

**How Social Categorization Shapes Intergroup Contact:
Implications for Understanding Group Members' Subjective Experiences and
Prospects for Achieving Attitude Generalization**

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of processes and conditions that may enhance or diminish the degree to which outcomes of intergroup contact will generalize, along with addressing many ways in which social categorization may shape intergroup contact. We review research linking intergroup contact to social categorization, including both its original emphasis on attitude generalization and a more recent focus on categorization at the subgroup and superordinate levels. We also consider the salience of multiple social categories during intergroup contact, in terms of both how people see themselves and how social identity complexity shapes contact process. We then examine social categorization and intergroup contact in contexts of social division, where certain social categorizations are especially likely to be salient and influential for shaping relations between groups. We conclude with reflections on directions for future research that can enhance our understanding of social categorization and social division in the intergroup contact literature.

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Since early theorizing by Williams (1947) and Allport (1954), decades of research have shown that contact among people from different social groups can be effective in reducing prejudices between the groups (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011). Intergroup contact is generally understood to be effective in reducing prejudice not only because it improves attitudes towards the individual outgroup member with whom contact occurred, but because the improved attitude toward the individual outgroup member generalizes and is applied to the outgroup as a whole (Boin et al., 2021; Brown et al., 1999; González & Brown, 2003).

Nonetheless, some scholars have questioned the regularity with which contact effects should be expected to generalize, particularly when contact occurs in contexts of social division or ongoing conflict between groups (see Mousa, 2020; Paluck et al., 2019; Tropp, 2015). These perspectives call for a more comprehensive examination of processes and conditions that may enhance or diminish the possibility that outcomes of intergroup contact will generalize, and understanding the many ways in which social categorization may shape intergroup contact is key to addressing such questions. In this chapter, we first review well-established theory and research linking intergroup contact to processes of social categorization, with its original emphasis on attitude generalization and a more recent emphasis on categorization at the subgroup and superordinate levels. Next, we highlight early and emerging perspectives focused on how people may perceive and relate to others when multiple social categories are salient during intergroup contact; here, we consider how people both may see themselves in relation to multiple social categories, and the implications of such identity complexity for intergroup contact. We then review research and theory on processes of social categorization and intergroup contact in

contexts of social division, where certain dimensions of categorization are likely to be especially salient and determinative for shaping relations between groups. Finally, we conclude the chapter with reflections on directions for future work that can enhance our understanding of processes associated with social categorization and social division in theory and research on intergroup contact.

Basic Processes of Social Categorization and their Relevance to Intergroup Contact

Social categorization is at the heart of intergroup relations, because the social categories to which we belong, and the groups with which we identify, shape our perceptions, attitudes and behaviors toward other social groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People tend to categorize themselves and others as members of social groups—for instance, as members of racial, ethnic, gender, and age groups, among others—based on perceived similarities with fellow group members and perceived (or presumed) differences from members of other groups (Bruner, 1957; Turner et al., 1987; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Along with seeing ourselves as members of particular social groups, we also adopt the norms and values of our groups as a means of reducing uncertainty about our place in the world (Hogg, 2000), and we look to our groups for information about how to act and what to think (Abrams et al., 1990), and as sources of pride and esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Decades of theory and research highlight the important role of social categorization in fostering prejudice reduction and improved intergroup attitudes through intergroup contact (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005 for an extensive review). A primary thrust of this work has focused on the process of *attitude generalization*: when members of one social group have positive contact experiences with members of another social group, the positive attitudes they develop toward the individual outgroup members they encountered tend to generalize toward the entire outgroup,

including outgroup members who were not present during the contact. Many studies have demonstrated this generalization process in relation to positive intergroup contact (Boin et al., 2021; Brown et al., 1999; González & Brown, 2002), and some studies have begun to examine generalization processes in relation to negative intergroup contact (Meleady & Forder, 2019; Stark et al., 2013). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, there has been considerable debate regarding the extent to which social categorizations should be salient when people from different groups engage with one another, to yield desirable and generalizable outcomes of intergroup contact (see Brewer & Gaertner, 2003; Miller, 2002).

Minimizing salience of social categories. Given that salient social categorizations in and of themselves can produce ingroup-favoring biases (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Brewer and Miller (1984) argued that researchers should aim to minimize the salience of social categories during intergroup contact to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup attitudes. According to these authors, intergroup contexts should facilitate the extent to which members of different groups can come to know each other as unique individuals, rather than inducing people to perceive each other merely on the basis of social category membership. By reducing the salience of social categories through a process of personalization (Miller, 2002) or de-categorization (Ensari & Miller, 2001), people in the contact situation should then begin to recognize the great variability that exists among members of each group, thereby rendering group membership less relevant to social perception and reducing the propensity for intergroup biases to be activated during contact. Consistent with this view, many studies show that when greater attention is focused on the unique characteristics of participants in the contact situation (rather than on group differences that exist between them), participants tend to express less intergroup bias (Brewer et al., 1995; Marcus-Newhall et al., 1993; Miller et al., 1985; Ensari & Miller, 2001). Relatedly,

increasing perceived out-group variability has also been shown to predict a decrease in intergroup bias (Er-rafiy & Brauer, 2012; Brauer & Er-rafiy, 2011).

Still, despite research supporting for this model, its prevailing focus on personalization and de-categorization has been met with some critiques. Scholars have noted that lab-based studies seeking to test the effects of diminished category salience during contact still require social categories to be salient to some degree, relying on characteristics or apparel that signal group membership (Vivian et al., 1997). Moreover, if people in any given contact situation were seen solely as individuals and not in terms of social categories, then any positive shifts in attitudes emerging from the contact should be unlikely to generalize because—in the minds of the participants—the contact experience would have been represented as one between individuals rather than as between members of distinct social groups (Rothbart & John, 1985; Weber & Crocker, 1983).

Enhancing salience of social categories. In light of such critiques, Hewstone and Brown (1986) emphasized that social categories must be salient in the contact situation for shifts in attitudes to generalize from positive encounters with individual outgroup members to transformed attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole. Using manipulations that enhanced the salience of social categories—either through having an experimenter refer to group membership (van Oudenhoven et al., 1996), or through having participants interact with a highly typical and representative member of the outgroup (Brown et al., 1999)—these authors showed that heightened social category salience corresponded with more positive intergroup attitudes. Hewstone and Brown (1986) added that intergroup contact should be especially likely to reduce prejudice between groups when social categories are salient yet not threatening; preserving the salience of social categories while acknowledging (i.e., differentiating) each group's strengths

can minimize potential threats to the value or distinctiveness of each group's social identity (Jetten & Spears, 2003).

Sequencing the salience of social categories. Considering their benefits and pitfalls, Pettigrew (1986; 1998) integrated these approaches to social categorization by introducing a temporal dimension. He suggests that, when people from different groups first meet, the salience of social categories should be minimized so they can get to know each other as individuals through personalized contact. Then, once initial cross-group trust and rapport have begun to grow, social categories should be reintroduced and made more salient, so that any positive intergroup attitudes growing from the contact between individual members of different groups will be more likely to generalize. Pettigrew's approach has received empirical support from several studies (Binder et al., 2009; Christ et al., 2010; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Levin et al., 2003); importantly, his approach also considers people's subjective experiences during contact, recognizing that emphasizing group differences at the early stages of cross-group interaction may induce feelings of anxiety and threat (see Dovidio et al., 2016; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

Dual Categorizations: Considering Superordinate and Subordinate Groups in Contact

Whereas early debates about the salience of social categories tended to focus on a single categorization at a time (Brewer & Gaertner, 2003), later approaches sought to restructure social categorizations in intergroup settings, toward more inclusive representations of social groups (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Introducing salience of a superordinate social category. Following the same principles guiding earlier discussions of social categorization and ingroup-favoring biases in the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Gaertner and Dovidio reasoned that a shared social category—that is, a recognizable, common group identity that includes people from two distinct

groups—should foster more positive intergroup attitudes toward former outgroup members at this higher, superordinate level of categorization (i.e., re-categorization; see Gaertner et al., 1989; 1993; 2000). Numerous studies lend support for this view, showing that intergroup prejudice can be reduced when people construe others in the intergroup contact situation as part of one large superordinate category, as compared to when they are perceived as representing two or more subgroups (Dovidio et al., 1997; 1998; Gaertner et al., 1999). Nevertheless, some scholars have noted that studies supporting this model did not always test for generalization and may have only showed reduced prejudice within the contact setting itself (e.g., González & Brown, 2003).

Making subgroup and superordinate social categories salient simultaneously. Some concerns associated with the re-categorization approach emphasize that, in real life, a variety of psychological and socio-political factors might make it difficult—or undesirable—to ignore or abandon subgroup identities (Huo et al., 1996). Taking such concerns into account, scholars have advocated for a dual identity strategy, whereby both the more inclusive, superordinate category and the original subgroup categories would be made salient (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a); emphasizing both the superordinate and subgroup categories simultaneously during contact should maintain the value and distinctiveness of subgroup identities while facilitating the generalization of positive intergroup attitudes through the shared superordinate categorization. Supporting this approach, experimental research by Hornsey and Hogg (2000b) shows that making both subgroup and superordinate categories salient leads to lower intergroup prejudice as compared to when only the superordinate category is made salient.

Multiple Categorizations: Perceiving Others in Relation to Several Group Memberships

Through the lines of inquiry outlined above, researchers have made great strides in identifying how processes of social categorization function during intergroup contact. Yet despite

all the progress made, the extant literature remains far from providing us with a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature and experience of social categorization in contact settings. With the increasing globalization and diversity of human societies, it has become all the more evident that people always belong to more than one social category at any given time. Correspondingly, research on the implications of perceiving and holding multiple group identities has grown substantially in recent years (see Nicolas et al., 2017), yet the role of multiple categorization has received only limited attention in intergroup contact research (see Dovidio et al., 2017). In this section, we review literature on multiple categorization in the contexts of social perception and intergroup contact, toward the goal of clarifying pathways to the generalization of positive attitudes when contact occurs between groups. Research in these areas has centered around two scholarly traditions, including studies of crossed categorization on the one hand, and studies of intersectionality on the other (Nicolas et al., 2017). We will briefly describe research from each tradition in the paragraphs that follow, before raising some open questions regarding multiple social categorizations in intergroup contact research.

Crossed categorization. Early research on crossed categorization was inspired by observations in anthropology suggesting that intergroup tensions can be attenuated when there are cross-cutting group memberships and allegiances among members of society (Gluckman, 1955)—a sentiment captured well by T. S. Eliot, who wrote that “everyone should be an ally of everyone else in some respects, and an opponent in several others, [so that] no one conflict, envy or fear will predominate” (cited in Gluckman, 1955). The first experimental studies testing the effects of crossed categorization on intergroup attitudes were conducted in late 1970s (e.g., Deschamps & Doise, 1978; Doise, 1978); in a typical crossed categorization study, two dimensions of social categorization are crossed to create four attitude targets: double ingroup,

double outgroup, and two partial ingroup targets. Studies using this paradigm typically show that adding a cross-cutting dimension of social categorization improves intergroup attitudes, as compared to evaluating targets on the basis of a single outgroup categorization (Crisp & Hewstone, 2000; Mullen et al., 2001); moreover, studies have revealed that the baseline pattern of effects is an additive one, such that double ingroup targets are typically evaluated most positively, and double outgroup targets most negatively, with the two mixed targets (ingroup on one dimension, outgroup on another dimension) falling in between (Migdal et al., 1998; Urban & Miller, 1998). Research in this tradition also shows that deviations from this additive pattern might emerge when certain categories come to dominate social perception (Crisp et al., 2003; Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Urban & Miller, 1998). Recent methodological advances have further improved the ecological validity and applicability of research in this area, by allowing for studies to be conducted in more realistic settings, with more diverse samples and greater numbers of real-life dimensions for categorization (Nicolas & Fiske, 2023; Grigoryan, 2020a; 2020b; Grigoryan et al., 2022; 2023; Hooijsma et al., 2021; Prati et al., 2021).

Intersectionality. While often used to refer simply to the intersection of social categories (e.g., Cole, 2009; Grzanka et al., 2020), the concept of intersectionality emerged from Black feminist studies to highlight how social categories such as race and gender are not isolated entities, but rather relational ones that mutually construct social perception and intersect with systems of power and oppression (Crenshaw, 2017; Collins, 2015). Studies of intersectionality in psychology tend to focus on how social categories intersect to shape social perception, including intersections between race and gender (Galinsky et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2012; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; Sidanius et al., 2018), race and sexual orientation (Remedios et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2017), and race and social status (Freeman et al., 2011; Penner & Saperstein, 2013). In line

with theorizing by Crenshaw (2017) and Collins (2015), such studies demonstrate how specific category memberships mutually construct each other and give rise to new, emergent stereotypes, rather than reflecting an additive combination of stereotypes from the original, constituent social categories. In recent years, several conceptual models have also been proposed to explain the social cognitive processes involved in the formation and perception of intersectional categories (Freeman & Ambady, 2011; Hall et al., 2019; Petsko et al., 2022) and their implications for social perception and evaluation (Grigoryan et al., 2023; Grigoryan, in preparation).

Multiple categorizations in social perception and intergroup contact effects. Despite these many advances, there has been limited conceptual or empirical integration of work on multiple categorization in social perception within the realm of intergroup contact. As such, many open questions remain. For instance, some studies have shown that the higher the number of shared group memberships, the more positively an individual will evaluate another person (Grigoryan, 2020a), yet we know little about how multiple salient social categorizations may shape prospects for achieving the generalization of positive intergroup attitudes. Moreover, future research should consider how the salience of multiple social categories in the minds of interaction partners—and whether certain category memberships may become more prominent in their minds relative to others—might shape how interactants engage with each other, as well as their resulting intergroup attitudes and behavior. Addressing these kinds of questions would greatly improve our understanding of how multiple dimensions of social categorization are not only perceived—but experienced—during intergroup contact, thereby enhancing the applicability of our findings to real-life contact settings and providing valuable insights about how to design effective interventions for improving attitudes and relations between groups.

Multiple Categorizations: Seeing Oneself in Relation to Several Group Memberships

Beyond focusing on multiple categorization through the lens of social perception, greater research attention is also needed to understand people's subjective experiences during contact when multiple social categories are salient. How people choose to identify themselves, and which social category memberships they choose to highlight during contact, can have important implications for intergroup relations (Brown, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, the constellation of social categories with which group members identify can meaningfully contribute to their own well-being and sense of belonging (see Haslam et al., 2016; Jetten et al., 2014), along with shaping propensities toward conflict with members of other groups (see Brewer, 1993; Schmid & Hewstone, 2010).

Research and theory on social identity complexity (SIC; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) emphasizes that while all people belong to multiple social groups, they vary in terms of the nature and cognitive representations of the groups with which they identify. For some people, the social categories and groups with which they identify are quite varied and largely unrelated, whereas for other people, the social categories and groups with which they identify are aligned and highly overlapping. Accordingly, social categories vary in terms of (a) the perceived or presumed similarity between the typical members of each, and (b) the perceived or presumed extent to which membership in each social category is shared, such that being a member of one would likely also mean being a member of another. When the categories with which people identify appear to overlap a great deal (e.g., being American, White, and Christian; see Devos & Banaji, 2005; Schildkraut, 2011), SIC is low; when SIC is low, memberships in different social categories may be seen as reinforcing each other, and perhaps even representing a single compound social category that is less inclusive, due to minimal perceived differences across the

constituent groups. By contrast, when the categories with which people identify appear to overlap little (e.g., being American, Asian, and Catholic), SIC is high, such that people tend to have a more variegated view of the social categories to which they belong (Prati et al., 2021; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Differing conceptions of SIC have been shown to carry important implications for intergroup relations. People with high SIC—that is, who identify with multiple distinct social categories—typically exhibit greater open-mindedness, higher levels of intergroup tolerance, and stronger endorsement of multiculturalism, as compared to those who identify with fewer or more overlapping social categories (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012; Miller et al., 2009). Moreover, higher SIC tends to be associated with greater readiness to engage in intergroup contact and more positive feelings toward members of other social groups (Schmid et al., 2009; Maloku et al. 2019).

Further research has also sought to clarify the processes by which SIC may contribute to the tendency for intergroup contact to promote positive, generalizable intergroup attitudes. When members of different groups engage with one another through contact, they learn more about each other in terms of both the many personal characteristics they possess and the many other social categories to which they may belong. As they begin to know each other better across repeated interactions and over time, they may also come to realize that people who are considered part of an outgroup based on one social identity (or social category) may simultaneously be recognized as part of an ingroup in relation to another social identity (or social category). This recognition can encourage people to acknowledge the diversity present within their own ingroup and the outgroup (Brewer, 2008); thus, intergroup contact may not only shape people's cognitive representations of the individual outgroup members they encounter, but it

may also transform how people view the complexity of their own social identities (Schmid et al., 2009). Such shifts in cognitive representations of social categories growing from intergroup contact can, in turn, contribute to more positive, generalizable intergroup attitudes (Schmid & Hewstone, 2010).

These associations between SIC, intergroup contact, and positive generalization of intergroup attitudes closely parallels the process of “deprovincialization” coined by Pettigrew (1997). Whereas provincialism refers to perceiving and understanding the world from the perspective of one’s own small community, deprovincialization refers to “removing provincial blinders” (Pettigrew, 2010; Verkuyten et al., 2022), in that people learn to reappraise their own groups as they come to know and shift their attitudes toward other groups. As stated by Pettigrew (2010), “Deprovincialization allows one to respect, even admire, other peoples and cultures while looking at your own group in a new and more complex way” (p. 325). Connecting SIC to the concept of deprovincialization, Brewer (2008) similarly suggests that the more complex conception we have of our social identities, the less likely we are to rely on any single social category for how we view ourselves or others in the world. Pettigrew (1997; 2010) also argues that intergroup contact is a key process through which people not only change how they evaluate other groups, but that it can also lead people to re-evaluate their own groups, often spurring the recognition that the norms, customs, and lifestyles of one’s own group may not be the only valid or acceptable way to navigate the social world. In support of Pettigrew’s hypothesis, Verkuyten et al. (2010) observed that native Dutch participants who reported greater positive interethnic contact endorsed multiculturalism more than those who reported less interethnic contact.

Social Categorization and Intergroup Contact in Contexts of Social Division

Issues related to social categorization and social identity complexity are especially relevant to consider in contexts of social division. Original theory and research on social categorization in the realm of intergroup contact (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Turner et al., 1987) focused mainly on deriving testable predictions based on seemingly universal, transitive principles that could be applied from one intergroup context to the next. Such an approach made sense given social psychology's turn toward basic cognitive processes in the late 1970s and 1980s (see Billig, 2002), and it has yielded useful insights regarding the general processes of categorization in stereotyping and social perception (e.g., Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Turner et al., 1987; Zárate & Smith, 1990). Nonetheless, by seeking to identify principles that govern how social categorization shapes the generalization of contact outcomes, insufficient attention was granted to understanding how the nature of intergroup relationships, and features of the broader societal context, would likewise contribute to shaping contact's effects (Cikara et al., 2022 ; Pettigrew, 2021; Wagner et al., 2008).

Social and political contexts marked by some degree of social division are likely to shape group members' experiences and processes of social categorization in several notable ways. As conflicts between groups become more extreme, the intergroup conflict itself becomes a primary lens through which people perceive others and interpret events, such that the group identities serving as foundations for social division are likely to be chronically salient, and to be bolstered by collective memories and narratives about how ingroup members have been aggrieved and victimized, and which allow people to see their own groups in a positive light (Bar-Tal, 2007). Due to ongoing tensions between groups, contexts of social division can make negative intergroup encounters more likely to occur (Tropp, 2015), which may in turn lead to the

avoidance of future opportunities for intergroup contact (Meleady & Forder, 2019). Moreover, negative intergroup experiences can strengthen the salience of social categories, thereby reinforcing existing social divisions and heightening the possibility that negative intergroup attitudes will generalize (Paolini et al., 2010). Similar trends may be observed in contexts of social division rooted in violence and civil conflict between groups (e.g., direct violence) and those rooted in systems and structures that perpetuate inequality between groups (e.g., structural violence; see Galtung, 1996), as we note in the paragraphs that follow.

Social division borne of violent intergroup conflict. Violent intergroup conflicts tend to be fueled by negative interdependence between groups, whereby bases of identity and resources available to one group are threatened (or perceived to be threatened) by the presence or actions of another group (Deutsch, 1949). Such conditions of competition and threat stand in direct contrast to the optimal conditions of cooperation and common goals often proposed for achieving positive outcomes from intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), and they can perpetuate distrust and hostility between groups (Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2002), along with bolstering support for intergroup violence (Bar-Tal, 2007). Given these tendencies, it is understandable that voluntary patterns of segregation between groups are still common in post-violent conflict settings (e.g., Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Tredoux & Dixon, 2009). If and when members of conflicting groups begin to express openness to engaging with one another, safety concerns remain paramount, as people may be putting themselves at risk by attempting to travel from one community to the other (Institute for Conflict Research, 2005). Moreover, conflicts between groups can present challenges for community leaders who seek to support bridging and reconciliation across group lines, as their status and legitimacy as respected authorities may be questioned by the groups they represent (Hogg, 2001), and their role in

representing the interests and identities of their own groups typically takes precedence over supporting cross-community relations (Bekerman, 2009).

Social division borne of structural inequality. Structures that reinforce and perpetuate inequalities between groups can also produce differences in contact effects among dominant and minoritized groups. Given the regularity with which members of minoritized groups encounter discrimination and are exposed to prejudices regarding their groups (Swim et al., 2003), their minority status is likely to become chronically salient (Pinel, 1999) and to serve as a lens through which they view and experience relations with the dominant group (Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Whether encounters with discrimination are experienced personally, or instead target their groups overall (Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994), members of minoritized groups may understandably grow distrustful and vigilant in relations with the dominant group (Tropp, 2008). Consequently, relative to the effects commonly observed among members of dominant groups, positive shifts in attitudes growing from positive intergroup contact may be less likely to generalize among members of minoritized groups (Binder et al., 2009; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Tropp, 2007), whereas negative shifts in attitudes growing from negative intergroup encounters may be more prone to generalize (Tropp, 2003; Hayward et al., 2017). Structural inequalities also present special challenges for contact intended to improve relations between groups. Although traditional perspectives on contact would advocate for establishing equal status between groups in the contact situation (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Williams, 1947), the concept of equal status can be defined in varied ways (Riordan, 1978), and members of dominant and minoritized groups may diverge substantially in their views about what true equality would mean, or the degree to which equality might actually be achieved (see Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Foster & Finchilescu, 1986; Lewis, 2021).

Understandably, greater levels of intergroup violence and inequality should present considerable challenges to the prospect of achieving salutary outcomes from intergroup contact, as such features of the intergroup context are likely to heighten the salience of group divisions and sustain higher levels of intergroup threat (Kende et al., 2018; Tropp, 2015; Wagner & Hewstone, 2012). Nonetheless, despite these challenges, many studies have shown encouraging, generalizable effects of intergroup contact in divided societies, and across a wide range of societal contexts (e.g., Burrows et al., 2022; Dehron et al., 2022; Grady et al., 2023; Kende et al., 2022; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Morhayim et al., 2023; van Assche et al., 2023). Growing research suggests that such trends may be possible due to buffering effects of intergroup contact (Paolini et al., 2014); positive contact occurring prior to negative intergroup encounters or outbreaks of intergroup violence may help to sustain positive intergroup attitudes during turbulent times (see, e.g., Árnadóttir et al., 2018; Biro et al., 2004; Kende et al., 2022). Yet more research is needed in divided contexts to understand how people perceive each other in terms of complex social identities and multiple social categories—beyond those that define the most salient divisions between groups—and how positive views and social ties can be maintained across group lines when intergroup relations are strained due to societal forces.

Concluding Section and Final Thoughts

In this chapter, we have sought to link theoretical perspectives on social categorization and social division to inform our understanding of conditions that may enhance or diminish the prospect of achieving desired, generalizable outcomes of intergroup contact. As we conclude this chapter, and based on the literatures reviewed, we wish to offer some reflections about priority areas for future research, to promote greater conceptual integration and coherence about how

social categorization—as perceived and experienced—contributes to shaping contact outcomes in divided contexts.

Priority Area 1: Investigate simultaneously the experiences and effects of salient social categorization during intergroup contact. First, more work is needed to clarify if, when, and how social categories should be emphasized and made salient during intergroup contact. In part, the issue of social categorization demands research attention for the purposes of predicting attitude generalization, as had been proposed in earlier work (e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1984; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). More broadly, however, greater attention is needed to understand how salient social categorizations may affect group members' experiences during contact, as well as to account for potential differences in perspective on social categorization among members of dominant and minoritized groups. On the one hand, efforts to heighten the salience of social categorizations and group identities carry the risk of inciting intergroup anxiety or animosity toward members of other groups (Greenland & Brown, 1999; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). On the other hand, a lack of reference to meaningful social categorizations may not satisfy group members' need to have their distinct subgroup identities valued and acknowledged within a broader superordinate group (Eggins et al., 2002; Tropp & Bianchi, 2007; Vanbeselaere, 1991).

Complicating the issue further are differences in the expressed preferences for how relations between groups are represented among members of dominant and minoritized groups. Considerable work now suggests that dominant groups tend to prefer singular representations of superordinate categories, where all parties are merely regarded as part of a one large group; by contrast, members of minoritized groups tend to prefer representations that highlight both their distinct subgroup identities and their inclusion in the larger superordinate category (Dovidio et

al., 2007; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). These preferences for group representations within superordinate categories also correspond with group members' ideological orientations and conceptions of diversity (Dovidio et al., 2009; Hahn et al., 2015; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Members of dominant groups tend to favor colorblind ideologies that align with support for assimilation, through which the salience of group differences is downplayed in favor of a focus on cross-group commonalities; instead, members of minoritized groups tend to favor multicultural ideologies that align with support for diversity, through which subgroup differences are explicitly acknowledged and valued (Dovidio et al., 2016; Plaut et al., 2011; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Ryan et al. 2007). Given these trends, more work is needed that simultaneously considers (a) group members' concerns about and preferences for how groups and social categories are represented when they engage in contact with other groups, and (b) implications of how groups and social categories are represented during contact for the generalization of positive intergroup outcomes.

Priority Area 2: Specify how complex identities and multiple social categorizations can be incorporated into research and theory on intergroup contact. Second, further research should consider how complex identities and multiple forms of social categorization function in intergroup contact, both in terms of how they are perceived and how they are experienced. To test basic processes associated with social categorization, early intergroup research typically examined the effects of making one social category salient at a time (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1971). Yet this approach typically isolated people's identities as members of one group from any other social identities they might hold, and the broader constellation of social categories with which they might identify (see Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Turner & Onorato, 1999). More research is therefore needed to understand the effects of perceiving and holding

multiple group identities simultaneously during intergroup contact. Fruitful directions for this future work might involve greater integration of work from the social identity perspective that distinguishes between social categories that may become salient due to features of the social context, and those that may remain psychologically salient across contexts due to their enduring importance or relevance to the group members involved (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Building upon earlier research on the perceived importance of intergroup contact (van Dick et al., 2004), it is also possible that certain group identities or social categories would be regarded as more important or relevant depending on how people perceive the social context itself (Stets & Burke, 2000), and their degree of fit with (or distinctiveness from) others within that social context (Turner et al., 1987). Furthermore, it is possible that highlighting the salience of multiple social identities simultaneously could alter the effects of intergroup contact on attitude generalization (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), or the buffering effects of intergroup contact in contexts of social division (Paolini et al., 2014). We believe all these directions would be worthwhile to pursue in future research, as they have great potential for extending and refining existing frameworks in the intergroup contact literature.

Priority Area 3: Focus on outcomes of intergroup contact beyond attitude

generalization. Debates about the role of social categorization in intergroup contact have typically centered on the generalization of positive experiences and attitudes toward the encountered individual into transformed attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole. Given the multi-dimensional nature of intergroup contexts, we join others in suggesting that researchers move beyond thinking about prejudice reduction—or, the generalization of positive intergroup attitudes—as “the” sole desired outcome of intergroup contact (*cf.* Dixon & Levine, 2012; Tropp & Mallett, 2011). Rather, we suggest that researchers incorporate a variety of outcome measures

in studies of intergroup contact, to broaden the scope and implications of contact research (see Tropp & Morhayim, 2023 for a related argument). This expanded lens could compel researchers to consider simultaneously the implications of intergroup contact for social cohesion and support for social change (Dixon & Levine, 2012; Tropp & Dehrone, 2023), along with encouraging them to consider potential differences in starting points and end points that mark people's transformations on these indicators, and degrees of change in relation to each (Tropp & Morhayim, 2023). Such an approach may be particularly important when examining the effects of intergroup contact in divided societies where a primary social categorization divides groups and paramount concerns are likely to involve questions about whether the intentions of outgroup members can be trusted, whether future reconciliation may be possible, and whether there is any hope for the prospect of more peaceful relations between groups (Cohen-Chen et al., 2014; Morhayim et al., 2024; Tropp et al., 2017). Similarly, a multi-faceted approach to measuring contact outcomes would be beneficial when conducting studies in highly complex and diverse societies, where groups may be stratified into different status positions, and where multiple social identities and dimensions of difference are likely to be salient. In such contexts, crucial questions may instead involve how contact shapes willingness to tolerate or engage with difference (Kauff et al., 2021; Verkuyten & Yogeewaran, 2017), and how contact contributes to feelings of belonging in diverse contexts (Abellera, Kende et al., 2021), and whether such contact effects vary for differentially positioned groups depending on the outcomes assessed.

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