seem strategic and functional for serving group-based needs, in light of prior work on group-based motivations (Bobo, 1999) and related behaviors (Dovidio et al., 1997). We next describe work that provides support for the strategic way in which group members approach situations of contact.

Strategies in cross-group interactions

To empirically establish the strategic nature of the preferences to discuss power and commonalities, Saguy and Dovidio (2012) examined these preferences under insecure status relations. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979; see also Betten-court et al., 2001; Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990), group members' reactions to the status quo depend on the extent to which they perceive the status relations to be stable and legitimate, that is, secure. When status relations are secure, alternatives to the existing status relations do not seem viable or right. As a result, members of advantaged groups perceive little threat to their relatively superior position, and members of disadvantaged groups have little faith that attempts to advance their status would be fruitful. In contrast, when the status relations are perceived as unstable and illegitimate, not only that the hierarchy might change, such change has moral justification. Consequently, advantaged group members might be particularly inclined to defend their insecure status while disadvantaged group members are likely to be particularly motivated to engage in attempts to advance their group's position. Nadler and Halabi (2006) provided elegant support for these ideas by examining Arabs' reactions to help offered by Jews. Arabs in Israel are a low status minority, who generally perceive their status relative to Jews to be illegitimate. Results demonstrated that under unstable (compared with stable) status relations, Arabs in Israel were more likely to reject help offered by an Israeli Jew – help which could work to sustain the status hierarchy by fostering Arabs' dependency on Jews. Ironically, Israeli Jews were particularly likely to offer such dependency-oriented help to Arabs when their advantaged group's position was perceived as unstable (Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2008).

According to this analysis, when group members perceive the status relations to be insecure, they will be more likely to enact strategies to advance (for low status groups) or protect (high status groups) their status. In keeping with this, if the group-based preferences for interaction content described earlier are indeed strategic, they would be more pronounced under insecure status relations. That is, when they believe a change is possible, and morally justified, disadvantaged group members should engage more strongly in behaviors that can advance change, such as raising attention to power. By contrast, advantaged group members should be more defensive of their group status and more inclined to engage in behaviors that could preserve the status quo.

To test these predictions, students from the University of Connecticut (a high ranked, public research university in Connecticut), were led to believe that they were about to interact with either students from Yale university (a more prestigious school in the same state) or with students from Eastern Connecticut College (a school with lower prestige in the same state). These expectations constituted the group position manipulation by creating an advantaged position (when expecting to interact with Eastern Connecticut students) versus a disadvantaged position (when expecting to interact with Yale students). Similar to previous studies, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they would like to discuss different topics during the interaction, some addressing commonalities, and some addressing differences in status. Prior to choosing topics, participants read

a newspaper article describing the differences in status between alumni of the two schools, that were portrayed as either enduring (stable condition) or likely to change (unstable condition), and as either legitimate or not. The findings revealed that disadvantaged group members' desire to discuss power differences during the interaction was most pronounced when the status relations were both unstable and illegitimate. Mediation analysis further revealed that this greater desire to address status differences was largely due to a heightened motivation for social change. By contrast, advantaged group members showed a stronger desire to discuss commonalities over power differences, and this tendency somewhat increased when the status relations were both unstable and illegitimate.

These findings support the notion that goals involved in status relations relate to the way group members approach and react to situations of intergroup contact. A goal of challenging current status relations might lead to a stronger focus on *power differences* whereas a goal of maintaining power could be reflected in an emphasis on *commonalities*. In the next section we examine the utility of these strategies by considering the consequences of intergroup contact for the stability or malleability of power relations between groups.

Consequences of intergroup contact for social equality and social change

A focus on commonalities has consistently been shown to relate to more positive outgroup attitudes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), to foster more personalized and intimate cross-group interactions (Dovidio, Gaertner, Validzic, Matoka, Johnson, & Frazier, 1997), and to promote prosocial behavior across group lines (Nier, Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, & Ward, 2001). Nevertheless, commonality-focused interactions can impact outcomes that go beyond attitudes and emotions (see Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). For example, coming to like members of the disadvantaged group might relate to stronger support on part of advantaged group members for policies that could advance equality. Nevertheless, and as described earlier, such encounters might divert disadvantaged group members' attention from issues related to social inequality, thereby influencing their awareness and motivation to promote change. In this section we review findings that demonstrate the relationship between intergroup contact and perceptions and behaviors related to social inequality and social change.

Research on members of advantaged groups has generally shown that positive contact experiences with the disadvantaged predicts greater support for egalitarian policies (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). For example, the more White South Africans had positive contact with Blacks, the less opposed they were to compensatory policies that could promote Black advancement (e.g., scholarships for underrepresented students) and to preferential policies for Blacks such as affirmative action (Dixon et al., 2010b). In a survey of Jewish-Israelis, Maoz and Ellis (2008) have shown that participation in structured encounters with Palestinians predicted increased willingness to compromise and make reparations. Studies in Western Europe and the United States further find that contact with

immigrants is significantly associated with greater support for pro-immigration practices (e.g., Hayes & Dowds, 2006; Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2007; see also Pettigrew, 1997).

Research on members of disadvantaged groups, which has been relatively scarce in contact research (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), has begun to reveal a more complex picture regarding contact and dimensions related to equality and social change. Wright and Lubensky (2009) found that among African Americans and Latinos, positive contact with Whites was associated with more positive attitudes toward Whites, but also with less support for collective action to advance equality. Similar findings were obtained among Arabs in Israel, for whom contact with Jews predicted better attitudes toward Jews, but also reduced support for policies that could advance the positions of Arabs – an effect mediated by reduced awareness of structural inequalities between the groups (Saguy et al., 2009). In a survey of Black South Africans, positive contact with Whites was associated with decreased support for social policies that could potentially enhance racial equality (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007), and with decreased perceptions of racial discrimination (Dixon et al., 2010a). Taken together, these findings suggest that positive contact may not only encourage minorities to feel more favorably towards advantaged groups, but can have the unintended consequence of diminishing their perceptions of discrimination and their inclination to challenge the status quo (Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010c).

These ideas were further tested in a laboratory experiment in which different types of contact, either focused on commonalities or differences in power, were manipulated and perceptions regarding inequality were subsequently measured (Saguy et al., 2009). College students were randomly assigned to either an advantaged or a disadvantaged group. The advantaged group was given the opportunity to assign extra course credits to the two groups. Before the advantaged group members allocated the credits, members of both groups interacted, with instructions to focus on either intergroup commonalities or differences. Results demonstrated that commonality-focused interactions, compared with differences-focused interactions, produced more positive intergroup attitudes among both advantaged and disadvantaged group members. In addition, commonality-focused contact was related to reduced awareness of the inequality in the study among members of both groups. Moreover, members of the disadvantaged group expected the advantaged group to distribute the credits in a more equitable fashion, following commonality-focused than following differences-focused interactions. Mediation analysis revealed that this expectation was explained by improved intergroup attitudes and reduced awareness of inequality. These findings complement the cross-sectional data reviewed above, showing that positive contact predicts reduced perceptions of discrimination (Dixon et al., 2010a).

The laboratory experiment further enabled examination of whether the disadvantaged group members' expectations for equality were met by the behavior of the advantaged group. Results showed that following difference-focused contact, advantaged group members were substantially biased in the allocation of credits, just as disadvantaged group members anticipated. However, after

commonality-focused contact, although disadvantaged group members expected a more equal distribution of credits, advantaged group members were just as biased in this condition as in the difference-focused condition. This effect is consistent with theories of group position indicating that advantaged groups are motivated to maintain their power (Blumer, 1958; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Furthermore, whereas members of advantaged groups may support equality in principle, which likely corresponds to an attitudinal outcome of favorable contact, they may still demonstrate resistance to creating equality in practice (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Jackman & Crane, 1986).

Taken together, the findings reviewed in this section suggest that experiences of positive, commonality-focused contact can affect how disadvantaged group members view social inequality and their own disadvantage. Because perceiving one's group as disadvantaged is a key predictor of collective resistance (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2008), the impact of contact on such perceptions might work to impede the potential for change among members of disadvantaged groups. Moreover, the harmony created by contact, as reflected in improved attitudes, might predict greater stated support for equality among members of advantaged groups, but not necessarily egalitarian actions. Implications of this work for designing contact interventions and future contact research are discussed in the next section.

Conclusions

In this chapter we provided a framework for understanding how power relations impact the dynamics of intergroup contact. Traditionally, contact research has granted limited attention to the ways in which differences in group power impact the dynamics of intergroup contact. For over fifty years, the assumption seems to have been that advantaged and disadvantaged group members alike benefit from contact that is generally pleasant and focuses on goals that the groups share in common. Consistent with this view, contact interventions were typically constructed to diminish power differences between groups during the intergroup encounter. The research reviewed in this chapter demonstrates a number of key points regarding the intersection of power and intergroup contact.

First, advantaged and disadvantaged group members bring different *goals and preferences* to intergroup contact. Whereas members of both groups may see benefits in a focus on communalities, the desire to address differences in power is typically stronger among members of disadvantaged groups. A primary implication of these findings is that the perspectives of *both* advantaged and disadvantaged group members are important to consider when studying and designing intergroup encounters. A focus on cooperative elements can be successful in inducing a pleasant atmosphere, yet, if it involves no reference to power, it might better serve the interests and goals of members of advantaged groups than of members of disadvantaged groups. Thus, if intergroup contact is solely focused on commonalities – such as having Palestinians and Israelis work together on joint projects (see Maoz, 2011) or play soccer together on the same team (Peres Center

for Peace, 2008), members of disadvantaged groups might end up feeling that the interaction was less satisfying, productive, or worthwhile than advantaged group members.

Second, the findings reviewed in this chapter suggest that the harmony created by positive contact, in the form of improved attitudes, might inadvertently impede chances for change toward equality. The orientations of both disadvantaged and advantaged groups can contribute to this “irony of harmony.” Harmony-inducing strategies can turn disadvantaged group members’ attention away from social inequalities and lead them to view the advantaged group as generally fair and egalitarian. Both of these outcomes can lead disadvantaged group members to relax their efforts to promote change toward equality. At the same time, for members of advantaged groups, improved attitudes resulting from positive contact do not necessarily translate into more egalitarian intergroup behavior (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004).

Future research might examine the processes through which intergroup harmony impedes egalitarian actions on the part of advantaged groups members. One possibility is that when intergroup relations are positive, members of advantaged groups feel less urgency to make changes in the social system. Having positive interactions with the disadvantaged may have helped them to fulfill their needs to feel accepted and to have their moral image restored (Shnabel et al., 2009). Positive interactions in which members of the disadvantaged group appear content may also reduce advantaged group members’ concerns about social inequality and make actual egalitarian behavior seem less necessary.

Future work might also examine the effects of commonality-focused contact over time, especially among members of disadvantaged groups. Disadvantaged group members may at first become optimistic about group relations through positive contact and the advantaged group’s benevolence. In the longer term, however, disadvantaged group members may become “disillusioned” if repeated positive contact experiences do not correspond to achieving any real change. In addition, their situation might actually stagnate or get worse rather than improve if members of the advantaged group feel no pressure or urgency to be truly egalitarian. This cycle of events could in turn produce greater distrust, disillusionment, and resentment, which might eventually fuel more extreme forms of conflict. This possibility points to the potential fragility of harmony created by contact that focuses merely on commonalities, and to the need to develop interventions that would help achieve both improved intergroup attitudes and greater steps toward social equality.

It is important to note that the findings reviewed in this chapter do not indicate that commonality-based contact *necessarily* undermines efforts toward equality. The critical factor likely involves the nature of the positive contact and how this intergroup harmony is achieved. For instance, although an emphasis on commonalities that are unrelated to social inequalities may deflect attention from group disparities, common identities structured around a sense of morality and shared humanity would likely bring illegitimate disparities to light. Such a commonality focus could also motivate members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups to

work together to eradicate social inequities. But, we wish to highlight that, both theoretically and practically, an emphasis on commonality and intergroup harmony in and of itself does not necessarily lead to intergroup equality (see Dixon et al., 2007).

In conclusion, the work reported in this chapter joins recent accounts in integrating intergroup contact with insights from work on social change (Dixon et al., 2005; Dixon et al., 2010c; Reicher, 2007; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). There are many clear positive consequences of optimal contact on intergroup attitudes, and these effects have been shown to generalize across context and time (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Nevertheless, solely promoting more harmonious relationships can distract attention away from inequity and impede, in the long run, fundamental structural changes in society. Recognition of this potential contradiction between the positive attitudinal outcomes of contact and the motivating factors for social change is of crucial importance when considering the wide implementation of contact interventions (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Paluck & Green, 2009). If such interventions inadvertently work to undermine efforts toward social change, they may, ultimately contribute to the stability of status relations and the corresponding manifestations of social inequality and injustice. Understanding the complexity and range of consequences of what is typically considered “optimal” contact is thus essential for creating a society that is both inclusive and just in structure and practice, not only in principle.

Note

1. We use the terms “advantaged” and “disadvantaged” to refer to differences between the groups in power and/or status. Whereas differences in group power often involve differential control over valuable resources (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), differences in group status could be also symbolic and involve differential prestige and value associated with each group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By using the terms advantaged and disadvantaged, we refer to differences in the relative position of each group within the social hierarchy (Bobo, 1999), which could be due to power, status, or as in most intergroup contexts, both.

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