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Ellemers N.; Scheepers D.; Gilbert, D.T.; Fiske S.T.; Finkel, E.J.; Mendes W.B.

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Intergroup Relations: The Level, Content, and Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict Between Groups

Naomi Ellemers, Utrecht University

Daan Scheepers, Utrecht University and Leiden University

Cooperation between individuals and representatives of different groups has been identified as a key factor in the evolution of most species. In this context, humans stand out because of the broad range, geographical distance, and wide scale at which such cooperation is sustained, even across group boundaries (Apicella & Silk, 2019; Fehr & Schurtenberger, 2018; Melis & Semmann, 2010). Institutional provisions that support cooperation between groups by formalizing social norms and regulating their enforcement are general pre-conditions for social development. Indeed, organizing cooperation between members of different groups is indispensable for individuals to survive and thrive in modern day societies. Groups need to coordinate their efforts, for instance to control and combat pandemic diseases or to secure access to key resources, such as water, food, or energy sources. Additionally, cooperation and exchanges of knowledge and goods across different cultures, nations, and professional groups help to develop new technologies that mitigate and adapt to climate change, to cope with the challenges of migration, or to secure physical well-being and economic prosperity over time (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2023; Rand & Nowak, 2013; Zelenski et al., 2015). For this reason, the emergence of conflictual versus cooperative relations between groups in society is a key issue of political and scholarly interest (Fiske, 2002). A broad range of scholars in the social sciences and humanities—ranging from philosophers, legal scholars, and political scientists, to anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists—all highlight the relevance and far-reaching implications of understanding intergroup relations.

This chapter provides an overview of intergroup relations from a social psychological perspective, highlighting the psychology of 'us' versus 'them'. Three features of intergroup relations will guide the presentation of the wealth of knowledge on this topic: The *level* of explanation, the *content*, and the *dynamics* of intergroup relations.

First, as any social psychological phenomenon, intergroup relations can be understood from individual level explanatory variables (e.g., personality, frustrated individual needs) as well as group-level explanatory variables (e.g., relative group-status, historical relations between groups;

e.g., Pettigrew, 1958). In their theories and studies, scholars have focused either on these more individual-level or group-level factors, characterizing the level of explanation of intergroup relations.

Second, regarding the content of intergroup relations, approaches emphasizing instrumental concerns can be distinguished from identity- and morality-based approaches (Halevy & Landry, 2023; Scheepers et al., 2006b). Researchers addressing the former perspective point to the key role of material outcomes and access to scarce resources as more 'objective' and instrumental concerns underlying intergroup relations. Researchers emphasizing the latter perspective point to the way groups and their membership offer opportunities for moral elevation, perceived status, and social esteem, as more 'subjective' and symbolic outcomes. Consideration of this difference informs the content of cooperative vs conflictual relations between groups.

Finally, to fully understand intergroup relations it is necessary to go beyond the observation of current outcomes and consider the broader historical context that reveals how relations between groups and their members are subject to change over time. Current issues may reflect past interdependencies (e.g. a colonial history) that no longer exist. Likewise, the social implications of certain group memberships (e.g., based on gender) may change over time. These changes in the ties between individuals and groups, and in relations between groups illustrate the dynamic character of intergroup relations.

These different features characterizing intergroup relations—and the way these are studied —will structure the narrative of this chapter across four sections. In this first section the field's historical background is sketched as the starting point of scholarship on these features. The next section outlines the main themes, concepts, phenomena and theories characterizing the psychology of intergroup relations, followed by a section highlighting emerging evidence and recurring themes in ongoing research. The final section of this chapter details how these insights can be applied in interventions aiming to improve intergroup relations. Each of these sections can be read independently of each other. Together, they are meant to offer a broad overview and general introduction to the extensive literature on intergroup relations.

Revisiting The Classic Studies

To understand where theory and research on intergroup relations originated and how recurring themes developed over time, the review starts by reconsidering several classic studies on this topic. Over the years, these key studies have become part of collective knowledge. They have inspired further scholarly efforts and have led to the design of often-used interventions. Indeed, their research paradigms and their striking outcomes have found their way into several types of media and textbooks used to train a broad variety of professionals. Nevertheless, these accounts highlight only a small selection of broader observations or over-simplified caricatures of the classic studies.

This chapter therefore starts by considering these studies' generative insights. Inspired by real-world social problems at the time, the studies continue to influence scholarly thinking over many years. The original and engaging nature of this work explains why it is still considered today as the intellectual foundation for the scientific study of intergroup relations. These classic studies are often presented as clever methodologies allowing researchers to reveal people's natural tendencies and ugly sides of human nature. In retrospect, the research instructions induced additional

considerations and implicit guidelines that may have been the real cause of these effects—shedding light on the contextual and social factors driving intergroup relations.

Our critical evaluation is meant to offer a deeper understanding of which processes and phenomena these studies revealed—and to eliminate common misconceptions about this. Identifying the common themes and features of these studies explains why they are still relevant for the contemporary psychology of intergroup relations and its applications. The current review of these classic studies highlights the three recurring themes that characterize different explanatory approaches and guides the review of insights that emerged over time.

Emergence Of Intergroup Aggression: Beyond Individual Differences

At Yale University, in 1961, *Stanley Milgram* (1963) made an early attempt to understand the social contextual origins of aggression between groups in society. Born in 1933 from Jewish parents originating in Eastern Europe, Milgram was interested in understanding aggression of the Nazis against Jews during the Holocaust (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). He conducted his seminal studies around the same time that Adolf Eichmann was put on trial in Jerusalem, to account for his role in arranging the deportation of Jews to death camps in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In media reports at the time, the Eichmann trial and the Milgram studies were often considered conjointly as attesting to the willingness of ordinary people to inflict harm on others. The Eichmann trials revealed the *banality of evil*, in the words of philosopher Hannah Arendt. Likewise, Milgram's obedience studies demonstrated how easily ordinary people can be induced to inflict harm on others (Reicher & Haslam, 2017).

Milgram's research paradigm examined people's propensity to inflict harm on unknown individuals. However, the studies were meant to explain the more general origins of aggression against members of other groups. In fact, Milgram's original plan was to examine how people across the world differ in their willingness to inflict harm on others when ordered to do so. He meant to use the aggression levels among USA participants as a baseline, i.e., as a standard against which to compare the behavior of people in other nations—for instance Germany. This resonated with the psychodynamic perspective, which was still salient in psychological analyses at the time, when it was common to explain discrimination as stemming from an authoritarian personality disorder (Adorno et al., 1950) or from aggression triggered by frustration (Dollard et al., 1939).

In Milgram's experimental setup, research participants were placed in the role of teacher, who had to check and control the performance of confederates playing the role of learner working on a memory task. Teacher participants were instructed by another confederate in the role of experimenter to punish the learner with electric shocks whenever they made mistakes in correctly recalling word pairs they had supposedly memorized. With every new mistake, the teacher was instructed to increase the shock level using a control panel starting at 30 volts and potentially going up all the way up to 450 volts.

Before running these studies, Milgram described the setup to a sample of people including psychiatrists and college students. When asked to indicate whether they would be willing to administer intense shocks in this context, no one said they would go to the maximum level of 450 volts. However, once Milgram placed research participants in the role of teacher, all of them proceeded to administer electric shocks of this intensity. Although the learner confederate protested his treatment and claimed to suffer from a heart condition, most participants were

inclined to follow instructions from the experimenter confederate to adhere to the prescribed procedure.

Later variations on this basic paradigm revealed that this behavior depends on many conditions. These moderated the willingness of research participants to administer apparently harmful shocks, stopping at levels between 0% and 90%. Variations determining the shock levels administered included the physical proximity of the learner, the identity of the person instructing participants to deliver electric shocks, and apparent (dis-)agreement among confederates in the role of experimenters. Thus, these studies document not only that aggressive behavior can be elicited more easily than many people prefer to think. They also show (a) that it is easier to inflict harm on others when they are separated from us by their social roles and group memberships, and (b) that people are guided by (both personal and social) norms and values and are motivated to do what they think is right in a particular situation (Reicher & Haslam, 2017).

Another early attempt to understand the origins of conflict and aggression between members of different groups was made by *Phil Zimbardo*, in the classic Stanford prison experiment. This research too was conducted against the background of real-world experiences with escalating intergroup violence—in this case taking place in the context of prisons. In 1971, correctional officer John Mills, who had shot three black inmates in Soledad Prison, California, was murdered by Black Panther George Jackson. Jackson in turn was shot dead after his conviction by correctional officers in San Quentin State Prison. This cycle of events raised questions about the psychology of correctional officers and catalyzed large-scale riots, leading to the death of 33 inmates and 10 guards in Attica Correctional Facility in New York State (Haslam & Reicher, 2012).

To study the psychology of correctional officers, Zimbardo created a mock prison in the Psychology Department at Stanford University. He recruited normal, healthy college students and randomly assigned them to the roles of prisoners and guards. His aim was to examine how this situation would impact their behavior—irrespective of their personality and individual character (Zimbardo, 1971; 2004). Although the study was planned to last two weeks, it had to be aborted after six days, due to the extreme abuse that guards displayed, and the extreme distress prisoners showed as a result. This study became famous for displaying the power of situational roles and group memberships in eliciting interpersonal antagonism and aggression.

Later analyses questioned the extent to which these responses emerged spontaneously and suggested they may have been quite contrived. For instance, it turned out that the experimenters initiated several interventions, provided props for abuse (chains, bags), and even offered specific instructions to exacerbate mutual grievances and intensify feelings of frustration (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Further, a later study (Carnahan & MacFarland, 2007) suggests that college students volunteering to participate in a study on prison life may have different personality profiles than students volunteering for other types of studies. Notwithstanding these later amendments to what initiated the rapid escalation of conflict and aggression between groups, some core findings have withstood the test of time. In fact, an attempt to re-create key features of the situation Zimbardo examined under more controlled circumstances after many years (the BBC Prison Study) underlined the power of his basic research design (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). These data confirmed the key conclusion that artificially clustering people into separate groups can invite them to develop their own identity and mission, and result in mutual antagonism and the use of force against each other. However, the BBC Prison Study also illustrated that the ultimate effects of these more generic group processes are influenced by the norms of the time. For example, in the BBC version of the study, the prisoners—rather than passively accepting their subordinate role—started to revolt,

causing physiological stress among members of the dominant group, i.e., the guards (Reicher & Haslam, 2006).

Pursuit Of Desirable Outcomes: Beyond Interpersonal Interactions

The Summer Camp studies, also known as Robbers Cave studies, constitute another type of classic study that has been influential in the development of scholarship on intergroup relations. This project consisted of a series of three field experiments, conducted between 1949 and 1954, by a research team led by Muzafer Sherif and his wife Carolyn Wood (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Sherif et al., 1961). This work was also clearly inspired by the personal experiences of the lead researcher. Being from Turkish origin, Sherif's early life experiences included imprisonment in Turkey for criticizing Nazi Germany, and pursuit by Greek soldiers who tried to kill him. After moving to the USA, he witnessed changing relations between groups due to racial desegregation and the rise of the Civil Rights movement. All these experiences motivated him to understand the origins of increasing nationalist sentiments and intergroup antagonism and how to curb these at the onset of the Cold War (Platow & Hunter, 2012).

The original aim of these studies thus was to examine the conditions that would give rise to intergroup conflict and cooperation, and how these develop over time, due to the (changing) functional relations between groups. As participants in their Summer Camp studies, the researchers selected relatively homogeneous groups of white Protestant 11 to 12-year-old schoolboys of normal character and family background to attend a three-week summer camp at different locations in the United States. During these three weeks, the researchers examined dynamic changes and the development of different types of relations within and between groups, during the different group phases guided by the experimenters. The three weeks highlighted mechanisms relating to group formation, the emergence of intergroup conflict, and finally the reduction of antagonism between groups once it was established.

During the first week of camp, the experimenters formed groups by deliberately cutting across spontaneous interpersonal friendships the boys had formed during the first days of camp. Each group engaged in a number of activities that required them to work together toward shared goals (e.g., finding a hidden treasure; building dams and shelters), develop a shared conception of self (e.g., by creating and using group names: Red Devils, Eagles) and allowed them to develop distinctive group norms (e.g., being tough, not expressing home sickness).

During the second week, the boys were confronted with the other group. The two groups were induced to compete in sports tournaments, tent-pitching, and song contests. This quickly resulted in mutually negative evaluations of the other group (characterizing them as sneaky, stinkers, or smart alecs) and escalated into hostile behavior, such as the exchange of insults, fights, raiding each other's cabins, or stealing and burning each other's flags.

The third week was intended to examine whether and how such intergroup hostility might be reduced. One way of exploring this was by organizing shared activities to allow the two groups to connect with each other in the context of an attractive activity (eating, watching a movie, or setting off fireworks together). However, at this stage, merely providing opportunities for positive intergroup contact proved insufficient to elicit friendlier interactions and even offered new opportunities to express hostility. Instead, friendlier and more cooperative interactions emerged only after the experimenters had introduced some common enemy (in a tournament against a team outside the camp) or a superordinate goal that required collaboration across groups (repair the

camp's water supply, collect money needed to watch a movie, pull the food truck up a hill). The latter type of interventions successfully reduced mutual aggression, and they even resulted in mutual support, helping behavior, and friendship by the end of the third week, which also ensured an ethically acceptable conclusion to the camp. The two groups eventually performed skits and songs for each other on the last night of camp, used prize money they had won to buy drinks for losers, and cheered when they were put on the same bus home.

The reasoning summarizing these findings is commonly referred to as realistic group conflict theory (Jackson, 1993; Levine & Campbell, 1972). It refers to the notion that groups tend to develop friendly or hostile relations depending on whether access to valued resources can be gained through cooperation or competition between the groups. Over the years, further evidence that these conditions and key mechanisms can elicit ingroup love and outgroup hate has been obtained with various research populations and study designs examined in different contexts (e.g., Brown, et al., 1986; Esses et al., 1998; Platow & Hunter, 2012).

Nevertheless, later analyses and interviews with participants after many years revealed that the conflict may have been exacerbated by the experimenters. For example, by photographing acts of aggression instead of intervening, and by recording instead of punishing transgressive behavior, the experimenters failed to set boundaries to displays of hostility between the groups (Billig, 1976; Platow & Hunter, 2012). In fact, one study in the series was terminated prematurely because the boys realized they were being manipulated by the camp staff. Thus, the hostility between the two groups should not be seen as inevitable or spontaneous.

One reason that Sherif's studies became classics is because they so convincingly attested to the psychological significance of groups. This was driven not only by realistic conflicts over prizes or coveted resources, but also by the symbolic meaning afforded by flags, group names, and other distinctions made between 'us and them'. This is how the groups acquired meaning and afforded purpose to these boys, by defining and shaping self-views and relations with others in the situation. In this sense, the groups were prototypical and essentialistic, comparable to e.g., soccer teams and -fan groups, i.e., groups that are also defined by goals pitting them against each other (winning games) as well as identity cues (colors, logos, songs). Moreover, the Summer Camp studies illustrated the psychological power of groups beyond the individual-level characteristics or interpersonal interactions of the boys. That is, initial friendships or opportunities for positive contact did not have similarly powerful effects.

The ongoing significance of this work also stems from the fact that it illustrated the dynamic and context-dependent nature of intergroup relations, how goals and group affiliations change over time. Thus, these studies also attest to the power of social context and changing conditions in establishing conflictual or cooperative relations between groups. As a result of this, they can also inspire interventions meant to reduce intergroup hostility, in line with the original motivation of the researchers to understand how to create peaceful and productive relations in dynamic societies (Haslam, 2018).

Self-Defining Groups: Beyond Interdependence

A third line of classic studies concerns the path-breaking work of Henri Tajfel in the development of social psychological insights on intergroup relations. As a student of chemistry in Paris, he was called into the French army at the start of the Second World War. He was captured by the Germans, but they never realized that he was born as a Polish Jew, allowing him to survive a series

of prisoner of war camps. After the war he discovered he had lost nearly all his family and friends. These life-changing experiences prompted him to start studying psychology, to better understand how the fates of individuals are tied up with their group identities.

The classic studies Tajfel developed are commonly referred to as the 'minimal group studies' (see also Brewer, 1979; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969). Tajfel's original aim was to experimentally create the most basic conditions in which all features that are known to invite conflict between groups, such as a history of antagonism, are stripped away. After this, his plan was to gradually build up the situation, adding different features one-by-one, to be able to specify the critical conditions that produce conflict between groups (Tajfel et al., 1971).

In the minimal group studies, research participants were completely anonymous and were placed in separate cubicles to prevent face-to-face interaction. They were then randomly assigned to experimental groups, allegedly based on their performance on a dot-estimations task, or their alleged preference for abstract images painted by Klee or Kandinsky. Subsequently, they allocated small amounts of monetary rewards to others, but never to themselves. By means of the so-called 'Tajfel matrices', which presented different outcome trade-offs, participants were forced to choose between reward allocations that would benefit a member of their own group, the other group, or members of both groups. In this way, Tajfel and colleagues sought to differentiate among different strategies that could be followed in the allocation of resources. For instance, participant choices could be seen to seek fair outcomes for all, or to result in maximum differentiation between the groups—even by sacrificing ingroup outcomes (Otten, 2016; Spears & Otten, 2012).

Results indicated that when research participants were allocating rewards, they tended toward fairness, but in situations where they had to make a distinction, they systematically favored ingroup over outgroup members. In fact, differentiating between the groups per se proved more important than awarding maximum outcomes to other ingroup members.

Tajfel and his co-workers were puzzled by this phenomenon in search of an explanation (Spears & Otten, 2012). Initially, Tajfel proposed that these results could be explained by a generic norm. That is, he argued that research participants had learned to favor their ingroups in more naturalistic settings and now simply applied this norm to the minimal group context (see also Iacoviello & Spears, 2018). Ultimately this explanation proved unsatisfactory: One can explain every behavior by inferring that this must represent a norm, but the question remains of where this norm came from in the first place.

Other explanations for the minimal effect have focused on instrumental factors such as self-interest and interdependence (Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Misch et al., 2021; Rabbie et al., 1989; Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000). Although in the classic minimal group paradigm people cannot allocate money directly to themselves, based on the principle of 'bounded reciprocity' (Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000), they can expect other ingroup (but not outgroup) members to allocate money to them. In anticipating this, they might be prompted to allocate money to other ingroup members. In line with this explanation, studies in which the interdependence structure was explicitly manipulated show that ingroup favoritism is substantially reduced, and can even turn into outgroup favoritism, when research participants are made dependent upon the outgroup for their material resources (Rabbie et al., 1989).

Despite the validity of such individual-level and instrumental explanations, these can account less well for the finding that ingroup favoritism in the minimal group paradigm also occurs along other dimensions than making (monetary) resource allocations. For example, ingroup favoritism was also

shown when points instead of money had to be allocated (Turner, 1975). Moreover, ingroup favoritism also occurs in the minimal group paradigm when rating ingroup and outgroup members on positively and negatively valanced personality traits, or when evaluating the creative products allegedly made by ingroup or outgroup members (Jetten et al., 2004; Scheepers et al., 2002). There is even evidence showing that people form mental images of the faces of ingroup and outgroups members in the minimal group paradigm, and that independent raters rate the ingroup faces more favorably than the outgroup faces (Ratner et al., 2014).

Over the years, attempts to explain the minimal group effect have therefore also included cognitive mechanisms. A dominant approach in this work is the 'search for meaning' after categorization in what were initially relatively meaningless social categories (see also Fiske, 1993). That is, people use social categories and group memberships to afford meaning to complex social situations, and guidance on how to behave (e.g., Turner, 1985). In his early work on intergroup relations and social categorization, Tajfel had already drawn upon the analogy with categorization as a sense-making strategy in the perception of objects (Tajfel, 1969). The later social identity explanation of the minimal group effect was based on this motive for meaning making, in combination with the motive for self-enhancement. Specifically, Tajfel proposed that social categorization is always self-relevant as the consideration of any group in society immediately raises the awareness of the self either being included in or excluded from that group. The implications of the self (not) belonging to that group is determined through social comparison with other groups, which in turn provides meaning and value to one's group membership. This eventually results in a social identity, i.e., '...the part of an individual's identity that is based on their group membership, along with the emotional significance of the group for the self' (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63; see also Brown, 2000; 2020; Haslam et al., 2010).

The motivational part of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how people strive for positive and meaningful social identities: needs that are being met when one's ingroup is positively distinct from relevant outgroups. In line with this motivational assumption, ingroup bias, i.e., the tendency to display one's group in a particularly favorable light, is reflected in higher self-esteem and certainty (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Moreover, the search for meaning can also explain why ingroup bias is particularly strong when the group is relatively indistinctive and bears (yet) relatively little social meaning (Jetten et al., 2004; Scheepers et al., 2002; Shah et al., 1998; Spears et al., 2002; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2011).

Alongside this dominant explanation for the minimal group effect, over the years other cognitive explanations have also been proposed. A prominent view is provided by the self-anchoring approach (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Otten & Wentura, 2001). Following this rationale, people take their own personal self-concept as a starting point to evaluate others around them. Hence, they project their self-concept onto the group prototype. Moreover, because people typically have a positive view of themselves, this self-anchoring tendency can also be used to explain ingroup bias (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005).

With research evidence supporting the plausibility of all these mechanisms, the minimal group effect seems overdetermined (Spears & Otten, 2012). After decades of research on the minimal group paradigm, the conclusion is that multiple motivational processes are involved (meaning making, self-projection, self-enhancement, self-interest), and that different mechanisms can come to the fore depending on the specific context, procedures, or tasks (e.g., resource allocations versus more symbolic judgments), as well as the phase the group is in (group- formation versus performance; Pinter & Greenwald, 2011; Scheepers et al., 2006b).

One of the reasons the minimal group paradigm has become so popular and well-known is the experimental control it offers, undoing groups from a past and specific meaning. Moreover, the paradigm is relatively easy to apply, whether in online studies or fMRI research (e.g., Morrison et al., 2012). Precisely because of their empty character, minimal groups are ideal tools for studying intergroup relations in their most basic sense, and the most basic psychological processes involved in a relatively isolated manner. Despite instrumental motivations playing a role, research in this tradition has in this sense also been important for demonstrating the symbolic aspects and identity-based functions of ingroup bias.

Conclusion From This Section

When scholarship in social psychology started to address intergroup relations, existing interpretations explained intergroup conflict and hostility from deviant personalities and individual-level character traits, the experience of frustration in goal achievement, or aversive interpersonal interactions. Subsequent studies in the field—which are now considered classics—highlight the influence of the broader social context and characterize intergroup competitiveness as part of normal psychological functioning that is not irrational or deviant. In this way, all studies discussed in this section show the power of the social context and social roles (e.g., in Milgram's obedience study) prompting individuals to emphasize differences between groups (Stanford prison experiment; summer camp studies; minimal group studies).

Thus, a first conclusion from these classic studies is that intergroup relations cannot be fully understood from intrapersonal frustrations, interpersonal deviance, or intragroup liking—all highlighting individual-level mechanisms. Instead, these explanations should be complemented by group-level factors such as social roles, group norms, or collective outcomes, to draw a complete picture of the psychology of intergroup relations. The remainder of this chapter will refer to the distinction between individual- vs group-level explanations as indicating the 'level' addressed by explanatory mechanisms in the social psychological study of intergroup relations. Second, these studies have illustrated the distinction between different conceptions of the content of inter-group relations. Here, the summer camp studies addressed tangible material resources as a relatively objective reason for conflict and cooperation. Yet similar behaviors were also elicited by appealing to more symbolic social concerns. These were raised in studies appealing to specific (professional) roles (Milgram's obedience study, Stanford prison study) or to more abstract group-based identities (in the minimal group studies). From now on, the distinction between instrumental concerns about objective resources and symbolic identity concerns will be referred to as indicating the 'content' of concern in intergroup relations.

Third, these studies also highlight the dynamic character of intergroup relations. This is most obvious when the same study procedure is repeated after many decades: for instance, the propensity toward obedience in the original Stanford studies versus resistance in the later BBC prison studies. Additionally, the dynamic nature of intergroup relations also comes to the fore due to concrete changes in the immediate intergroup situation. Classic studies reveal this by inducing different goal relations or by experimentally shifting social categorizations (summer camp studies; minimal group studies). The propensity of changes over time to impact on the way people perceive and respond to the current situation will be referred to as indicating the 'dynamics' of intergroup relations.

A critical examination of the classic studies has helped to identify these three features of intergroup relations. Additionally, the reconsideration of these early methodologies and findings reveals that some of these features are present in a study that has become famous for another feature. For those who look closely, the Milgram study also highlights the importance of social norms and morality in the willingness to inflict pain, the summer camp studies also reveal the role of symbolic and identity aspects of group memberships in fueling intergroup conflict, and the minimal group studies also demonstrate the power of interdependence in prompting ingroup favoritism. The next sections of this chapter will continue to refer to the level, content, and dynamics of intergroup relations to organize and discuss relevant insights.

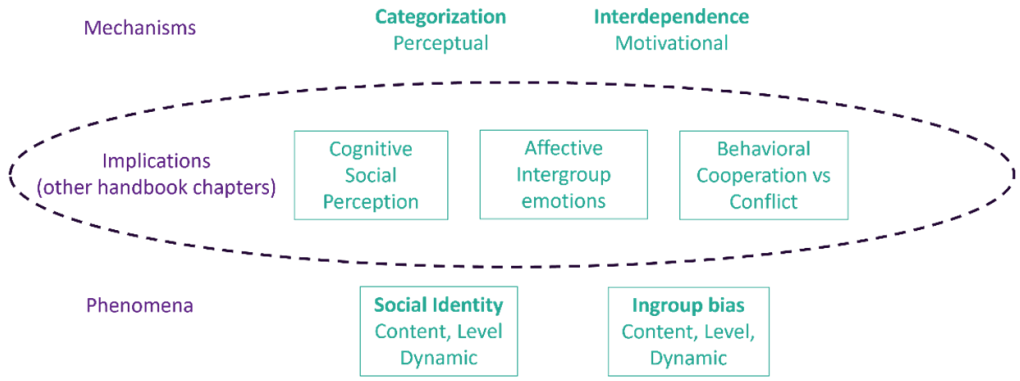
A final note on these classic studies is that they were all motivated by the personal experiences and social concerns of leading scholars in our field. Their concerns with intergroup conflict, and maltreatment of large numbers of individuals simply because of their group membership were guided by major historical events, such as the Holocaust during World War II, or racial segregation and civil rights movements in USA society. Their interest in analyzing and explaining real-life issues led these scholars to seek experimental control over situational features or small-group interactions while doing bold and complicated experiments in socially rich and highly realistic settings. In keeping with the spirit of these pioneers the final section of this chapter will highlight implications of further theorizing and emerging insights for effectiveness of different types of interventions. It will specify key mechanisms of interest, based upon the examination of real-life issues and impact studies in different social situations and longstanding intergroup conflicts.

RELEVANT VARIABLES AND PHENOMENA

The Building Blocks Of Intergroup Relations

To facilitate comprehending the rich, complex, and dynamic nature of intergroup relations, including all its phenomena, theories, and applications, first consider its most basic elements, interdependence and social categorization, as social-psychological building (see Figure 1).

***Figure 1*: Relevant Mechanisms and Phenomena**



Interdependence

Social groups are typically defined in terms of *interdependence* among individuals to reach certain goals, such as completing a project at work, winning a game with a sports team, or obtaining social change with a protest group. Kelley and Thibaut (1959) specified this basic conceptualization of the social group further in terms of social exchange, i.e., the instrumental behaviors among group members to obtain certain outcomes. This also closely relates to the concept of *common fate* that can bind individuals (Campbell, 1958; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969), that is, the realization of 'being in the same boat' sharing the same destiny.

Understanding social groups in terms of interpersonal interdependence to reach common goals fits well with an evolutionary account of the origins of group living. More specifically, working together in groups to obtain positive outcomes (finding food) and avoid negative outcomes (defending food against hungry outgroups) has been one of the core factors in the development as humans as a species throughout history (Harari, 2015; Henrich & Muthukrishna, 2021). To coordinate the behavior of group members toward such common goals, groups developed additional features, such as a division of roles, a hierarchical structure, core defining norms, and a shared sense of morality indicating how group members are expected to behave (Ellemers, 2017; 2018). The need for coordination and the development of these other group aspects became particularly necessary when groups grew larger (De Dreu et al., 2023; De Waal 2006).

Groups do not require other groups to function or even exist (Balliet et al., 2014). Yet, the principle of interdependence in itself can explain the emergence of ingroups and outgroups, and the resulting intergroup relations, even in the absence of clearly defined group identities. A fascinating illustration of this phenomenon is provided by an agent-based modeling study, showing how ingroups and outgroups can emerge in just '80 lines of code' (Gray et al., 2014). In this mathematical simulation, individual agents interacted with each other, guided by just two principles: reciprocity and transitivity, the latter principle referring to the idea that 'the friends of my friend are my friends, and the enemies of my friends are my enemies'. Over the course of multiple hypothesized interactions among the agents, clear ingroup and outgroup clusters emerged by following these rules, demonstrating that pre-formed, meaningful social categories with clearly defined identities are not needed for intergroup relations to originate: Purely interpersonal processes can be sufficient for ingroup and outgroup differentiation to arise (see also De Dreu et al., 2023; Fu et al., 2012).

The basic principles underlying cooperation in groups do not only apply to small, interactive groups but have, over the ages, allowed for cooperation in larger social units, such as nations (De Dreu et al., 2023). With expanding group sizes, intergroup encounters—and conflict—became more likely, as bigger groups require more resources, potentially resulting in more scarcity and conflict with outgroups (De Dreu et al., 2020). At the same time, larger groups resulted in increasing complexities in forming alliances, for example knowing whom (not) to trust. These challenges were met by further psychological, group-dynamic, and institutional developments. That is, the need for coordination led to the evolution of a set of specific psychological processes aimed at tracking alliances (Boyer et al., 2015; Brewer & Caporael, 2006; Cikara, 2021) as well as the development of group norms, cultures, and morality, and the formation of institutions, such as governance and a judicial system (De Dreu et al., 2023; Ellemers, 2017; 2018). The psychological process facilitating the coordination of cooperation represents the second main social-psychological building block of intergroup relations: social categorization (Cosmides et al., 2003; Kurzban et al., 2001; Pietraszewski, 2021; Platow et al., 2012).

Social Categorization

Whereas interdependence refers to a bottom-up process through which groups emerge from interpersonal interactions, social categorization characterizes a top-down process through which groups that seem relevant guide perceptions of and interactions between individuals. In its most basic sense, social categorization is a special case of a more general categorization process that also applies to objects (e.g., distinguishing tables from chairs as different types of furniture). The basis of social categorization is a perceived similarity, or a defining attribute shared by some individuals but not others, whether it is being left-handed to being a Yankees fan.

A primary psychological function of (social) categorization is creating meaning in an otherwise unstructured and chaotic world (Bruner, 1957; Tajfel, 1969). To facilitate meaning-making, people tend to exaggerate differences between categories and underestimate differences within categories. This helps to perceive clear—and clearly distinctive—social categories, even if these group-based perceptions don't always accurately render specific features of individual group members (Tajfel, 1969; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963; see also the principle of 'meta-contrast ratio' in self-categorization theory; Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Social categorization also results in the perception of ingroups and outgroups. Indeed, as the next section will elaborate in more detail, other than object categorization, social categorization is always self-relevant. That is, when categorizing people into groups, the self always belongs to either one of these groups or to a third outsider group. This in turn forms the basis of a more elaborate sense of social identity, also involving a clear picture of the essence of the group, as well as emotional meaning attached to group membership.

In addition to these relatively basic psychological functions (meaning making, identify formation), social categorization is also functional in deciding whom to trust more (e.g., ingroup members) or less (e.g., outgroup members). This way, perceiving the social world in terms of 'us', vs. 'them', helps forming alliances and coordinating action in interdependent situations (Balliet et al., 2014; De Dreu et al., 2020 Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Platow et al., 2012; Rabbie, 1993; Wit & Wilke, 1992). Just imagining what a sports game would look like with two teams wearing exactly the same outfits helps to illustrate how cues of social categorization facilitate easy and quick cooperation within groups and competition between groups.

Closely related to the distinction between interdependence and social categorization as basic principles underlying group formation is the conceptual and theoretical distinction between 'social groups' and 'social categories' (Lewin, 1936; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1988). Although social groups are primarily defined by the interdependence among group members to reach common goals, social categories are primarily defined by people sharing a defining attribute. Despite its importance for analytic reasons, practically speaking the distinction between social categories and groups is often more gradual. For example, although in the most basic sense left-handers lack a clearly defined goal, when facing structural discrimination based on their shared attribute (e.g., lack of availability of suitable tools), left-handers can start experiencing a common fate, and potentially even a common goal of improving their situation (e.g., rooting for the production of such tools) through collective action (see also Platow et al., 2012). Likewise, although a sports team may initially be defined by certain goals (winning games, having fun), gradually the team is likely to develop a certain team culture and identity that goes beyond its basic function (developing distinctive rituals, songs). This again illustrates that a sense of social identity ('who we are as a group') not only develops through

top-down categorization processes but is also maintained bottom-up through social interaction among group members (Jans et al., 2012; Postmes et al., 2005).

In practice, most intergroup situations and phenomena contain both (top-down) social categorization processes and (bottom-up) interdependence processes, although the extent to which these processes play a role still differs from one group to the next and from situation to situation (Johnson et al., 2006). Thus, the essence of the distinction between social groups and categories lies mostly in the primary function that they serve: Although some groups, such as a task group at work, primarily serve interdependence functions to reach joint goals, other group-memberships, such as identifying with a professional soccer team and its associated colors and songs, primarily serve identity functions (offering social meaning, self-esteem).

In summary, interdependence and social categorization form the two most basic building blocks of the psychology of intergroup relations. A sense of interdependence provided humans with the capacity to work together to obtain goals that individuals cannot reach by themselves. Social categorization, dividing the world into us and them, helps coordinating such cooperation, but also serves additional psychological functions, providing emotional value to these groups and meaning to the social world. Interdependence and social categorization emerge in both social groups and social categories.

Intergroup Perception, Emotion, And Behavior

Either in relative isolation or in interaction, interdependence and categorization undergird the social psychology of intergroup relations, which in turn unfolds itself in a wide range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral phenomena (Brewer, 2007a; 2010b; Ellemers & De Gilder, 2020; Hogg, 2013; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019a; Yzerbyt, & Demoulin, 2010). For example, perceiving the world in terms of 'us' and 'them' results in viewing people as more or less interchangeable exemplars of the same category (i.e., stereotyping; Bodenhausen & Cheryan, 2024). Stereotypes have a *content* component, in terms of the typical traits (e.g., slow), behaviors (e.g., playing bingo), and members (e.g., grandparents) associated with a social category (e.g., the elderly). Moreover, stereotypes have a *variability* component referring to the extent to which group members differ in terms of these traits and behaviors (e.g., some elderly still run marathons).

In addition to stereotypes about outgroups, people also have stereotypes about ingroups, which also inform their social identities (see below). Despite similar principles guiding the formation of stereotypes about ingroups and outgroups, a general finding is that ingroups are typically perceived to be more varied than outgroups; i.e., although 'they' are all the same, 'we' are quite different (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992). The perception of group variability is not static, however, but varies as a function of both person variables (e.g., group identification) and contextual variables (e.g., group status, intergroup competition). Although people generally see the outgroup as less varied than the ingroup, this changes under conditions of intergroup competition, when it becomes important to mobilize, close the ranks, and increase cohesion in fighting the outgroup (Doosje, et al., 1995; Simon, 1992). Moreover, members of low-status groups tend to see their ingroup as more varied, as a way of distancing themselves from the group ('we are not all incompetent'), whereas members of high-status groups tend to see the ingroup as more homogeneous, allowing the superiority of the group to reflect on all ingroup members, including themselves. The former tendency (low-status group members seeing the group more varied) is particularly strong among those who only weakly identify with the group, whereas the latter tendency (high-status group members seeing the group

as more homogeneous) is particularly strong among those highly identified with the group (Doosje et al., 1995).

In addition to shaping social perceptions and stereotypes, salient group memberships also partly determine the emotions individuals experience (Mackie & Smith, 2018; Pliskin & Halperin, 2021; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010), as well as their physiological responses (Derks et al., 2013; Scheepers, 2013). For example, observing the wins and losses of (otherwise unknown) ingroup members may be emotionally experienced as if these were their own personal gains and losses. Intergroup emotions theory (Mackie & Smith, 2018) specifies how following social categorization, members appraise events in terms of the interests of the ingroup, but also subjectively experience specific emotions as a result. Consequently, they feel, for example, anger when the ingroup is mistreated (Mackie et al., 2000), guilt when other ingroup members mistreat outgroup members (Doosje et al., 1998; see also later sections on emerging evidence and interventions) or 'collective angst' when the existence of the ingroup is threatened (Wohl & Branscombe, 2009). In line with the appraisal approach to emotions, these group-based emotions, in turn, also determine behavior of individual group members, such as striking back at the outgroup when angry at them, or repairing the harm done to an outgroup to alleviate guilt about transgressions of other ingroup members against the outgroup.

The specific interests of groups, and the specific emotions these interests trigger, depend on contextual factors, such as the relative status of the ingroup or specific features of the outgroup. The biocultural approach (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005) explains how outgroups differ in the threats they are perceived to evoke, in turn triggering matching emotions and action-tendencies. For example, ethnic outgroups that are viewed as threatening important material goals of the ingroup tend to elicit anger and aggression, whereas outgroups that are viewed as violating important moral principles of the ingroup tend to elicit disgust and avoidance.

A related model, the BIAS map, elucidates how different types of groups elicit specific emotions and behaviors. The BIAS map builds on the stereotype content model (SCM), a generic model specifying how stereotypes derive their content along two general dimensions: warmth and competence. Some groups (e.g., the elderly or disabled) are seen as low in competence and high in warmth, while other groups (e.g., rich people, feminists) are seen as high in competence and low in warmth. The SCM also details the emotions that these warmth-competence combinations elicit, which the BIAS map uses to predict behavior. For example, the elderly and disabled (low competence and high warmth) who raise pity gain active help but passive neglect, as when they are institutionalized. For groups stereotypically seen as having high competence and low warmth (rich, Asian, or Jewish people) feelings of envy predict passive cooperation (going along to get along with groups that control resources) but also active harm (mass killing in revolutions—when society breaks down). In contrast to these ambivalent cases, unambivalent admiration for idealized citizens (in the case of high competence and high warmth), predicts both active and passive help. Finally, for groups characterized by low competence and warmth (such as drug addicts and homeless people), disgust explains why they are actively harmed and passively neglected.

Thus, once an intergroup context becomes salient, people perceive the world through a lens of us versus them, in turn shaping their motives, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. The next paragraphs illustrate this further by zooming-in on two core phenomena in the psychology of intergroup relations: ingroup bias and social identity. In keeping with the more general framework of this chapter, the focus of the research reviewed here is on the specific *content* of ingroup bias and social identity (instrumental vs symbolic) as well as the different *levels* addressed by explanatory variables

(individual vs group). The section concludes by discussing the importance of the dynamics of identification and ingroup bias, indicating how these phenomena operate as a function of psychological or realistic changes in the intergroup situation—to address the *dynamics* of intergroup relations.

Ingroup Bias

One of the primary consequences of thinking in terms of us and them is the tendency to see one's group as more positive than relevant outgroups (Balliet et al., 2014; Bettencourt et al., 2001; Böhm et al., 2020; Brewer, 2007a; Hewstone et al., 1992; Mullen et al., 1992). This tendency can be accompanied by more elaborate positive stereotypes of the ingroup and/or negative stereotypes about the outgroup, as well as by its behavioral manifestations in terms of favoring the ingroup (ingroup favoritism) and/or derogating the outgroup (discrimination).

Ingroup bias is a universal phenomenon. For example, Romano et al. (2021) examined the extent to which people are willing to cooperate with ingroup members, outgroup members, and unclassified strangers. Specifically, participants played prisoner dilemma games with others who either belonged to the participants' national ingroup, a national outgroup, or with a person of unspecified nationality. Cooperation with ingroup members, compared to outgroup members and strangers, was higher across 39 out of 42 nations across the world, with only a little cultural variation in the strength of bias.

Other research has addressed cultural variations in ingroup bias comparing trait ratings and resource allocations in the minimal group paradigm (Falk et al., 2014). For instance, American individuals showed a stronger ingroup bias than Japanese individuals, which was partly explained by the higher self-esteem among Americans. Moreover, although Americans showed a strong ingroup bias across a variety of measures, the ingroup bias shown by Japanese participants was smaller, and emerged in trait ratings in particular. Together, these results indicate a universal tendency toward ingroup bias, even though there may be cultural variation due to, for example, the specific group context (minimal versus naturalistic groups) and measures used (resource allocations versus trait ratings).

Forms of ingroup bias

In addition to the *modality* of ingroup bias (e.g., perception versus behavior) and the *direction* of ingroup bias (favoring the ingroup or derogating the outgroup), ingroup bias can also take different *forms*. Singing glorifying songs about one's soccer team, rating ingroup members more positively on specific traits, or exclusively selecting ingroup members for an important task-group can all be seen as expressions of ingroup bias. In considering the variety of forms of ingroup bias, in a more general sense a distinction can be made between *symbolic* forms of ingroup bias (e.g., singing ingroup-glorifying soccer chants) and *material* forms of ingroup bias (e.g., favoring ingroup members above outgroup members in the allocation of resources; Scheepers et al., 2006a, b).

The broad range of ways in which ingroup bias can be expressed, in terms of its forms and modalities, is also a factor in why intergroup attitudes are often ambivalent (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984). For example, group members may cooperate with outgroup members on a task, but still judge ingroup contributions as more crucial than outgroup contributions for the success on the task (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). Alternatively, a White person may use positive (e.g., athletic) as

well as negative (lazy) traits to describe Black people. In addition, people often are willing to admit that their own group has negative characteristics, but still show ingroup bias in subtle ways, for example, by ascribing more importance to positive ingroup dimensions and negative outgroup dimensions (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984). We return to this tendency in the final section of this chapter, when considering the pros and cons of interventions that may benefit cooperative relations between groups.

Functions of ingroup bias

Variations in the strength of ingroup bias across different contexts and measures can be partly understood in terms of the different *functions* that ingroup bias serves (Scheepers et al., 2006b). On the one hand, the expression of ingroup bias can be functional in mobilizing ingroup members, strengthening cohesion and identification, and increasing effort on behalf of the group, for example when competing with outgroups. In this sense, ingroup bias can serve an *instrumental* function. On the other hand, the expression of ingroup bias may be a means to claim the positive value of the group, which indicates the more *symbolic* identity-expressive function of ingroup bias (Scheepers et al., 2006b).

Different situations trigger different needs and motives. When groups are under threat, for example due to their perceived low status, expressed ingroup bias (i.e., highlighting superior capabilities and unique talents of the ingroup) can serve an instrumental function, in mobilizing and motivating ingroup members to engage in collective action to improve the group's position. By contrast, when groups are positively affirmed, for example through the salience of a high group-status, ingroup bias is more likely to serve an identity-expressive function by claiming, or even collectively celebrating, the group's positive value (Scheepers et al., 2006b).

Different groups have different needs. As noted, social groups are primarily defined bottom-up in terms of interdependence, whereas social categories are defined top-down in terms of perceived similarities between individual characteristics. In line with this, ingroup bias is more likely to serve an instrumental function in social groups than in social categories, whereas social groups and social categories may both raise identity-expressive behaviors (Scheepers et al., 2006b).

Identity and instrumental functions of ingroup bias relate to different forms of ingroup bias. The instrumental function is typically better served by material forms of ingroup bias, that help to strengthen the group, for example when competing against the outgroup (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Scheepers et al., 2006b). By contrast, the identity-expressive function of ingroup bias is typically better served by symbolic forms of ingroup bias (e.g., trait ratings, glorifying songs) that help to claim superiority in a more general, abstract sense (Scheepers et al., 2003; 2006b).

Note that identity and instrumental functions of ingroup bias are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other (Rabbie, 1993; Scheepers et al., 2006b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). On the one hand, reaching instrumental goals (a sports team winning a game) may in turn strengthen group members' social esteem and identity. On the other hand, the expression of social identity during intergroup competition may increase cohesion, identification, and effort on behalf of the group, thereby serving an instrumental function (Scheepers et al., 2006b). This latter finding fits with evolutionary approaches to social identity that have explained the expression of social identity cues in terms of its functionality in coordinating cooperation in groups (Efferson et al., 2008; Park & Van Leeuwen, 2015; Smaldino, 2019; Voorhees et al., 2020).

From ingroup favoritism to outgroup derogation: the role of threat

A robust finding regarding the direction of ingroup bias is that ingroup favoritism is often the default response. Nevertheless, note that this does not necessarily go hand in hand with, or lead to, outgroup derogation (Balliet et al., 2014; Brewer, 1999; Brewer, 2007b; Mummendey & Otten, 1998). However, a main condition under which ingroup favoritism is likely to turn into outgroup derogation is when the ingroup is under threat (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Mummendey & Otten, 1998; Riek et al., 2006). One example of this is when one's group has a stable low status. Under such (hopeless) conditions, just working to improve the ingroup's position may seem unrealistic or is probably not be enough to change things and, as a consequence, direct attacks of the outgroup become more likely ('desperate situations require desperate measures'; Scheepers et al., 2006a; Tausch et al., 2011; Wright et al., 1990).

More generally speaking, intergroup threats can have different sources. For example, among the members of a host society, migrants may be seen as threatening access to *material resources* such as the available houses and jobs (Chang et al., 2016). In addition, migrants may also be perceived as threatening *safety* or health, if portrayed as potential criminals, sexual harassers, or carriers of alien viruses (Ji et al., 2019; Neuberg et al., 2011). Moreover, the actual interaction with outgroup members, such as migrants, may be threatening for a variety of reasons, like uncertainty about the (biased) impression one may make (Mendes et al., 2002; Shelton et al., 2006). Finally, migrants may also bring different cultures, values, and identities with them, which may be experienced as threatening in a more *symbolic* way, for example for the national *identity* shared by members of the host society (Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002). As indicated earlier, according to social identity theory, people strive for positive and distinctive social identities, but both of these aspects of social identity (either its valence or its distinctive meaning) can be threatened. For example, group members may experience *value* threat when the group's status seems low or undermined and *distinctiveness* threat when the group seems too similar to a relevant outgroup.

These diverse threats do not necessarily have to be real to have important consequences. That is, irrespective of its precise source and objective reality, the experience of outgroup threat invites prejudice and outgroup derogation, especially among those who identify strongly with their group (Jetten et al., 2004; Riek et al., 2006; Rios et al., 2018; Stephen et al., 2016).

Sometimes threat is so inherent to an intergroup context that outgroup derogation becomes the default response. An example concerns political identities in highly polarized societies. Under these circumstances, outgroup derogation may become the default, even to such an extent that group members withhold helping the outgroup even when doing this is also costly for the ingroup (Gershon & Fridman, 2022; see also Halevy et al., 2008).

Finally, more implicit forms of out-group derogation may arise even under non-threatening circumstances, as the work by Simon and Gutsell (2020) on dehumanization in the minimal group paradigm showed. The term dehumanization is used to indicate the tendency to see certain people as less human than others, for example by not attributing uniquely human (i.e., secondary) emotions to them (Leyens et al., 2001; Demoulin et al., 2005). Even the minimal group paradigm shows stronger tendencies toward dehumanizing outgroup (versus ingroup) targets (Simon & Gutsell, 2020). Note that in this work dehumanization was measured using an implicit measure, which helps explain why the researchers picked it up, even in a relatively non-threatening minimal group context. One of the reasons why outgroup derogation is less prevalent than ingroup favoritism is the social norm against showing outgroup derogation, although a certain level of

ingroup favoritism may still be socially acceptable (Mummendey & Otten, 1998). The study by Simon and Gutsell suggests that the generally lower prevalence of outgroup derogation, compared to ingroup favoritism, does not necessarily mean that people are not inclined to be biased against outgroups. Rather, it suggests that although people are less likely to show outgroup derogation in more explicit blatant ways, it may still emerge more implicitly and in more subtle ways (see also Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

In summary, ingroup bias concerns the tendency that people favor the groups to which they belong above outgroups, which can have its expression in different ways (trait ratings versus resource allocations) and serve different functions (facilitating group action versus expressing group identity). A distinction can be made between ingroup favoring and outgroup derogatory forms of ingroup bias. Ingroup favoritism can be regarded as the default in intergroup contexts, whereas outgroup derogation becomes more likely when the group is under threat, for example in terms of its resources, safety, or identity.

The next paragraphs turn to a second core phenomenon stemming from an interplay between social categorization and group processes: social identity.

Social Identity Content And Strength

Despite the commonalities between the categorization of physical- and social objects, social categorization has some specific features. One of its most important features is that social categorization always implies the *self*. That is, when categorizing the social world, the perceiver always belongs to one of the two social categories, or to a third (e.g., outsider) category. For example, when observing two crowds of football fans, this may make identification with one of these teams salient, prompt the identification with a third team, or make salient the fact that there is a category of people 'not interested in football'. This feature of social categorization lays the foundation for social identity, i.e., the part of people's identity derived from their group membership.

Social identity has roughly two components: A *content* component and a *strength* component. The content component is formed by the specific norms and features that are central to the group (Turner 1987). In this sense, it closely relates to the process of self-stereotyping, as specified above. The main dimensions of social identity content refer to assessments of *intentions* (morality, warmth) and *competencies* (ability, assertiveness; Abele et al., 2021; Cuddy et al., 2008; Ellemers et al., 2008). These dimensions indicate the content of intergroup relations central to the current chapter, as more symbolic (moral values) or instrumental (achievement ability).

The strength component of social identity is typically referred to as *social identification,* i.e., the extent to which group membership is integrated into the self (Ellemers et al., 1999). Covering both the cognitive and affective (i.e., the emotional significance; Tajfel, 1978) aspect of social identity, social identity theorists have developed taxonomies where social identification has been unpacked in different components, such as self-stereotyping ('I see myself as a member of this group') group esteem ('I feel good about being a member of this group'), and group commitment ('I am willing to invest in this group'; Cameron, 2004; Ellemers et al., 1999; Leach et al., 2008; Roccas et al., 2008).

Social identification is a useful concept because it predicts a range of important phenomena, such as variations in ingroup bias and intergroup polarization. Even though the relationship between identification and ingroup bias is complex, and far from a universal law (Turner, 1999), it can be activated during times of competition or threatening circumstances when a stronger ingroup

identification typically relates to more intense ingroup favoring and/or outgroup derogatory tendencies (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). An illustration of a threatening context that often involved highly antagonistic intergroup situations concerns the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, it has been shown that social identification with one's vaccination status fuels polarization between groups differing on this attribute (Henkel et al., 2022).

Sometimes, a clearly salient intergroup context may be sufficient to turn relatively benign ingroup identification into a negative attitude toward outgroups. National identification may turn into nationalism and, consequently, the rejection of people from other nations, when making comparisons between nations explicitly salient. However, in the absence of these explicit comparisons, national identification can be relatively harmless, as far as outgroup attitudes are concerned (Mummendey et al., 2001).

The relationship between identification and ingroup bias thus depends on the type of group identification considered. Of relevance here is the concept of *collective narcissism*, a form of identification tied to the tendency to exaggerate the positive image and importance of a group to which one belongs (de Zavala et al., 2009). Collective narcissism has been related to overly defensive responses to (threatening) outgroups. Similar responses can be found among *identity-fused* group members (Swann et al., 2009). Identity-fusion concerns a form of alignment with groups in which group members experience a visceral sense of oneness with the group, i.e., their self-image is completely merged with the ingroup image. Identity fusion has been related to the willingness to engage in extreme actions against outgroups, such as terrorist attacks (Swann et al., 2009; 2010). Thus, although the relation between identification and ingroup bias is far from straightforward, the predictive value of identification for explaining ingroup bias is stronger under certain circumstances (clear intergroup situation; threat) and for specific forms of identification (collective narcissism, identity-fusion).

In addition to its darker consequences, however, group identification also has a more benign side. Indeed, higher group identification is related to a stronger willingness to invest effort on behalf of the ingroup, even when the group has been performing poorly, for instance in social or work contexts (Ellemers et al., 2004; Ouwerkerk et al., 2000). Again, the specific type of identification predicts who will be most likely to work towards group goals under these circumstances. Specifically, group commitment, the emotional attachment component of social identification, plays a key role in the extent to which group members remain loyal to the group even when its current social standing is unsatisfactory (Ellemers et al., 1999).

Social identification also relates to several positive health outcomes (Jetten et al., 2009; 2012). For example, a strong social identity can stimulate feelings of social support, thereby forming a buffer against stress (Haslam et al., 2005; Haslam & Reicher 2006). The number of different social identifications one has was found to be positively related to health outcomes – provided these identifications were compatible with each other (Iyer et al., 2009). This is an important precondition: In some cases, the multiple identities people have are seen as incompatible, causing one identity to preclude people from engaging with other important identities. For instance, when women or sexual minorities feel they have to hide or relinquish their 'deviant' identity to be able to be fully accepted in a highly masculine work context, this reduces their access to social support and undermines their ability to cope with stress (Newheiser et al., 2015; Suppes et al., 2021). Having multiple strong group identifications provides more material and social resources to deal with stress, and it also allows one to switch between group memberships, offering resilience—for example when one of these groups is under threat.

In addition to the *strength* of identification, the *type* of identification also matters for predicting health outcomes. The centrality dimension of identification is particularly important for the relationship between identification and coping with stress. *Centrality* concerns the extent to which a certain ingroup is more-or-less chronically salient throughout the day and is a factor in how people respond to ingroup and outgroup events (Leach et al., 2008). Therefore, the extent to which race is central in the identity of ethnic minority group members relates to their likelihood to perceive discrimination, but—also, in turn, buffers against the negative health consequences of this discrimination (Sellers et al., 2003). Thus paradoxically, the centrality of one's racial identity on the one hand enhances sensitivity to race and race-based rejection in one's life, but on the other hand allows targets to seek social support and develop better coping mechanisms to deal with these rejections, that buffer against their detrimental effects for health.

Apart from its stress-buffering properties, another way in which social identification relates to positive health outcomes is through a stronger adherence to positive health behaviors, as long as these are normative for the ingroup. An impressive demonstration of this comes from a study showing that national identification predicted public health support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Van Bavel et al., 2022). Thus, there is nothing particularly 'bad' about social identification. True, extreme forms of identification (collective narcissism or fused identities) may fuel intergroup conflict and discrimination. Nevertheless, identification just as well relates to a range of more constructive and benign outcomes such as the willingness to stay committed and work for one's group, as well as a range of positive outcomes for group members' wellbeing and health, even under adverse circumstances.

In summary, a direct consequence of social categorization is the formation of social identity, the part of people's identity derived from their group membership. Different aspects of social identification can be distinguished (e.g., more cognitive vs affective aspects) which all function as both traits and states. Identification predicts a number of important outcome variables ranging from discrimination to physical and mental health indicators. In addition to the strength of social identity it is also important to consider its content, for example in terms of how warm, competent, or moral the group is perceived to be.

The preceding paragraphs have considered different forms and functions of ingroup bias and identification, which indicate the content defining intergroup relations (symbolic versus instrumental). Symbolic aspects were illustrated by, for example, identity functions of ingroup bias and morality as a primary dimension of social identity. Instrumental (material) aspects were illustrated by, for example, the instrumental function of ingroup bias, competence as a primary dimension of social identity, and the relationship between group identification and the willingness to invest effort in intergroup competition and social change. The next paragraph addresses another principle that guides the review of studies in the current chapter: the distinction between individual and group-level factors explaining intergroup relations.

Explaining Intergroup Relations: Individual And Group-Based Factors

Individual-Level Factors

Ingroup bias and social identification are partly driven by individual needs and motivations. Fiske (2010) highlights five core social motives, and all of these can be related to the motivation to identify with ingroups, or to put the ingroup in a positive light. Obviously, the need to *belong* is directly served by identification with ingroups. Relatedly, people may express ingroup bias and behave in line with group norms also as a sign of group commitment, to gain acceptance as a group member (Coser, 1954; Ellemers & Jetten, 2013; Noel et al., 1995; Romano et al., 2017). Moreover, the creation and expression of social identity serves both the need for *meaning* in life and *self-esteem*. Finally, the needs for *trust* and *control* may be served through engaging with ingroup members based on principles of reciprocity and interdependence to safeguard important goals and material resources that one cannot obtain as an individual. Thus, in this sense, intergroup processes (ingroup bias, identification) are set into motion by core social motivations.

As indicated above, the earliest work in intergroup relations highlighted the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950). Referencing psychodynamic principles, certain authoritarian fixations that can develop in parent–child relationships in early life, are seen to generate identification with authoritarian (fascist) leaders and the groups they represent, later in life. This line of reasoning was thought to help explain individual differences in prejudice toward outgroups. Altemeyer (1998) has further elaborated this thinking, developing the concept in terms of *right-wing authoritarianism* (RWA), a mixture of adhering to conventional values, placing high value on obedience and respect for authority, and punitive attitudes toward those who deviate from conventional values.

Other analyses have focused on individual differences in the extent to which people believe that hierarchy is an inevitable part of human nature, and hence the extent to which power differences between groups are justified. One such analysis focuses on individual differences in *social dominance orientation* (SDO), i.e., '…the general desire to establish and maintain hierarchically structured intergroup relations...' (Sidanius, et al. 2017). Indeed, individual differences in SDO are found to predict a variety of intergroup attitudes, including racism (Pratto et al., 1994) and support for violence toward outgroups (Levin et al., 2003).

The *dual process model* (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009) integrates SDO and RWA in a single perspective comprising both the personality and social contextual determinants of these two ideologies. In this model, RWA is associated with social threats, and perceiving the world as a dangerous place, whereas SDO is associated with perceiving the world as a competitive jungle. In terms of the Big Five personality traits, people high on SDO are also relatively more likely to be toughminded and therefore score low on agreeableness. People high on RWA, by contrast, tend to place high value on social conformity, and are therefore more likely to score low on openness and high on conscientiousness.

Individual difference perspectives focusing on rigidity as a determinant of intergroup attitudes, relate to the focus on conformity and the adherence to conventions that is characteristic for RWA. One classic example is Rokeach's (1954) work on dogmatism. Another example is work on the 'need for cognitive closure' (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009) referring to the epistemic need to be certain about one's knowledge and views. This need for seeing the social world in a simplified, clear way relates to a stronger tendency to stereotype, as well as more positive views about one's own groups and negative views about outgroups (Shah et al., 1998).

Note that despite the stress on individual differences, social dominance theory and the dual process model are not purely reductionistic, in the sense of reducing ideologies and intergroup attitudes to personality traits. Indeed, the dual process model also incorporates contextual variables (dangerous

versus competitive contexts) and in this sense connects to different levels of analysis in explaining intergroup relations. The same applies to SDO which is also influenced by social and contextual variables such as group status (Sidanius et al., 2004). For example, Schmitt et al. (2003) showed that when people compared their ingroup to a lower status outgroup (highlighting the favorable position of the ingroup), they scored higher on SDO than when the same ingroup was compared to an outgroup with higher status, to highlight its less favorable position. Thus, the main asset of these individual difference measures is that they are powerful predictors of a wide variety of key intergroup attitudes and behaviors, more than that they are the ultimate or only root of such attitudes and behaviors. This leads us to consider a second main class of explanatory variables in intergroup relations: Group-level factors.

Group-Level Factors

Many of the individual-level processes driving identification and ingroup bias also operate at a group-level. The need to control (individual) material resources through cooperation in groups – that was elaborated above - can be extrapolated to higher levels of social organization, and securing such resources can become an integral goal of the group (De Dreu et al., 2023; Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Likewise, the motive for a positive self-image at the individual level can be served by showing pro-ingroup behavior to gain respect from ingroup members (Coser, 1954; Noel et al., 1995; Romano et al., 2017), but also at the collective level by positively differentiating the ingroup from the outgroup—thereby obtaining a positive and distinctive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, both instrumental and identity-based goals operate at both an individual and a group level. Another aspect of the group-based nature of intergroup relations is that, in addition to individual-level factors (personality, individual needs), intergroup phenomena are under the strong influence of contextual or socio-structural factors. This influence will be detailed next.

In the research on social identification reviewed so far, identification has often been treated as an individual difference variable, predicting outcomes such as discrimination or health behaviors. Even though interpersonal variations in social identification can be assessed, the strength of identification is not a static trait but also a state that can substantially change from one situation to the next (Doosje et al., 2002). For example, work on the *rejection-identification model* (Branscombe et al., 1999) has shown that the perception of ingroup rejection (e.g., discrimination) can stimulate a stronger group identification to cope with this rejection. Various coping mechanisms (collective action or stressing alternative and more favorable aspects of group membership, referred to as *social creativity*; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) help group members draw together to protect their group-based self-esteem against such negative intergroup comparisons. This, of course, connects to the other work reviewed above, showing how group identification buffers against stress (Haslam et al., 2005; Sellers et al., 2003).

The dynamics of individual levels of group identification are strongly influenced by group-level variables, such as the group's relative status. Generally, people identify more strongly with groups that have a relatively high, compared to low, status (Ellemers, 1993). Indeed, high-status groups directly contribute to a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, when status improvement is possible, members of low-status groups tend to identify as strongly with their group as members of high-status groups do. This is the case when group boundaries are closed (i.e., *impermeable*, making individual status seeking less likely), and when the intergroup status differences are *unstable* and *illegitimate*. In other words, members of low-status groups identify stronger with their group when it is hard to leave the group, when its low status seems unfair, and

when there is a chance that this status can be improved. The stronger identification under these circumstances has been interpreted as being supported by social creativity and as preparing for social change to collectively improve the status of the group (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Similar results have been obtained for ingroup bias. A meta-analysis on the relation between group status and ingroup bias (Bettencourt et al., 2001) demonstrated that members of high-status groups show a stronger ingroup bias than members of low-status groups. However, in line with social identity theory, and the results on identification summarized in the previous paragraph, this relationship was moderated by the permeability of group-boundaries, as well as the stability and legitimacy of the status differences. In parallel to the demonstrated effects on identification (Ellemers, 1993), when groups were impermeable, and status differences were illegitimate yet unstable, members of low status groups showed an equally strong ingroup bias as members of high-status groups (Bettencourt et al., 2001).

In summary, both individual and group level factors drive the psychology of intergroup relations. Group identification is a determinant and consequence of intergroup behavior. Individual motives (belongingness, self-esteem) are complemented by group-level determinants (group status) in shaping a range of intergroup phenomena. As the work on group status stability already illustrates, (anticipated) change is a strong driver of intergroup relations. This dynamic feature of intergroup relations will be discussed next.

The Dynamics Of Intergroup Relations

Intergroup relations are seldom static, but continuously change, due to a mixture of psychological and social processes. Tajfel and Turner (1979) even argued that fully stable intergroup relations are unlikely or even impossible because there are always *cognitive alternatives* to the current state of affairs. Cognitive alternatives refer to the notion that it is always possible to imagine that the current intergroup relations could be different. Even for members of groups with a seemingly hopeless, stable low status it is possible to imagine that through collective action or even revolution, things may be different in the future. Changing intergroup relations, either imagined or real, have psychological consequences. Here, two aspects of the dynamics of intergroup relations will be highlighted: changing status relations between groups and changing social identities.

Changing Status Relations

Changes in the status and power relations between groups can be stressful, especially for those who have something to lose, such as members of dominant groups (Earle et al., 2022; Jetten et al., 2017; Mackey & Rios, 2023; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2018, 2019b). Research illustrates this for different domains in society. In the context of politics, evidence from countries around the globe (US, Chile, the Netherlands, and Finland) shows that people perceive a shift towards more progressive policies and ideologies. This perception was equally strong for conservative and progressive people. Importantly, however, conservatives experienced this shift as an existential threat (Ruisch et al., 2024).

A related domain of societal changes concerns demographic shifts. For example, in the USA, by approximately 2045, White people are expected to go from being the majority group toward being the minority, compared to Black people, multiracial people and people of color. Again, this prospect

was perceived as threatening, and especially so for White USA citizens who identified strongly with their ethnicity (Major et al., 2016). Likewise, feelings of threat have been observed among majority group members (men, White people) when the societal progress of minority groups (females, Black people) is made salient (Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014).

The threat of status loss has also an impact physiologically. In a study by Dover et al. (2016), White men participated in a (bogus) job application procedure. Participants displayed a cardiovascular response pattern indicative of maladaptive threat once they learned that the company valued diversity, compared to a control condition where such information was not provided. Similarly, men, and especially those highly identified with their gender, display threat when being confronted with changing gender roles in society (Domen et al., 2022; Scheepers et al., 2009). The physiological threat of changing status relations is so universal that it can even be found in minimal groups. More specifically, reflecting on the current status quo elicited physiological threat responses among members of low-status groups. However, when anticipating a possible change in the status quo, the pattern reversed. The prospect of change was threatening for members of the high-status groups, and particularly so for members who identified strongly with the minimal group they were assigned to (Scheepers, 2009; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005).

Status threat also has important attitudinal and behavioral consequences. The fear of *cultural displacement* played a more important role in the decision to vote for Trump in the 2016 USA presidential elections than more instrumental considerations regarding the economy (Jones et al., 2017; Mutz, 2018). Moreover, the threat of a shift toward a more progressive ideology fueled support for antidemocratic measures among conservatives (Ruisch et al., 2024). More generally, as indicated earlier, intergroup threat often leads to prejudice and outgroup derogation (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2016). As a specific example of this, the threat of changing demographics, making White adults fear that over time they would become the minority, led highly identified White respondents to oppose migration policies (Major et al., 2016). At the same time, after making the racial progress of (previous) ethnic minority groups salient White adults became more likely to claim victimhood, i.e., to see bias against their own ethnic group as increasing (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). Relatedly, after learning that the general public is becoming more progressive regarding gender issues, males felt more threatened, and this threat predicted opposition to feminist groups (Rivera-Rodriguez et al., 2022). Finally, salient societal changes can also result in a feeling of collective nostalgia, in turn leading to the idealization and glorification of the ingroup's past (Wohl et al., 2020). Thus, in summary, when the status or meaning of groups changes, this is generally threatening for group members, and particularly so for members of dominant groups, prompting a range of defensive responses among them.

Changing Identities

In addition to dynamics in the structural relations between groups, there is also flexibility in social categorization and identification processes, meaning that people can switch between categories, or that these categories can be combined or otherwise changed (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). As discussed, a more complex social identity, involving more group memberships, provides a resource to cope with threat; when threatened on the basis of one group-membership, one can turn to another group to find support. For example, Asian-American women were threatened by a math test when their identity as woman was made salient (in line with the negative stereotype about women and math) but not when their Asian identity was made salient (in line with the positive stereotype about

Asian people and math; Shih et al., 1999; see also Gibson et al., 2014). Thus, the flexibility of social categorization helps people to cope with social identity-based threats.

Creating a superordinate identity subsuming an ingroup and outgroup can also be a means to bring groups together, and to reduce conflict and bias between members of these groups (Dovidio et al., 2009; Gaertner et al., 1989; 1996). Examples are two companies merging (Giessner et al., 2012; Gleibs et al., 2008) or a multicultural school setting where pupils of different ethnicities cooperate in classes and common tasks (Gaertner et al., 1996).

However, creating a superordinate identity can be challenging, for at least two reasons. First, a superordinate identity can be so inclusive, that group-members' need for distinctiveness is undermined, motivating them to emphasize individual differences instead of shared group features to differentiate themselves from the group (Brewer, 1991). Relatedly, an overarching ingroup can also threaten the distinctiveness of the subgroup, to which group members are often particularly attached (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). A solution to the threat that superordinate social categorization can induce is stimulating to develop *dual identities,* simultaneously highlighting connections with the subgroups and how these complement each other as well as the overarching identity that they all share (Dovidio et al. 2009). This is particularly relevant in contexts where the involved groups differ in size, status, or power, and where, as a consequence, members of the dominant group may be inclined to ignore the presence of the subordinate group and impose their priorities and values on the overarching category (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Wenzel et al., 2007). Under these circumstances, dual identities may prompt members of low-status groups to emphasize their distinctive identity and interests.

Establishing dual identities is one particular way in which a sense of subgroup continuity is assured when groups combine. As mentioned, this feeling that the subgroup identity prevails is important, especially among group members who are highly identified with the subgroup. In addition to assuring continuity, the *social identity model of organizational change* (Mühlemann et al., 2022) details a second path towards (simultaneous) identification with the superordinate category: the social identity gain path. The latter means that giving up their distinct identity may seem warranted in view of their ability to command higher status or greater social power once they are part of the overarching group. For example, a relatively small company may gain financial stability, or a broader customer base, from merging with a larger, more profitable, company. In combination, an increased engagement, motivation, and identification with the merged company is particularly likely when, in addition to stressing gains, a sense of continuity of the old sub-group identity also is stimulated (Mühlemann et al., 2022). Thus, the dynamics of social categorization and social identity provide both challenges and opportunities for intergroup relations.

In summary, intergroup relations and their associated social identities are inherently dynamic. Structural changes between groups can be threatening, especially for members of (previously) dominant groups. Psychologically, people are able to recategorize (former) ingroup and outgroup members as belonging to a common ingroup, which facilitates cooperation, as long as the distinctive aspects of the subgroups are still recognized, or when a sense of identity continuity is safeguarded otherwise.

Conclusion From This Section

Over the last century, the psychological study of intergroup relations has developed into a rich and flourishing area of science. Regarding the *content* of intergroup relations, a general distinction can be made between two perspectives. One perspective has primarily focused on the instrumental and material aspects of intergroup relations. This approach has its origins in the bottom-up conceptualization of groups in terms of interdependence and reciprocity as processes aimed at the realization of personal and group goals. The second perspective has highlighted the symbolic and identity-related aspects of intergroup relations. This approach has its origin in top-down social categorization and shared feelings of identity as a basis of group processes.

Both perspectives provide rich insights into the psychology of intergroup relations, from how ingroup bias serves diverse functions and takes different forms, to how social identities derive content and predict outcomes such as health and discrimination. Note that these two perspectives can be seen as complementary rather than incompatible, because instrumental and identity factors often interact in driving intergroup phenomena as they unfold in the real world.

As with any social psychological phenomenon, intergroup relations can be understood from explanatory variables at the individual (personality, needs, and values) and group (group status, goals, and values) *levels*. Again, these individual- and group-level factors do not mutually exclude each other, cannot be entirely viewed as isolated from each other (e.g., personalities also develop as a function of the social climate in which one is raised), and interact in predicting important real-life phenomena.

Intergroup relations are rarely stable and are best characterized in terms of a *dynamic* process. Changing status relations between groups have consequences for individuals, groups, and societies (stress, resistance, voting behavior). Changing social categorizations and developing identities can be a source of stress-resilience and inter-group cooperation, when these categorizations continue to provide people with a sense of meaning and distinctiveness. The next section turns to later developments in theory and research and considers how these have broadened and deepened our understanding of recurrent research themes.

EMERGING EVIDENCE AND RECURRING THEMES

The initial efforts to engage in theory development and systematic research into intergroup relations were inspired by major historic developments at the time. The Holocaust and the USA Civil rights movements were already mentioned as personal experiences that influenced researchers who developed the 20th century classic studies reviewed earlier. Research in the intervening years, just reviewed, can be seen to reflect broader trends in social psychology as a science. In general, this work can be characterized as aiming for increasing experimental control and more sophisticated methodologies and statistics to be able to tease apart specific mechanisms for further theory development. To be able to do this, researchers have engaged a multitude of artificially created groups. Studies examining these issues in natural groups often capitalized on rivalries between convenience groups such as sports fans, or students at different universities.

Over the years, globalization and migration have made researchers realize that there are many more groups beyond those that figured prominently in this area of research, and that relations between groups are subject to changes over time. Initially, natural groups were often defined by skin color or biological sex. These days, the groups that come to mind refer to a much broader range of categories and characteristics, including political groups, Americans from Asian, Latino, or Arab

origin, war refugees and 'fortune seekers' in Europe, religious, ethnic, and language groups all over the world, college educated versus manual workers, or farmers versus city dwellers. At the same time, large-scale migration, intermarriage, and emancipation can also blur group boundaries, as many of these group members can be categorized in multiple different ways—either emphasizing their similarities or their differences. Emerging evidence has begun to incorporate these issues, highlighting the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of relations between members of different groups. This work has expanded understanding of how individual and group levels of analysis relate to each other, how instrumental and symbolic concerns are often intertwined, and how past and future perspectives on changing realities determine responses to current relations between groups.

Increasing reliance on technology and digital interactions has also impacted the questions raised about intergroup relations over the years. These altered social realities have changed the way individuals and groups interact with each other, giving rise to additional research questions and further societal problems that call for systematic research. For instance, in the public opinion the ubiquity of social media use on the one hand is cited as a cause of increased individualism and erosion of group communities. On the other hand, it is seen as facilitating opportunities to rally individuals around shared concerns and experiences. This may result in the perception of increased distancing between different groups and their everyday realities, fueling polarization and intergroup hostility. Clearly such developments call for more systematic examination of the question of whether and how modern lifestyles and social media use have altered the way people think of themselves and how this impacts relations between different groups in society.

In parallel to its impact on social interactions, easy access to technological and digital advances has broadened the application of additional methodologies and research techniques to the study of intergroup relations. This has helped develop insights on social cognitive neuroscience. The greater accessibility of equipment and techniques developed in the medical and cognitive sciences is increasingly engaged to complement traditional measures of self-reported intentions, observable actions, and stated motives. This allows for real-time monitoring of implicit indicators in the brain or body that reveal the mechanisms through which people learn, feel, and think about groups and their interactions with other ingroup or outgroup members.

Together, these social and technological developments enriched the psychology of intergroup relations with new concepts, phenomena, and methodologies, inspired new theoretical perspectives and empirical work, offering new insights into issues relating to level, content, and dynamics of relations between groups. In this section, the chapter considers how this offers a fresh perspective on recurring themes in the understanding of intergroup relations.

Social Neuroscience Of Individual- And Group-Level Explanations

The development of innovative research procedures and social cognitive neuroscience has motivated researchers to reconsider and refine their insights in the psychological mechanisms relevant to intergroup relations (Amodio, 2014; Cikara et al., 2011; Cikara & Van Bavel, 2014; Derks et al., 2013; Golby et al., 2001; Molenberghs, 2022; Scheepers & Derks, 2016). For instance, scalp electrodes for EEG measures are used to indicate the onset, duration, and intensity of brain activity when attending to, processing, and responding to information about individuals and groups (Ito & Urland, 2003; Derks et al., 2015; van Nunspeet et al., 2014). Brain imaging with fMRI scanning techniques can reveal which areas and networks in the brain are engaged while considering

specific groups and their social outcomes (Harris & Fiske, 2009; Van Bavel et al., 2008). Cardiovascular patterns of changes in cardiac output and blood pressure allow researchers to infer when individuals engage with particular group identities, and how well they are able to adapt to challenging conditions (Derks et al., 2011; Scheepers, 2009; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2018).

These methodologies also allow researchers to examine and answer additional questions, for example about the operation of social identity strength at the neural level: Is there an overlap in brain areas involved in processing information about the self and the ingroup? Research results suggests that there is. For example, neural activation using fMRI was measured while research participants were exposed to pictures of their own face, or that of unknown ingroup members versus outgroup members (based on university affiliation), in a face recognition paradigm (Scheepers et al., 2013). Replicating prior results, while viewing pictures of themselves, participants displayed neural activation in areas associated with the processing of self-relevant information. Additionally, viewing ingroup members—who were unknown to them—yielded activation in similar areas. However, this depended on participants' level of ingroup identification. That is, the more strongly they identified with the ingroup, the clearer the overlap in brain areas (characteristic for self-relevant processing) activated when viewing another ingroup member or when viewing the self (see also Morrison et al., 2012; Volz et al., 2009).

Other neuroscience research also provides evidence for the more specific *content* of social perception, specifying instrumental versus identity aspects that can connect individuals and define groups (Hackel et al., 2015). This revealed that different neural substrates were activated for instrumental learning (expected outcomes) versus trait-level inferences (e.g., 'generous') about a partner in an economic game. Additional research (Lau et al., 2020) suggests that the neural processing of information needed to make social categorizations ('is this person similar to me?') is independent of the processing of coalitional information ('can I cooperate well with this person?'; see also Cikara, 2021). Together, these studies suggest that the instrumental vs symbolic content of identities relevant to intergroup relations, can be traced back to the neural level.

In sum, socio-neural indicators illuminate the overlap people experience between the self and the group, the categorizations they use to make sense of social situations, how they select, process, and engage available information to form judgments about different groups, and when the situation causes them to experience threat (Scheepers & Derks, 2016). This work aids understanding of when and how self-views and self-relevant thoughts and concerns connect individuals to groups, to explain the development and change of conflictual or cooperative relations between groups in society. Below neuro- and psychophysiological data will be reviewed, which shed new light on old questions about the way group-level concerns and outcomes are related to individual-level cognitions, emotions, and behaviors.

Conflict Between Groups As A Natural State?

A recurring ambition that drives much of this research is to establish the neurocognitive origins of conflictual (versus peaceful) relations between groups—or individuals representing these groups. This work examines the possibility that antagonism between groups may be driven by basic biological survival mechanisms—that are hard wired in the brain and have been reinforced through evolution. Evidence to this effect can be seen to imply that conflict between groups emerges as a natural state, making attempts to establish more peaceful and cooperative intergroup relations seem naïve and doomed to fail. The examination of empirical evidence for this assumption, speaks to the *level* at which explanations are being sought: is conflict between groups dominated by

ubiquitous individual-level biological concerns for survival, or can it be based on group-level concerns about social dynamics and relations between groups?

Research supports the general notion that ubiquitous biological and survival-driven mechanisms can play a role in people's responses to outgroup members. These are prompted by self-protection tendencies, for instance relating to the motivation to avoid diseases by physically distancing oneself from strangers (Schnall & Henderson, 2023; Van Leeuwen et al., 2023). Indeed, avoidance responses of White research participants to faces of Black (versus Asian) males were found to relate to their associations with physical threat, rather than evaluative dislike (March et al., 2021). Studies using a simulated shooting game demonstrate how such mechanisms can affect behavioral tendencies that raise intergroup hostility and aggression. Here, the inclination of police officers as well as students to shoot Black suspects was associated with the individual experience of threat rather than stereotypical views of the outgroup as being dangerous (Miller et al., 2012). Furthermore, priming self-protection among White research participants raises faster avoidance responses to Black individuals (Miller et al., 2012). This work thus suggests that aversive responses to individuals who represent another group focus on (social) survival and self-protection, and are mainly prompted by fear (Amodio, 2014; Olsson et al., 2005; Navarrete et al., 2012).

However, other strands of research suggest that social cues and group-level considerations that inform people's categorizations also determine their responses to others. For instance, people generally draw on specific group-based stereotypes (prompted for instance by their skin color), rather than individual features (such as business versus casual clothing they wear) to determine which strangers they should fear. This was established in a study conducted in Milan, where individuals showed more aversion to contact with Nigerian than Chinese individuals in public space (Zhang et al., 2022). This is reflected at the neurocognitive level where interactions with others are interpreted *both* through subjective experiences gathered from sensorimotor signals *and* through more conceptual and semantic associative information networks (Farmer et al., 2017). Results from research examining brain activity reveal implications of these different pathways, for instance when experiencing empathy with the pain of others. Adult tendencies to experience and display empathy not only relate to activity in the somatosensory cortex indicating that they vicariously feel the pain. It also involves brain areas that are associated with higher-level representations and other-focused mechanisms (Levy et al., 2018). This is relevant here, first, because it suggests that mechanisms relating to physical experiences as well as more cognitively driven information channels can be recruited to raise or reduce adverse responses against members of other groups. Second, note that neither bodily nor cognitive experiences and responses are set in stone. Instead, both are malleable and can mutually influence each other. For instance, the use of virtual reality techniques to modify bodily experiences can elicit change in conceptual attitudes towards others (Farmer et al., 2017).

Evidence from neurocognitive measures further supports the notion that other mechanisms, beyond physical avoidance of individual-level threat, play a role in the way relations between groups unfold. This work reveals that defensive and hostile responses to outgroup members can be the result of deliberate decision making, based on group-level judgments about fairness and justice. One example is a study where Muslims and non-Muslims were confronted with images of an outgroup member with a gun. This manipulation was found to activate the lateral orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) in the brain, which is associated with deliberate moral decision making (Domínguez et al., 2018). Other research evidence further supports the notion that defensive hostility, prompted by individual fear responses, is moderated by group-level interpretations of social features. For

instance, the relationship between fear and the tendency to shoot Black targets in a shooting game was stronger when these targets were dehumanized (Mekawi et al., 2016).

This points to the more general phenomenon that the *social meaning* afforded to individuals—based on the way they are categorized—can be decisive for the way they are treated. In particular, the extent to which people are inclined to see outgroup members as lesser humans has been found to predict the tendency to ignore or disregard their needs, goals, and concerns, or to display hostility toward them (Fiske, 2020). As indicated above, when outgroup members are dehumanized, they are denied complex human emotions (Demoulin et al., 2005; Leyens et al., 2001; 2003). This failure to make inferences about other people's minds—which is needed for perspective taking (Frith & Frith, 2001), is seen to justify ill treatment and aggression (Allport, 1954; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). Dehumanization can be inferred from the lack of activation of the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) in the brain (characteristic for mentalizing others), and is associated with devaluation, and the experience of disgust, for instance toward homeless people (Harris & Fiske, 2006).

The tendency to consider members of outgroups as lesser humans is a key factor in explaining displays of aggression against members of other groups. For instance, dehumanization has been documented as a decisive factor in having people condone military force against citizens of hostile nations (McAlister et al., 2006), or withdrawing support from military peacekeeping missions abroad (Leidner, 2015). Understanding what causes people to dehumanize outgroup members therefore contributes to emerging insights into the factors that contribute to careless or antagonistic behavior towards members of other groups.

Seeing Women As Objects

There is by now plenty of evidence that social categorizations and stereotypes can induce dehumanization of outgroups—and influence interactions between members of different groups—in this way. Research further suggests that this facilitates harmful responses toward outgroups that are seen to frustrate goal achievement. However, at first sight, it is not always obvious that this is the case. Statements and actions that undermine opportunities for outgroup members to achieve their goals, or to fulfill important needs may not seem blatantly hostile (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Nevertheless, their consequences may be quite harmful (e.g., Barreto et al., 2010; for a review, see: Bareket & Fiske, 2023).

A case in point is the common tendency to consider women primarily in terms of bodily features relevant to sexual attraction. This is often viewed as an innocent, flattering, or playful practice. However, research results have revealed that it can have quite adverse effects for individual women as well as for the relations between gender groups. For instance, sexualized women generally are assigned less agency, competence, warmth, and moral status (Bernard & Wollast, 2019; Cikara et al., 2011). Such female objectification reduces the tendency to consider their personal preferences, or to empathize with their individual or group suffering. Attesting to the category-based perception that results, perceivers are less able to recognize the faces of female bodies pictured in swimsuits or underwear than when they are fully clothed. Furthermore, viewing pictures of women in scant clothing is less likely to activate brain regions that indicate mental state attribution (Cikara et al., 2011). In general, the focus on bodily features of women is associated with neural responses that indicate less perspective taking and empathy. Instead, it is characterized by visual recognition patterns that are typical for the perception of nonhuman objects—indicating dehumanization (Bernard et al., 2020; Gothreau et al., 2023; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014).

Highlighting bodily features of women is quite common in written and visual portrayals in the arts and in product advertisements, as well as in representations of professional women in the (social) media. The research just reviewed explains how this practice contributes to careless treatment of female co-workers, professionals, friends or family members, when they are viewed as interchangeable women. This extends early insights on the origins and consequences of outgroup homogeneity, reviewed earlier, and impacts how gender groups relate to each other in society.

Additional studies reveal specific conditions that cause the deactivation of brain areas associated with perspective taking and empathy. This work shows that the tendency toward dehumanization and category-based treatment of individuals is not universal. Instead, it is socially constructed and dependent on how group members are (visually) portrayed. This implies that inconsiderate or hostile treatment of outgroup members should not be seen as reflecting inevitable and hard-wired responses to specific target features. In fact, some studies reveal that the tendency to dehumanize others can simply be reversed by focusing on individual features (Fiske, 2009). That is, explicitly instructing people to mentalize members of dehumanized groups (for instance by requesting that they consider their possible food preferences) can increase empathy and helping behavior (Harris & Fiske, 2007). Again, this evidence underlines the powerful role of social narratives. It clearly shows how (social) media frames and (political) discourse focusing on group-level features can feed and maintain the ill treatment of outgroup members, while explicit attention to individual differences and preferences can invite displays of empathy and care.

Bottom-Up And Top-Down Mechanisms

The study results reviewed here generally call into question the tendency to explain cooperative versus antagonistic relations between groups from primary experiences of individual-level characteristics, rooted in biology. Research comparing how people view and treat animals, infants, adults, and robots also demonstrates that differential responses to different types of targets mainly result from learning through social interaction (Heyes, 2018). In fact, the experience of anxiety, leading to hostility and aggression, as well as the tendency to mentalize outgroup members and empathize with their outcomes is the result of cognitive sensemaking. This varies from one situation to the next, and can be moderated or reversed with experimental manipulations.

The general consensus emerging from studies on these phenomena thus is that hostile versus helpful relations to outgroup members result from an *interplay* between automatic emergence of physiological, hormonal, and neural response patterns to specific individuals, and more controlled interpretation of these responses, guided by social ideals and values about relations between groups in society (Decety & Cowell, 2014). In this interplay, group norms and cultural practices can either benefit trust and cooperation between members of different groups or raise aggression—depending on the activation of situational concerns. In fact, research evidence counters the notion that psychological states and behaviors directly result from biological and neurochemical processes.

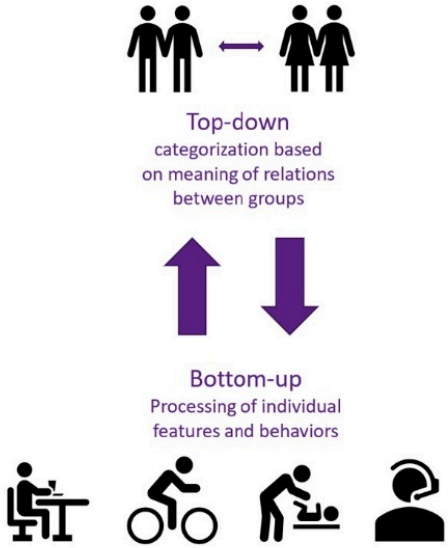
Whereas the neuropeptide oxytocin is often referred to as the love hormone in lay accounts, studies have established that it can also induce aggressive behavior, for instance to protect the ingroup against outside threat (De Dreu & De Kret, 2016). Likewise, testosterone —which is often seen as causing unbridled aggression—can just as well increase helping behavior and protective responses toward dependents (Bos et al., 2021; Van Honk et al., 2012). This work shows that the same biological system can on the one hand be associated with empathy, trust, and compliance toward individuals who are categorized as ingroup members, and on the other hand be linked to aggression and discriminatory responses toward those who are seen as outgroup members in that

context. Thus, instead of focusing on characteristics of these biological systems as key factors in explaining intergroup behavior, it is crucial to attend to situational cues and cognitive and motivational mechanisms to understand what causes people to categorize specific individuals as ingroup or as outgroup members in the first place.

This further substantiates the conclusion that the studies documenting biological and automatic responses also point to the role of more deliberate, learned, and symbolic sense-making mechanisms that influence and explain the way members of different groups relate to each other. In fact, these mechanisms mutually influence each other: Although biological systems inform evaluations of whom to fear and judgments of whether aggression is warranted, these cognitive evaluations have also been found to impact immediate biological response patterns over time or across situations (Kawakami et al., 2017). Indeed, when people interact with each other, brain networks are activated to process feedback that helps them decide with whom to cooperate on that task, as but the brain also uses this information to inform the formation of more abstract social evaluations to predict the likelihood of developing cooperative relations in other contexts (Hackel et al., 2015). Thus, cooperation has been associated with intuitive as well as deliberative neural networks, relating to individual level reward learning to group-based trait attributions and interaction tendencies (Hackel et al., 2020; 2022).

In sum, emerging insights from intergroup neuroscience attest to the importance of engaging group-level reasoning to explain intergroup bias and discrimination. Neuroscience methods elucidate how cognitive categorizations, group-based perceptions, and updating of stereotypes impact emotional and behavioral responses toward individual targets (Amodio & Cikara, 2021). Even the occurrence of racial bias is not invariably associated with visible target features—such as their skin color. For instance, relatively minimal experimental procedures used to assign individuals to mixed-racial groups proved sufficient to reduce the occurrence of such bias in the brain (Van Bavel & Cunningham, 2009; Van Bavel, Packer, & Cunningham, 2008; see Van Bavel & Cunningham, 2010, for an overview) and clearly impacted the behavior extended towards visibly different targets (Cosmides et al., 2003; Kurzban et al., 2001). This neuroscientific evidence thus reveals that us-and-them thinking that raises antagonism between groups is not rooted in biology. Instead, it is dynamic, socially informed, and context dependent. It stems as much from top-down, category-based meaning seeking as it is about bottom-up processing of individual features (Cikara & Van Bavel, 2014; see Figure 2).

***Figure 2*: Connecting Different Levels: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Information Processing**



A recurring conclusion from this strand of research accordingly is that basic biological facilities universally prepare humans for cooperation as well as competition within and between groups. However, when, how, and toward whom each of these facilities is applied mostly depends on context-dependent and dynamic features of the situation and how these are engaged to define relevant social groups that imbue social meaning for people's identities.

Shifting From Instrumental To Symbolic Concerns

The research just reviewed challenges accounts that explain antagonism between groups primarily from anxiety and threat experiences that activate biological mechanisms. Indeed, the studies revealing that involuntary and physical responses interact with more deliberate attempts at sensemaking suggests that instrumental as well as symbolic concerns are likely to play a role in how relations between groups develop. Therefore, the review will now consider how content and dynamics of intergroup relations work together to jointly impact the way relations between groups develop. Doing this engages with the classic notion that conflict between groups can be traced to instrumental concerns. This refers to the struggle for power and control over scarce resources first noted in the Sherif summer camp studies as specified in realistic conflict theory. Yet, studies have revealed that additional concerns often play a role. Here too, emerging insights point to the mutual influence of cognitive and motivational mechanisms. Although this reveals no single cause-and-effect sequence, it does clarify how cycles of escalating antagonism can build over time.

Some of this work clearly demonstrates how behavioral demands of the situation determine intergroup perceptions. For instance, raising the conviction that there is a limited amount of attractive resources—activating a realistic conflict frame—is enough to make people anticipate the possibility of discord over access to these resources. Hence, simply placing people in a situation where attractive resources are scarce or plentiful has been found to impact the way they process information about others in that situation. Specifically, a program of research revealed that inducing the notion of resource scarcity among White Americans impaired processing of facial information of Black male individuals, resulting in more stereotypical perceptions of low social economic status and threat. As a result, unless people are highly motivated to avoid racial discrimination, the individuals depicted in this way are given less access to valued resources

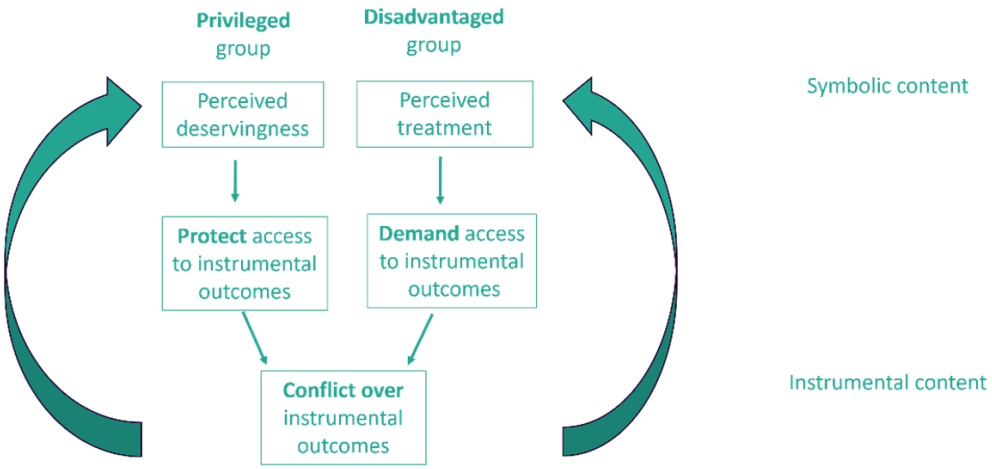
(Berkebile-Weinberg et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2016; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; 2019; Krosch et al., 2017).

This research not only shows that anticipating the possibility of instrumental conflict is sufficient to devalue members of other groups and restrict their access to attractive resources. It also reveals how stereotypical perceptions invite unequal treatment that likely raises protest and hostility from the other group. Arguably, such hostile responses would in turn justify feelings of threat and reinforce symbolic self-categorizations of individuals into distinct and incompatible groups. Thus, on the one hand—as just indicated—the designation of others (such as women, migrants, minorities) as outgroup members makes it easier to see them as objects or lesser humans, and to exclude them from our circle of care. On the other hand, this practice increases the risk of designing or maintaining societal or organizational structures in which these individuals are treated differently and have different outcomes, reinforcing the notion that they are not one of us. This was found to be the case, for instance, during the European refugee crisis raised by the Syrian civil war. Here, the degree to which Muslim refugees were dehumanized, in that they were seen as less evolved and civilized people, predicted negative behavior towards them, across populations of different European countries (Bruneau et al., 2018).

Evidence for the cyclical and self-fulfilling consequences of dehumanizing outgroup members was obtained in the context of the 2016 USA elections. Here, on the one hand, the tendency of voters to dehumanize Mexican immigrants and Muslims predicted their support for aggressive Republican politics. On the other hand, when Latino and Muslims felt dehumanized, they were more inclined to support hostile and violent collective action—giving voters additional cause to fear them. They also indicated being reluctant to assist efforts to counter terrorism (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Similar reinforcing mechanisms were found to feed mutually negative stereotypes that maintain long standing conflicts between Palestinian, Jewish, and Arab groups in Israel (Niwa et al., 2016). For instance, Israeli Jews who were exposed to Palestinian terrorism reported experiencing more distress and threat. These feelings caused them to support measures to exclude Palestinians from political decision making—in turn driving Palestinians to engage in acts of terror (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009). Such research thus documents how the continual exposure to political conflict and violence in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank raises collective threat and distress, which feeds the ethos of conflict and reduces support for compromise among Israelis as well as Palestinians (Canetti et al., 2017).

Evidence that conflict between groups is raised by symbolic feelings of threat and inequality as much as by instrumental outcomes was also found in South Africa. After the apartheid policy was formally abandoned in 1994, representative national surveys in 1998, 2001 and 2009 revealed that White adults gradually started to report less prejudice against Black adults. However, in these years after the reconciliation the intergroup attitudes of Black people toward White people did not improve and even became more negative than during apartheid (Bornman, 2011; Durrheim et al., 2011). These observations among real life groups complement the experimental findings and psychophysiological response patterns reviewed above. That is, even when instrumental outcomes are secured, symbolic group representations, the threat of future status loss, or disappointment about slow improvements can all feed intergroup hostility and conflict. It is very likely that similar mechanisms play a role in maintaining and reinforcing antagonistic relations between groups elsewhere in the world. For members of privileged as well as disadvantaged groups, symbolic notions of perceived deservingness and unfair treatment feed instrumental conflicts over valued outcomes, while such conflicts in turn influence perceptions of unequal deservingness and unfair treatment (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Mutual Influence of Symbolic and Instrumental Concerns



Digital Interactions As Catalysts Of Conflict

The previous paragraphs highlighted the considerable influence of contextual variables and group-based stereotypes in how people afford meaning to social situations and view individuals representing different groups. Engaging with this argument raises concerns about modern methods of social communication through digital interactions and on social media, as catalysts of intergroup conflict. These mechanisms are relevant to intergroup relations, as they can strengthen group identity and reinforce ingroup versus outgroup affiliations (Reicher et al., 1995; Yardi & Boyd, 2010).

Digital interactions and social media communications encourage the use of one-sided messages and reliance on reductionist stereotypes, when people reflect on societal developments (Kaakinen et al., 2020). The adverse effects of such echo-chambers or identity bubbles have been established. For instance, during the initial COVID-19 outbreak, social media consumption of USA citizens was found to relate to hate toward Chinese Americans (Croucher et al., 2020). In Singapore, use of social media related to negative stereotypes of immigrants (Chen et al., 2021). Online discourse on the migration debate in Finland was found to contribute to the normalization of anti-multiculturalism (Nortio et al., 2021).

The contribution of social media use to polarized and conflictual relations between groups in society is also known from specific case studies of social media messaging (Dobson & Knezevic, 2018). This has raised concerns of policy makers and governments about how they can monitor and regulate the way tech companies facilitate these interactions. Network and text analysis of hyperlinks offered by online news media reveals that social media do not connect everyone. Instead, they offer highly selective linking to similar coverage of controversial incidents, to maximize public views and commercial success of internet sites. This was found to be the case after the 2014 police shooting of black teenager Michael Brown, prompting public rioting in Ferguson (Turetsky & Riddle, 2018). This well-known side-effect of the algorithms that are used for commercial purposes contributes to polarized and conflictual relations between groups in society.

To some extent one may argue that the design of social media platforms merely amplifies and escalates social processes that also occur offline. However, a literature review of 121 research papers investigating the relation between polarization and social media use reveal specific features of social media that make digital interactions prone to manipulation (Iandoli, et al., 2021). One cannot

understand how intergroup relations are developed, maintained, or changed, without considering the contribution of digital communication technologies—and the way these can be abused for malicious purposes.

The age-old practice of deliberately spreading hate speech, fake news, and conspiracy theories also emerges in social media use. However, the broad availability of digital information channels has quickly made this a much more accessible, and powerful channel to disrupt social cohesion—that withstands available mechanisms for control and regulation. In fact, the far-reaching social impact such activities can have constitutes a key point of attraction for individuals to engage in these practices. That is, displays of trolling behavior on social networking sites are better predicted by the pursuit of social rewards (having a negative social impact) than by negative personality traits such as sadism or psychopathy (Craker & March, 2016). People doing this also report that they are gratified by promoting their ideologies in this way (Quandt et al., 2022). At the same time, the real-world consequences and impact of such online actions can be severe. This is documented for instance through examination of 14 years of online communication of Stormfront Downunder (a White supremacist community in Australia). This analysis revealed how online discourse about collective beliefs and consensual group norms related to racist riots and the pursuit of an anti-Muslim agenda in national politics (Bliuc et al., 2019). At the same time, the real-world consequences and impact of such online actions can be severe. This is documented for instance through examination of 14 years of online communication of Stormfront Downunder (a White supremacist community in Australia). This analysis revealed how online discourse about collective beliefs and consensual group norms related to racist riots and the pursuit of an anti-Muslim agenda in national politics (Bliuc et al., 2019).

Note that these social consequences do not just occur incidentally, nor do the online opinions expressed reflect individual-level convictions or characteristics. Instead, they are clearly related to people's social identities, political agendas and changing relations between groups in society (Chan et al., 2022). The parties driving these political agendas are very well aware of how digital communications facilitate moral disengagement of controversial opinions. This makes it easier for bystanders to join-in and makes it more difficult for dissenters to speak up. Calling attention to the interests of particular groups is meant to impact debates and decision-making in the real world, and actually has such impact. This was revealed for instance, through a content analysis of unstructured Facebook conversations between groups preparing political protest and rallies in the USA and UK. This analysis clearly established a relation between hostile online engagement and increased violence in real world interactions between these groups (Gallacher et al., 2021; see also Mooijman et al., 2018).

Relatedly, digital interactions increase the vulnerability of minority and marginalized groups in society. All the known effects of bullying, such as stereotyping, disinhibition, social contagion and bystander effects are amplified in online communications. Consequently, it has far-reaching harmful effects on individuals, families, communities, and the broader society (Gerson, 2017). Capitalizing on these powerful effects, cyberbullying offers an effective way to threaten and silence groups that advocate changes in intergroup relations. An experimental study revealed that men were more likely to send pornographic images to a woman that was portrayed as a feminist, than to a woman who endorsed traditional gender roles (Maass et al., 2003). In the online game Second Life, players who used female avatars experienced more cyber-harassment related to sexualization in the virtual world (Behm-Morawitz, & Schipper, 2016).

In real life too, women tend to face disproportionate amounts of hostility and hate through online expressions of misogyny and sexualized aggression (Khosravinik, & Esposito, 2018). An analysis of millions of Twitter messages in the USA and Canada revealed that women are more likely than men to receive offensive online messages (Rheault et al., 2019). Several analyses have established that women who speak up about social relations in public space are particularly likely to encounter digital harassment, and that online violence relates to physical attacks and legal harassment.

Across the world, female politicians, journalists, or scientists have become easy targets for online aggression, descriptions of rape fantasies, and death threats (Posetti et al., 2021). For instance, an analysis of Twitter data in the weeks leading up to the UK General Elections in December 2019 revealed that female Members of Parliament (MPs) received more hostile, abusive and extreme messages than male MPs. Further, these messages conveyed that their political activity did not fit what is considered appropriate for women (Esposito & Breeze, 2022). Muslim and Jewish female politicians suffered from racist abuse on top of that (Kuperberg, 2021). Using online harassments as a strategy to silence women seems quite effective. Individuals who received more abusive tweets were more likely to stand down for re-election in the UK (Gorrell, et al., 2020). Further, experimental methodologies revealed that exposure to threat tends to reduce the political ambitions of women (Pruysers & Blais, 2017). Indeed, several high-profile women have cited continuous and extreme online harassment as an important reason to withdraw from the public debate or to resign their public office (Oppenheim, 2019).

In sum, the increasing presence of digital communications and social media in the public discourse can amplify and escalate conflict and antagonism between groups. It also affords an easy way to bully and silence members of marginalized or low status groups who stand up for equal treatment and social change. Of course, it is tempting to attribute such online aggression to individual character traits or convictions. However, the research reviewed above clearly demonstrates the relevance of group-level concerns and changing relations between groups in society. These offer an additional layer of understanding that is relevant for those who aim to analyze the origins of intergroup hostility or to find ways to reduce it. This issue will be further discussed in the section on interventions below.

Dynamic Of Past, Present, And Future

Collective Guilt Over Past Events

Once cycles of escalating hostility and ill-treatment have developed, it is very difficult to break them. The preceding paragraphs have unpacked mechanisms that can explain the emergence of tit-for-tat responses. Some studies demonstrate how symbolic slights can perpetuate conflicts between groups, even after the original—instrumental—cause of contention has been resolved. Other studies document how symbolic concerns can result in unequal access to scarce resources. To complement these insights, the focus will now be on a different strand of research evidence, that highlights the dynamic nature of long-standing intergroup conflicts. This work elucidates the role of social identity concerns that connect group-level behaviors and outcomes to individual-level social evaluations, (vicarious) experience of emotions, and self-views. It demonstrates how a history of intergroup conflict can prompt group members to morally justify prior displays of hostility when looking back, allowing them to neglect the current and future needs of outgroup members looking forward. This dynamic represents an additional psychological mechanism that can reinforce and

perpetuate conflicts between groups. Here, research reveals the dynamics of intergroup relations by connecting these to social identity needs that are activated by the moral implications of differences between groups.

Relevant studies informing this perspective have examined the likelihood that intergroup conflict is reconciled over time. For instance, by studying conditions that facilitate or impede mutual forgiveness for previous intergroup aggression or (financial) compensation for historical group-based deprivation. This work reveals that the willingness of individuals to acknowledge past wrongdoings of their group and to repair historic injustice is driven by social identity concerns. The experience of collective guilt emerges as a decisive factor in determining such responses (for overviews, see Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Wohl et al., 2006). Again, this work points to the symbolic nature and group-based origins of such concerns. That is, the awareness of acts of aggression perpetrated by past generations of ingroup members can raise the experience of identity-based emotions and empathy that drive reparatory expectations and compensation intentions. This was demonstrated among different populations of young people across the world. For instance, young Germans reported collective guilt when reminded of the involvement of Nazi Germans in the Holocaust. As did young Americans when considering the decision of the USA government to drop the atomic bomb on Japan during World War II. Yet, in both cases these individuals were born after these historic events took place and could in no way be held personally accountable for them. Similar results were obtained when reminding later generations of the treatment of Black South Africans during the Apartheid regime, aggression against local populations during the colonization of Namibia or in Chile, or of the hostility of Serbs against Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1992-1995 war (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Brown et al., 2008; Doosje et al., 1998; Dumont & Waldzus, 2017; Imhoff et al., 2013; Jetten et al., 2015).

On the one hand, this work reveals the beneficial effects of people's ability to experience collective guilt in this way. The research shows that this can raise empathy with former victims and relates to positive attitudes towards the current outgroup and support for reparation initiatives. However, on the other hand, the extreme discomfort raised by negative moral emotions—even if these are experienced vicariously—gives rise to motivated reasoning. That is, many people are tempted to ignore, play down, or justify past atrocities as a way to avoid the experience of emotional discomfort (Ellemers, 2017; Sharvit et al., 2015). For instance, several of the United States of America developed legislation to prohibit teachers from discussing topics that might create discomforts, guilt, or anguish in class, with the result of depriving students of historical knowledge about slavery, or racism during and after the American Civil war. Scientific evidence for such defensive responses to avoid the experience of collective guilt was found for instance among Belgians who were reminded of the colonization of Congo (Klein et al., 2011). Likewise, the experience of collective guilt caused American research participants to forget ill-treatment of Native American Indians by early Americans. However, a study showed they were more inclined to remember such events when they were prompted to consider these as being perpetrated by European settlers (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). This suggests that the emotional burden of considering these events is not contained in the nature of the atrocities perpetrated. Instead, the main source of discomfort is the notion that other members of the ingroup participated in committing these atrocities—threatening the image of the ingroup and the self as being morally good (see also Rösler et al., 2023).

Moral Justification Versus Reconciliation

Attempts to cope with this threat to the moral image of the ingroup—and by extension the self—include victim blaming, or exclusion of victims from one's circle of care. These responses are triggered by perceptions of collective responsibility for historic misbehaviors, e.g., dehumanization of outgroups that have suffered from ill-treatment by the ingroup (such as Native Americans, Australian Aboriginals). In fact, such dehumanization tendencies are more pronounced as these groups are portrayed to have suffered more from unjust treatment by the ingroup (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006), and have been documented as a strategy to cope with the discomfort of group-based privilege (Shepherd et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2012). This evidence attests to the fact that dehumanization of outgroup members can emerge to assuage the guilt from realizing that current benefits arise from the (past) exploitation of other groups. At the same time, these cognitive and emotional coping responses do very little to motivate efforts at reparation or reconciliation.

In understanding these mechanisms, the reader should not underestimate the force of people's need to think of themselves and their groups as morally righteous and just. Programs of research relying on different moral issues, research methods, and study samples consistently show that people generally tend to address this need by turning a blind eye to past moral transgressions of themselves and other ingroup members. Confronting people with past misbehavior they cannot undo primarily motivates them to justify ill treatment of others, for instance, by assuming that targets must have done something to provoke this, placing them outside one's circle of care, or by inferring that the two groups must have opposite interests or incompatible values (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers et al., 2013; 2019; 2023). Such self- and group-serving defensive strategies can alleviate feelings of threat and discomfort, but generally work to sustain or fuel antagonism between groups instead of resolving it.

This all speaks to the symbolic meaning of groups for their members, as well as the importance of incorporating a more long-term perspective to properly understand how relations between social groups have evolved. The research reviewed here suggests that the implication of people's self-views in group-level issues can raise guilt and shame about the past, as well as uncertainty about the future. It also demonstrates that efforts to explain and deal with these feelings can elicit reverse causation. The root of the problem may not be that different groups have incompatible interests or values. In fact, many past conflicts between groups stem from historical accidents. Nevertheless, people tend to retrospectively make sense of coincidental developments by invoking explanations that seem socially just and morally sound.

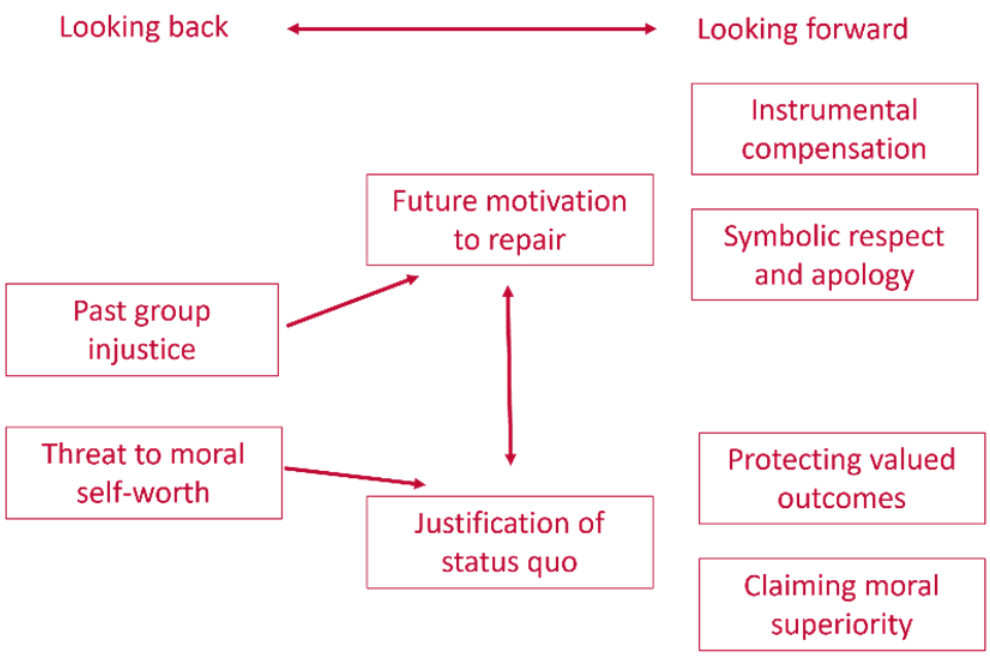
By now a multitude of experimental studies demonstrate that it is often much easier to justify the status quo and protect valued outcomes—while claiming moral superiority—than to find ways to apologize and compensate for past wrongdoings. Victim-blaming tendencies that are raised in this way may even develop into elaborate and far-fetched conspiracy theories or outdated ideologies–that are sometimes actively promoted by group leaders (Hornsey et al., 2023). One example is a set of studies documenting that highly identified Catholics indicate disbelief of news accounts reporting child sexual abuse by Catholic Priests. Further, they show a tendency to protect the accused that stands in the way of impartial investigation, which is less likely to be the case for non-Catholics (Minto et al., 2016). The general tendency to moralize characteristic ingroup values makes them seem universally true and invites denouncement of those who endorse different values. This leads people to condone hostility and aggression toward outgroup members (Mueller & Skitka, 2019; Skitka et al., 2015). The moral mandate that ensues offers a cause that seems to justify all means (Skitka, 2002; Skitka & Morgan, 2014). In fact, it leads people to evaluate behavior of other group members by the degree to which the shared cause is supported—regardless of whether they do so in ways that are morally acceptable or unacceptable (Mueller & Skitka, 2018). Public figures can

capitalize on these phenomena, by highlighting real or imaginary experiences of intergroup threat in the media, which happened for instance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was found to foster moral disengagement and dehumanization of outgroup members, that are associated with neural networks that induce violence between groups (Lantos & Molenberghs, 2021).

Across a variety of groups and contexts, high-identifying group members have been found to display these responses to a stronger extent than low-identifying group members. Their sense of collective guilt about historical facts documenting exploitation and abuse of other groups (e.g., enslaving indigenous populations, appropriating of natural resources, forced religious conversion) tempts them to legitimize their group's privilege by invoking moral superiority and devaluing the interests, characteristics, and humanity of other groups (for an overview, see: Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). In turn, when members of privileged groups claim moral superiority, this can lead underprivileged groups to refuse help as they try to reassert their own moral standing and identity (Täuber & Van Zomeren, 2012). Again, this illustrates how attempts to deal with events from the past cast a shadow over the present—making it more difficult to improve intergroup relations in the future.

In sum, backward-looking and forward-looking tendencies raise different types of priorities with their distinct concerns. In this dynamic, on the one hand, one's awareness of past group injustices may feed instrumental compensation as well as more symbolic reparation attempts. On the other hand, the threat to the moral sense of self that is implied can easily prompt efforts to justify the status quo—claiming moral superiority to protect valued outcomes—that stand in the way of reconciliation and change (see Figure 4).

***Figure 4*: Concerns Raised by Backward Looking and Forward Looking Perspectives**



Conclusions From This Section

This section began by reviewing relevant insights captured with social neuroscientific techniques. Evidence collected in this way reveals that intergroup anxiety and hostility cannot simply be explained by individual-level concerns for physical safety and survival. Studies also show that intergroup aggression is not the direct result of hard-wired biological fear responses. Instead, the research reviewed convincingly shows that more deliberate and group-level mechanisms are also invoked. These afford socially constructed meaning to different targets and interaction partners—and can raise diverging responses to identical target features, depending on whether targets are construed as ingroup or outgroup members. This review highlights studies that shed new light on the question of how individual-level mechanisms connect to group-level phenomena—and affect how information about target features are processed in the brain. The experimental designs that are used in many studies demonstrate that the same social actors can be seen as ingroup or outgroup members. Their findings reveal that social categorizations are not determined by objective target features (such as their ethnic identity, skin color, or visible gender markers). Instead, neurocognitive responses indicating whether targets are viewed as ingroup or outgroup members are shaped by subjective (self-) categorization mechanisms—that afford social meaning to different targets and can change from one situation to the next.

This section proceeded by considering emerging evidence on key concerns that play a role in relations between socially privileged and disadvantaged groups in particular. Here, emerging evidence called into question traditional views on the instrumental versus symbolic content of intergroup relations. What groups find important and what they compete for is not always rooted in tangible outcomes that are well-defined. Whether group members focus on their access to valued resources or on their social standing can change depending on how their outcomes and status compare to relevant other groups, and how they perceive the deservingness of their group in relation to its treatment.

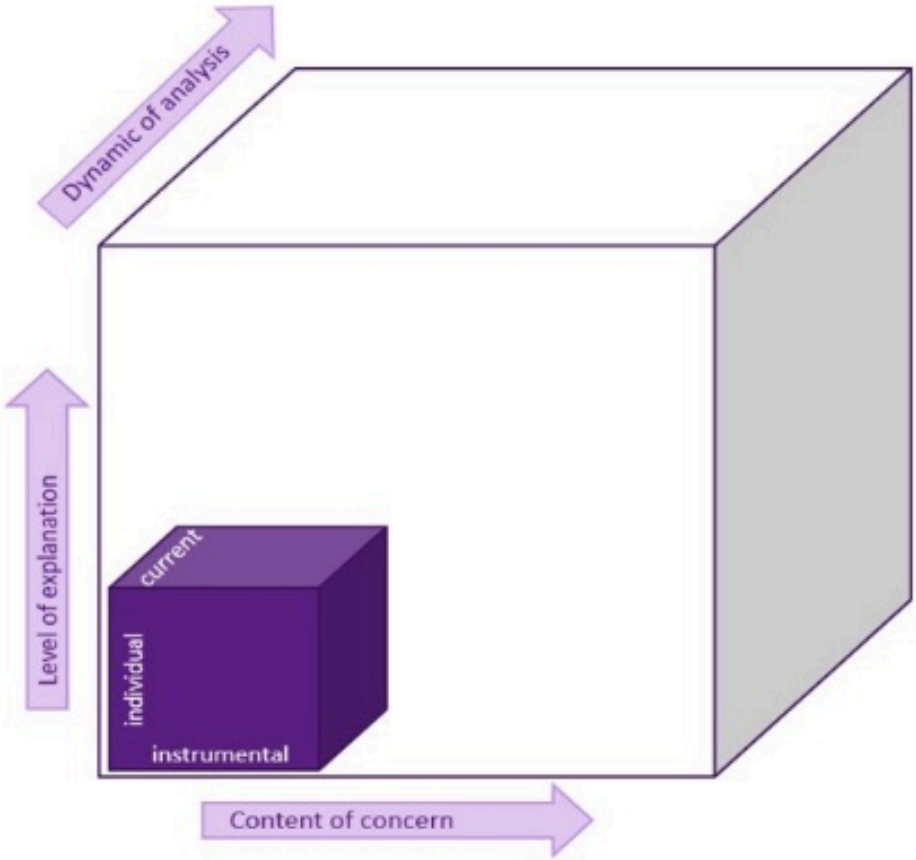
The research reviewed shows how a focus on access to material outcomes can raise conflict between groups, for instance about essential group features and differences in perceived deservingness. Further studies reveal that assumptions about stereotypical differences between group members can either facilitate or restrict their access to scarce resources and valued outcomes. A central conclusion from this strand of research is that group memberships can have far-reaching instrumental and symbolic implications for individual group members. That is, relations between groups in society impact the content of people's self-views, their feelings of self-worth, as well as their ambitions and future ideals.

Finally, the review built on these insights to examine the dynamics of intergroup relations as these unfold over time. Here, the question was addressed of how a history of antagonism and conflict between groups influences current self-views and collective experiences of group members. Studies reveal that the shadow of the past can raise remedial as well as self-justifying tendencies. Together, these not only affect current relations between the groups, but also impact future opportunities for the improvement of these relations. This work on dynamic features also shows how symbolic concerns at the group-level impact interpersonal interactions. It reveals the potentially escalating nature of aversive relations between representatives of different social groups. That is, due to changing relations between groups in society, group-based concerns, stressors, and emotions (such as collective guilt) can invite individual-level perceptions and behaviors that feed a cycle of increasing intergroup hostility and violence. Here too, note that intergroup conflict and aggression are not inevitable outcomes. However, more favorable social outcomes can only be realized from an accurate understanding of what causes such cycles and keeps them in place.

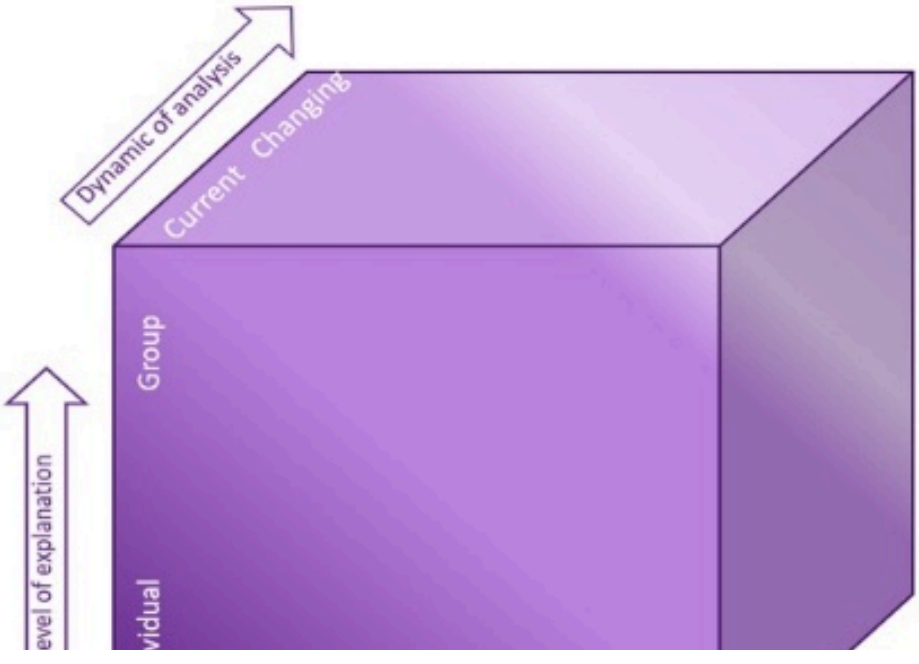
Thus, the research evidence that has accumulated can be organized to reflect the three recurring features of intergroup relations used to structure this chapter. Over the years, researchers have increasingly studied relations between groups at different levels of explanation, addressing instrumental as well as symbolic aspects, and observing dynamic changes over time (see also Figure 5). While in retrospect the roots of these ideas can be recognized in the classic studies, the range of evidence that is currently available has broadened understanding of intergroup relations beyond initial analyses. On the one hand, this has resulted in more detailed and specific insights into underlying psychological mechanisms. For instance, the introduction of neuroscientific techniques elucidates the interplay between top-down and bottom-up mechanisms in processing social information. On the other hand, application of emerging insights to a broader variety of groups and contexts has revealed additional complexities of incorporating instrumental as well as social concerns, as well as the long-term implications of changing intergroup dynamics. The need to understand relations between groups has regained its urgency and relevance—not only due to political developments but also due to changes in society. Here, research demonstrates the role of social media and online interactions in facilitating polarization and online aggression between members of different groups. Fortunately, these should not be seen as inevitable side effects of modern communication techniques. The next section of this chapter will examine these emerging insights to consider the possibilities of using social media and online communications in intervention strategies as one way to improve intergroup relations.

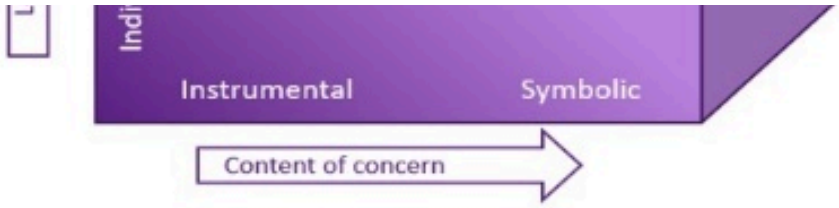
***Figure 5*: Understanding Relations Between Groups: Level, Content, and Dynamics**

Early explanatory approaches



Range of explanatory approaches





IMPLICATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

This final section synthesizes conclusions about the issues, findings, and theories reviewed in previous sections. These relate to accumulating research on real-life intergroup situations and tested impact of interventions. This connects back to the original questions and motivations examined from the start of the chapter.

The mechanisms identified in this chapter have *implications* for relations between groups, demonstrated in a variety of natural contexts. The three features of intergroup relations–used throughout this chapter–also help to determine whether attempts to improve intergroup relations target individual- or group-level mechanisms, presume preoccupation with instrumental or symbolic outcomes, and focus on the status quo or address dynamic changes in intergroup relations. Studies that have examined effects of different types of interventions reveal that some intuitively appealing measures prove ineffective. Likely this is the case because these do not target mechanisms at the appropriate level, or insufficiently capture the actual content, or dynamic of concern. Indeed, well-intended interventions can easily backfire, for instance when prompting people to defend and justify an existing conflict between groups, instead of inviting them to resolve it. In this way, attempts to improve intergroup relations can provoke additional derogation and hostility between members of different groups. Presumed solutions that address most visible symptoms of problems can be ineffective or even make things worse, if these do not accurately target underlying mechanisms and relevant concerns.

This final section of the chapter therefore focuses on how emerging insights about intergroup relations shed a new light on common *interventions* that have been developed. The range of contexts researchers have considered include challenges relating to diversity and inclusion in organizations, segregation versus integration of different groups in society, and the experience of threat and alienation due to migration. Interventions commonly used to handle such situations can be characterized by specifying the level, content, and dynamics these address (see Table 1). Referring to these features clarifies how additional and alternative interventions that have been developed include strategies that take into account group-level mechanisms, dynamic relations, or rivalry over symbolic outcomes. The research reviewed in this section can thus benefit further theory development and may inspire additional studies that can contribute to more productive approaches to relations between groups in society.

***Table 1*: Differences in the Level, Content, and Dynamic of Interventions**

Dimension	Focus	Focus
Level	Interpersonal	Intergroup
	Proximity Familiarity	Distinctiveness Complementarity
Content	Instrumental	Symbolic
	Interdependence Fair distribution	Shared ideals Respectful treatment
Dynamic	Past	Future
	Forgiveness Compensation	Opportunities Moral affirmation

Implications

Selecting The Appropriate Level Of Analysis: The Problem Of Self-Segregation

The body of evidence reviewed in this chapter shows that it is important to be specific about the root of problematic relations between groups, before being able to decide how to improve them. A first challenge to overcome in this context therefore is to determine the accurate *level of analysis* that is needed to understand or improve relations between different groups (see also Paluck, 2012a). This requires a closer consideration of how individual-level experiences and group-level experiences relate to each other—before being able to decide on an appropriate way to address these experiences.

In many real-life situations, religious, ethnic, or racial groups are socially and geographically separated from each other. Hence, group-level circumstances impact everyday individual experiences—or lack thereof. For instance, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland are located in different regions allowing both groups to live their separate lives and maintain stereotypical views of each other. The lack of interpersonal contact and first-hand information that might challenge the accuracy of such group-level images is a factor in the maintenance of conflict between these groups (Hughes, 2018).

However, this is not all there is to it. Even if the group setting does allow for interpersonal contact, people tend to avoid interacting with members of other groups. This was found to be the case, for instance, between members of different ethnic groups in South Africa (Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2007; see also Dixon et al., 2007). In fact, when given the choice, across different situations and national contexts individuals preferred housing and schooling options that connected them to ingroup rather than outgroup members. Such self-segregation tendencies are robust and persist even after attitudes about the other group have been improved (Schlueter et al., 2018). Thus, interventions that increase opportunities for interpersonal contact run the risk of treating lack of

contact, whereas this may only be a *symptom* of problematic relations between groups. Instead, it might be better to examine its origins, and address the reasons *why* people prefer to avoid such contact in the first place.

These efforts are driven by the expectation that increasing cross-group-boundary interactions will encourage the development of friendship ties, or at least make people realize how many things they have in common (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011). Thus, a key assumption is that interpersonal experiences will benefit group-level outcomes. For instance, in the USA, the practice of desegregation school busing—transporting students to public schools outside their local district—was developed with this aim in mind. It is true that benefits from increased intergroup contact have been documented across different national contexts and for different group types, for instance connecting minority and majority adults in neighbourhoods or majority and minority school students in five different countries (Schmid et al., 2017). Yet, lack of proximity or familiarity is not the only reason why members of different groups avoid each other. So simply encouraging more contact between individual group members is not always the solution. Indeed, in the USA school busing met with persistent protests from parents and was abandoned as an integration strategy (Sears & Kinder, 1985).

Even if increased contact has a positive impact, for instance in schools, this does not necessarily come about because members of different groups start liking each other more, or because they develop more positive attitudes about the other group (Hughes et al., 2013). In some cases, increasing contact between groups can make matters worse because people become more aware of their differences. For instance, a survey among mixed race university students in South Africa revealed widespread occurrence of racial incidents and discriminatory behaviors. In this case, these were mostly perpetrated by members of the university staff (Pillay & Collings, 2004). Thus, interpersonal contact experiences are not necessarily positive, and negative interactions only contribute to the continuation of hostility and distrust between the groups. Once this is the case, even seemingly neutral events can undermine the desire for further contact. For instance, a study in South Africa documents how unrelated experiences can be used to build narratives that reinforce perceived differences between the groups (De Vries et al., 2015). In sum, group-level problems do not always reduce to individual-level concerns, nor can intergroup tensions be solved by changing individual experiences.

As the Sherifs observed in the summer camp studies outlined above, once antagonism between groups has developed, just allowing for interpersonal contact is not enough to resolve this (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Sherif et al., 1961). Indeed, during the second week of camp, when the two groups of boys were brought together in the dining hall, catcalling escalated into a food fight. In the decades since this observation, a large body of evidence has accumulated to show the limited effects of merely offering opportunities for interpersonal contact. Instead, the nature of contact and the context in which it takes place are crucial factors determining whether and how this experience will impact on relations between groups. For instance, whether contact between sexual minority students and heterosexual students enhances discrimination or raises support for their activism depends on whether the contact experience is positive or negative (Reimer et al., 2017). Specifically, the level of *respect* extended to members of the other group predicts public support and political tolerance for a variety of groups, ranging from homosexuals, to Muslims, or Tea Party supporters in the USA (Simon et al., 2019). To be effective, such respect should not only refer to the quality of the interaction, but also convey respect for their cause, and acknowledge that both groups have a legitimate stake in shaping the local community (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2017).

In general, studies support the notion that contact between members of different groups is most likely to have positive effects when it targets the way the *groups* relate to each other. For instance, when it is supported by laws or relevant authorities, when both groups have equal status, have common goals they can (only) reach through cooperation, and have sufficient opportunity to interact and get to know each other (for overviews, see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011; Reina et al., 2022). However, in many natural group contexts, meeting these requirements is difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, many studies have documented the mixed effects of attempts to enhance contact between members of different groups. This work has specified different conditions that can contribute to positive experiences that successfully improve intergroup relations, which were mostly examined with interventions among children in educational settings (cooperative learning, or jigsaw classroom Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011; Reina et al., 2022; see Table 2). At first sight, this may be seen as a long and relatively random list of conditions that need to be met that can easily discourage people from even trying. At the same time, many of these conditions seem obvious if the aim is not just to foster opportunities for cross-group friendships, but to improve relations between *groups* (Hewstone, 2000).

***Table 2*: Conditions for Successful Intergroup Contact**

Condition	Description
Equal group status	The groups involved in contact should have equal status within the contact situation.
Common goals	The groups should work together towards a common goal that requires cooperation and interdependence.
Intergroup cooperation	The contact should involve cooperation in working towards common goals, and there should be no competition between groups.
Institutional support	The contact should be supported by authorities, law, or custom.
Salience of group membership	The salience of group membership should be reduced in the initial stages of contact, but later stages of contact may involve re-categorization to create a shared membership in a superordinate category that includes both groups.
Acquaintance potential	The contact situation should have the potential for individuals to become acquainted with each other.
Cross-group friendships	Greater closeness to individual outgroup members and the ability of the contact situation to provide people with the opportunities to become friends.
Frequency of contact	Contact that occurs more frequently may be more effective, but results are mixed.
Duration of contact	Longer contact interventions tend to have a higher positive effect.
Teaching resources	The use of teaching resources to deliver awareness interventions can be helpful in a teaching setting.
Perceived openness to cross-group interactions	The contact situation should be perceived as open to cross-group interactions.
Choice of contact	The positive effects of intergroup contact are greater when choice of contact is not given.
Age group	The effects obtained with children and adolescence are stronger than those with adults.
Setting	The largest mean effects emerge from contact that occurs in recreational and laboratory settings.

Note: Based on Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006); Pettigrew, T.F., & Tropp, L.R. (2011); Reina, R., Íñiguez-Santiago, M.C., Ferriz-Morell, R., Martínez-Galindo, C., Cebrián-Sánchez, M., & Roldan, A. (2022).

As is hopefully clear by now, people can fall into the trap of thinking that groups are just collections of individuals who share some common trait. Yet ample evidence shows that relations between groups are not defined by the degree to which individual members know each other or like each other. In fact, the reverse can happen: Some interethnic conflicts disrupt existing communities, suddenly antagonizing former neighbors, friends, even spouses and family members. Only group-level explanations can explain and address such events. Indeed, group-level needs and requirements can shape individual-level behaviors. For instance, displays of hostility toward outgroup members may be expected to demonstrate one's loyalty to the ingroup Coser, 1954; (Noel et al., 1995; Romano et al., 2017). Likewise, violence against the erstwhile ingroup may be requested to burn bridges and commit individuals to a new group (Ellemers & Jetten, 2013). As argued earlier,

to the extent that group memberships characterize individuals in terms of intragroup interdependences and self-defining identities, any attempt to improve relations between groups should start by considering these *group-level concerns and dynamics* that cause people to avoid interacting with outgroup members.

Addressing The Content Of Concern – The Case Of Intractable Conflict

These group-level concerns raise the next questions: What makes relations between groups conflictual? And, how to make relations more harmonious and productive? In many situations the answer to these questions seems obvious. Conflicts between groups arise because they have to compete for scarce resources. In some societies, different groups contend about access to food, water, or shelter. In other cases, their concerns center around the ability to secure education, housing, or employment. Unequal access to resources (e.g., income inequality) raises feelings of competitiveness, and promotes behaviors that undermine harmonious social relations (Sommet & Elliot, 2023). Thus, expanding the availability of valued resources (e.g., through economic growth), or arranging for a fair distribution among different groups should resolve these issues. Or so it seems.

People generally prefer to invoke such instrumental concerns to provide explanations. Specifying key resources that are lacking helps those who are socially disadvantaged to demonstrate the plight of their group or to argue for a different outcome. The privileged group can generally understand or condone these desires, even if they may dispute whether everyone is equally entitled to them. Hence, disagreements about the distribution of valued resources often come to the fore in the discourse about conflicts or how to resolve them. People generally consider it legitimate to argue for their preferred outcome and feel relatively confident about their ability to handle and resolve such conflicts (Harinck & Ellemers, 2014). However, it does not imply that this addresses the root of the problem. In reality, conflicts between groups often are mixed: Even disputes over scarce resources tend to include disagreements about key rights, responsibilities, or social ideals. Frustrations about lack of access to political voice, social status, or inclusion can also take priority over tangible outcomes. At the same time, regulating or negotiating these more symbolic issues is more stressful and daunting than arranging for a different distribution of material resources (Halevy et al., 2012; Harinck & Ellemers, 2014; Harinck et al., 2018; Kouzakova et al., 2012; 2014). This also explains why many shy away from trying to resolve ideological disputes that involve social and intangible concerns. Finally, as explained above, what might start as a competition over scarce resources can acquire symbolic overtones, just as disputes over social respect can inspire resource allocations.

Yet, here too, uncovering which issues are really at stake and what needs to be addressed is a key requirement to find a viable solution. This is not always clear, even if the situation seems obvious. For instance, in many parts of the world, migrants, members of the working class, or religious minorities are groups having to deal with unemployment, lack of access to housing, or reduced educational opportunities. It is easy to suspect that improving these instrumental outcomes is their top priority. Yet, in different countries, members of these groups have expressed equal if not greater frustration about their loss of dignity, lack of respect for their professional skills, or social exclusion (Lamont, 2000; Williams, 2017).

More generally, research results have documented a broad range of contentions that can divide societies and antagonize groups beyond instrumental concerns. Some of this work counters common narratives. For instance, resistance to the influx of migrants generally relates to anxiety of the host community about cultural changes—while more obvious economic concerns actually

figure less prominently (Hainmueller, & Hopkins, 2014). Indeed, in Belgium negative attitudes of Flemish speaking citizens towards French speaking citizens related to perceived economic threat. However, hostility towards migrants was fueled by perceptions of cultural threat (Meuleman et al., 2017). For the reasons detailed above, it is tempting to develop practical solutions that ignore such symbolic concerns. Yet, in these cases, financial compensation or material support may be construed as an inappropriate buy-off—raising resistance instead of gratitude (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). Similar mechanisms can operate in organizations, where minority workers receive support to advance their careers by teaching them to adapt to the work style of the majority. Here too, minority workers indicate feeling discouraged. They sometimes refuse participating in diversity programs—unless these value their group's distinctive features and unique work contributions (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Dover et al., 2020; Van Laar et al., 2013).

The reverse is equally problematic: when explanations for disputes and solutions for problems are sought in symbolic status markers and social outcomes while ignoring valid instrumental concerns. This happened for instance when addressing tensions between groups of agricultural workers in a grape-farming town in South Africa. Here, initial explanations and solutions highlighted xenophobic attitudes as a root cause. Nevertheless, a further investigation revealed how White farmers set these groups up against each other to compete for employment and housing, fueling perceptions of incompatible instrumental interests (Kerr et al., 2017). Likewise, an examination of violent raids among neighboring groups in rural Africa revealed that this did not reflect interethnic tensions. Instead, the risk of intergroup violence was increased in communities where young men had less access to material resources needed for marriage (Koos & Neupert-Wentz, 2020).

Additionally, scholarly analyses of longstanding real-life conflicts (such as the Israeli-Arab conflict in Israeli Jewish society) convincingly argue that political authorities and group leaders can deliberately offer narratives to confuse instrumental and symbolic concerns. Adding insult to injury, depicting the outgroup as the enemy may help rally support from ingroup members. However, systematically characterizing the distribution of valued outcomes as zero-sum while pointing to irreconcilable value differences, also makes the conflict seem intractable (Bar-Tal, 2000; 2013): There is no obvious solution, because there is no obvious cause. At the same time, references to longstanding and complicated disagreements that include intangible issues (such as identities, values, and beliefs) invite escalating cycles of polarization and hostility, as previously detailed.

In sum, in real life contexts, it is not always clear which intergroup conflicts reflect incompatible instrumental interests. Sometimes the actual dispute is about respect for group values or the acquisition of social status, and often it is mixed. Uncovering the root of the problem is made even more difficult when inaccurate but plausible narratives are put forth for political and strategic reasons. Thus, carefully examining and specifying the needs and concerns of different groups constitutes a second important step that needs to be taken for any attempt to resolve intergroup conflicts to be successful. Being mindful of the possibility that the conflict is not what it seems, and reluctant to accept the most obvious or popular answer can guard against investing in solutions for the wrong problem.

Minding The Dynamics Of Change – The Challenge Of Competitive Victimhood

This chapter started by noting that social groups are a key building block of human societies. This makes it necessary for members of different groups to find a way to co-exist at the minimum, or ideally to cooperate to be able to overcome shared technological, environmental, and social challenges. In any society, the resources and efforts of different groups are needed as they depend

on each other to be able to live and work together. At various points in time, societies and their leaders have tried different solutions to achieve this (see also Hogg, 2013). Many such solutions focus on maintaining the status quo, but do not benefit social resilience and adaptability to changing circumstances. Yet, intergroup prejudice and hostility does not just reflect the current situation: it is also predicted by concerns about the *future* vitality of one's group (Tabri et al., 2018).

A first way to impose order on society is to simply defend the dominance of particular groups, if needed with military force . In dictatorships, opposition of other groups calling for equal rights is crushed by brute force. In human history, governments have perpetrated mass migration, forced assimilation, and even genocide in their attempts to get rid of other groups and their competing claims for a place in society. History also shows how resilient groups are even when facing such brutal approaches. Ethnic communities and religious groups survive across generations and overcome geographical dispersion. They maintain a sense of community and common identity through cultural practices and storytelling. This carries them through hardship, unites them across different contexts, and fuels ongoing claims to equal rights and fair treatment of their group (Kahn et al., 2017; Kopstein & Wittenber, 2010).

A second option, and a counterpoint to violent struggle and oppression, groups can also more peacefully negotiate their place in society. In social identity theory, this is designated with the term *social cooperation* (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), indicating mutual agreement about the way the groups and their contributions to society complement each other (see also Hewstone & Brown, 1986). In two-group comparisons, one group is typically characterized through its competence and social achievement, while the other group is valued for its warmth and relational contributions (Cambon et al., 2015; Kervyn et al., 2010; Yzerbyt, 2018; Yzerbyt et al., 2005; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). This way of conveying that each gender group, racial group, or social class is predisposed for a specific role in society seems to offer an avenue toward harmonious social relations. However, in most cases contributions and achievements of one group (claiming superior competence) are more highly valued and give access to more resources than those of the other (who are seen to display more warmth). Hence, promoting such social cooperation can also be seen as a legitimizing narrative to maintain an unfair distribution of outcomes and opportunities between dominant and subordinate groups. Defusing legitimate claims for equal status or social change in this way can be an effective strategy to pre-empt more violent struggles about social power (Jackman, 1994). For this reason, such views have been characterized as being prejudicial and discriminatory and have been found to convey sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Bareket & Fiske, 2023) or racism (Esposito & Romano, 2014) albeit in a seemingly benevolent way. Thus, the 'irony of harmony' between groups is that it decreases awareness of social inequality and reduces collective action intentions to challenge unfair outcome distributions (Saguy et al., 2009; see also Hässler et al., 2020). Indeed, an important downside of interventions focusing on contact to foster mutual understanding and increase harmony between groups is that they reduce support for necessary changes to address historic inequalities (Dixon et al., 2012; see also Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Studies have documented such effects among different groups, such as Israeli Arabs (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019), and Black domestic workers in post-Apartheid South Africa (Durrheim et al., 2014).

A third approach to secure social stability and cooperation between groups is to channel efforts to change or improve social outcomes at the individual level. The illusion of meritocracy characterizes societal narratives maintaining that each individual can achieve any outcome—also known as the American dream. This suggests that differences between groups only emerge because members of some groups are less ambitious, talented, or hard-working than others and hence deserve less. Multiple analyses and studies have revealed that this image is not realistic. For instance, individuals

originating from socially privileged versus underprivileged groups do not have the same access to educational opportunities, healthcare, social support, or financial support to make for a level playing field (e.g., Di Tomaso, 2013). Much evidence specifies the causes and consequences of legitimizing ideologies or system-justifying beliefs (Jost, 2019; 2020; Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). Most relevant for the current argument is that these can easily obscure group-based differences in privilege and opportunity. Blaming individuals for group-level problems can be an effective way of maintaining a stable society but is not recommended as a strategy to secure fruitful cooperation between groups (Ellemers & Barreto, 2008; Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010).

What these violent and more peaceful approaches have in common is that they focus on *maintaining the status quo* even when having to adapt to allow members of different groups to thrive in a changing society. Indeed, as long as people suffer unequal opportunities, face an unfair distribution of outcomes, or lack social respect merely by virtue of their membership in social groups, sooner or later they are likely to challenge this. And when cooperative solutions no longer seem to work, those who suffer from such unfairness will ultimately resort to more radical and violent options, hoping to force social change (Cohrs et al., 2018). So what do the theoretical principles and studies reviewed in this chapter say about the dynamics of change?

As argued earlier, considering past inequalities and future ambitions allows us to specify points of contention that would otherwise not be understood. In this context, researchers have identified the principle of *competitive victimhood* (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2012; 2017). This term refers to a counterintuitive tendency of groups and their members to compete for the position of being worst off, due to harm inflicted by the other group. For instance, when violence of USA police officers toward citizens of color instigated the Black Lives Matter movement, this only prompted others to emphasize public violence against police officers, arguing that blue lives matter too (Solomon & Martin, 2019). Whereas it is difficult from an instrumental point of view to envision why people would downplay the achievements and social standing of their group, highlighting ongoing problems in this way can serve important symbolic and psychological functions. When both groups emphasize their weak position and unfavorable outcomes in the struggle for social recognition of their plight, they can each claim the moral high ground. References to past exploitation and present hardship and competing over the role of true victim and who is to blame for the current situation allows them to justify aggression and violence against the other group (Branscombe et al., 2015; Gray & Wegner, 2011; Halabi et al., 2021). Evidence for this phenomenon has been found in different types of studies and social contexts, ranging from experiments to qualitative analyses, and from historical intergroup conflicts to relations between different minorities in society (Young & Sullivan, 2016). Members of privileged groups typically claim hardship in being stigmatized by past injustice for which they cannot be held personally responsible (Leach et al., 2007; Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Saguy et al., 2013). Minorities claim suffering more from discrimination than other minorities (Craig & Richeson, 2014b; Vollhardt, 2015; White et al., 2006).

In general, competitive victimhood is most likely to emerge in situations characterized by structural inequality between groups that raises moral identity threat (Sullivan et al., 2012). The experience of such threat in turn relates to biased perceptions and recollections of the situation, which predict continuation of the conflict between the groups involved (McNeill & Vollhardt, 2020). Thus, attempts to resolve intergroup hostility and transition to a more equitable distribution of opportunities and outcomes between different groups are bound to fail unless they take into account moral identity concerns fuelled by past injustice. Competing views on which group can claim most suffering and hardship were found to influence relations between a large variety of groups (Young & Sullivan, 2016). These include Jews and Arabs in Israel (Hameiri & Nadler, 2017;

Schori-Eyal et al., 2014); Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Noor et al., 2008); non-indigenous and Native groups of Americans (Rotella & Richeson, 2013); Aborigines versus non-Aborigines in Australia; Muslim versus anti-Islam groups in UK; pro- versus anti-Pinochet groups in Chile (Noor et al., 2008); ethnic minority groups in Bulgaria (Green et al., 2017); and Dutch- and French-speaking citizens in Belgium (Alarcón-Henriquez, et al., 2010). The phenomenon of competitive victimhood is also evident in public communications about such conflicts. For instance, Russia was portrayed as a victim of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict on Russian TV (examined between 2013 and 2017; Pasitselska, 2017). At the same time, narratives highlighting the trauma of the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 were employed in Ukraine—for instance to engage support from Ukrainian Canadians during this conflict (Nikolko, 2020).

Competitive victimhood claims relating to historical differences in power positions, highlight the different *needs* of each group (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008; Shnabel & Noor, 2012). Victimhood of the group that has been violated or exploited addresses their need to motivate claims for reparation and change. Victimhood claims of the powerful or perpetrator group meet the need of alleviating collective guilt about past injustice and outgroup suffering (Roccas et al., 2006). Unfortunately, such competitive victimhood claims can frustrate conflict resolution, as they are also associated with lack of forgiveness and trust. This prevents reconciliation efforts and raises resistance to changes aiming to develop more positive intergroup relations (Siman Tov-Nachlieli et al., 2015; Shnabel et al., 2013). Thus, to be effective, interventions aiming for controlled and non-violent adaptations in intergroup relations should explicitly take into account past events and how these impact on the identity needs of each group.

Interventions

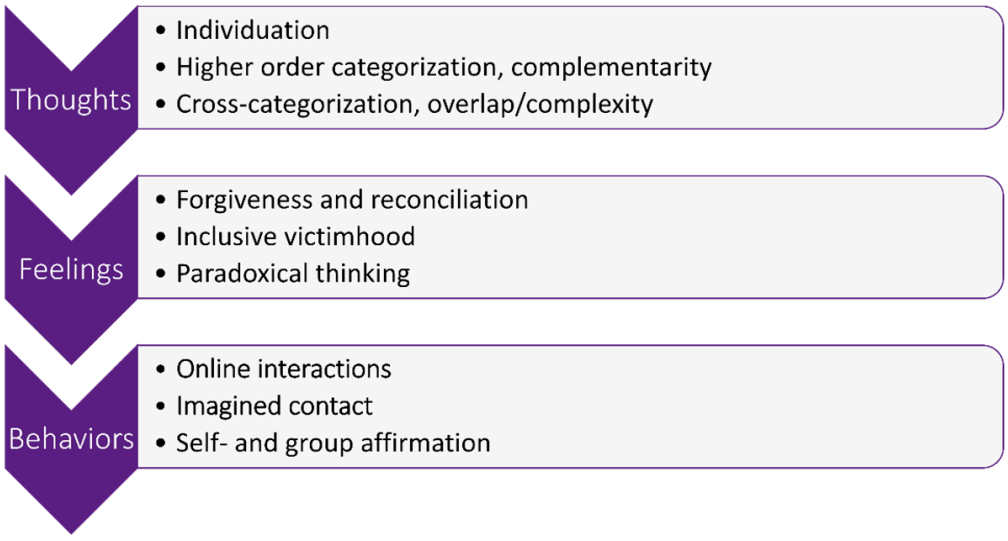
As indicated at the beginning of this section, early efforts to resolve hostile relations between groups focused on the facilitation of *contact* as a primary intervention (see also Devine et al., 2024). Over time, additional types of social interventions were developed and tested in research. These increasingly accommodate emerging insights about the level, content, and dynamic of intergroup relations, making it more feasible to select and apply an intervention that is appropriate for the situation and reflects an accurate diagnosis of the underlying problem (see also Figure 5). Most of these interventions aim to resolve intergroup conflict as a form of controlled social change, with groups seeking forgiveness, compensation, and reconciliation, as a way to prevent violent and revolutionary turnover of the status quo.

Unfortunately, available insights on the effectiveness of different types of interventions are incomplete. Several reasons explain why this is the case. Some interventions are driven by ideological convictions and mainly serve political purposes. This also explains why their intended impact is often not specified and is rarely monitored in a way that meets criteria for scientific knowledge generation. Further, the body of scholarly evidence that is available is dominated by laboratory experiments (as noted by Devine et al., 2024). While these studies may help select promising possibilities, their real-life viability and impact remains underexamined. Studies aiming to establish this in the field mostly employ post-hoc observations, making it difficult to pinpoint causal mechanisms. Field experiments examining the effectiveness of interventions by comparing them against each other or against control conditions—the gold standard methodology—are rare and have been conducted almost exclusively in North-American school settings (see also Paluck, 2006; 2012b).

Despite the limitations of this body of evidence, a key insight emerging from the studies conducted is that interventions tend to be more successful if they are not limited to ways to alter the *perceptions* of the other group, for instance through stereotype retraining (Dixon et al., 2012). As argued throughout this chapter, relations between groups are not only determined by people's views of others out there. Instead, perceptions of and interactions with members of different groups also depend on people's sense of *self* as well as the strength and content of their social identities—referring to the emotional and behavioral implications of their group memberships (Hogg et al., 2017). Thus, attempts to change the way members of different groups interact with each other should go beyond the way they *think* about other groups, but also include the way they *feel* about these groups in relation to their own group, and allow them to practice with different ways to *behave* in this context. Studies also reveal how these different aspects can be intertwined. For instance, the continuous feeling of intergroup threat, which characterizes intractable conflicts, has been found to induce closed-mindedness, which reduces people's ability to revise their views of the other group when receiving new information (Bar-Tal, 2007). Shared narratives that sustain such collective fears fuel pre-emptive aggression and frustrate the search for creative solutions (Bar-Tal, 2001). Thus, attempts at reconciliation are bound to fail unless they also tackle the feelings and behaviors that maintain this cycle of escalation (Bar-Tal, 2000).

This final part of the section overviews different types of interventions to specify their primary aim and target (see Figure 6). A first cluster of interventions addresses *cognitive* mechanisms, intended to make people *think* differently about the groups and their members. A second cluster of interventions highlights *emotional* implications of group memberships, as these aim to make people *feel* differently about the groups or about the self. Finally, a third cluster of interventions engages *behavioral* aspects involved, as these allow people to build confidence about their ability to act differently toward members of the other group.

***Figure 6*: Different Types of Interventions and Their Primary Target**



Notwithstanding the distinction between these three types of interventions, any intervention should be more effective when it includes multiple avenues toward change. In fact, engaging all channels may be needed, especially in longstanding conflicts, as was revealed, for instance, in multiple studies on the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Here, forgiveness and reconciliation after formal resolution of the conflict was not only driven by the positive thoughts people developed about the other group through increased contact. It also depended on their emotional connection to the ingroup that fostered outgroup dehumanization and

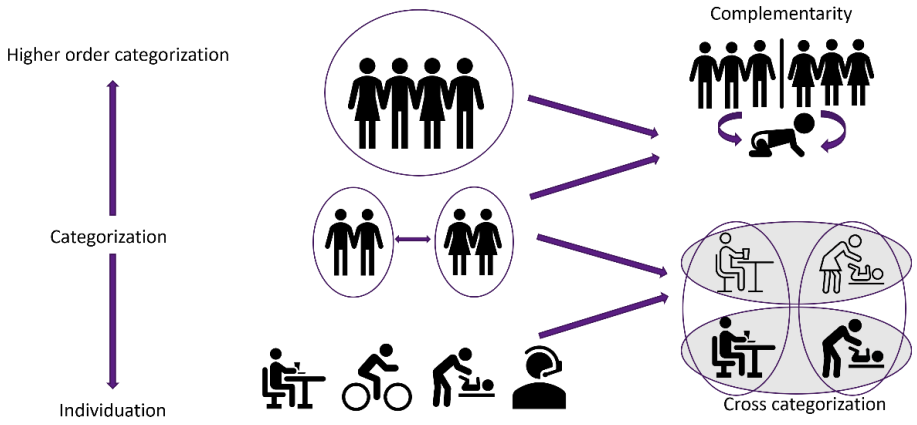
impeded empathy with their plight (Noor et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2007; 2008). Displays of support for the peace process increased over time because people started building a common social identity that allowed for intergroup forgiveness and trust (Taylor et al., 2022). Specific interventions can be used to elicit such cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes.

Thinking Differently

Interventions prompting people to *think differently* about members of the other group, target the social categorizations they tend to make. Instead of emphasizing differences between the groups, these interventions aim to foster a sense of shared identity that allows for individuation of outgroup members. By offering additional categorizations and alternative ways to cluster information about individuals and groups, these interventions aim to de-emphasize the categorization that causes problems. Diluting the information value of the division of people into two incompatible groups, makes it less likely that people simply infer individual characteristics, intentions, and behaviors from ingroup-outgroup memberships. This goal can be achieved in multiple ways: by facilitating individual-level information processing, by emphasizing a higher-level commonality, by elucidating how the groups complement each other in ways that contribute to a jointly valued goal, or by bringing to the fore a more complex pattern of partially overlapping categorizations. These are related mechanisms and ideally, interventions tap into a mix of their effects. However, for explanatory purposes, they are presented one by one (see Figure 7).

***Figure 7*: Different Strategies to Change the Way We Think About Groups**

Figure 7: Different strategies to change the way we think about groups



Individuation

Interventions that prompt people to consider the characteristics, needs and concerns of specific outgroup members can alter the way they think about the outgroup, because explicitly focusing one's attention on individual group members can decrease dehumanization tendencies (Harris & Fiske, 2011). The willingness to do this can be enhanced through contact or by emphasizing a shared identity. This was found to be the case in Kosovo, where Albanian students were invited to reflect on the violent relations between their ethnic group and the Serbs. After having frequent, high-quality, and extended contact with outgroup members they were more inclined to view the situation from the perspective of the outgroup, especially when they identified with the common ingroup of Kosovo citizens. They were more willing to trust outgroup members and disinclined to

see them as lesser humans (Andrighetto et al., 2012). As indicated when discussing the potential benefits of intergroup contact, studies examining White and Black adults in South Africa, Flemish and Walloons in Belgium, or Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland reveal the *quality* of the interactions as a crucial determinant of the likelihood that people build a common sense of identity and develop mutual trust (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2011; Dixon et al., 2010; Tropp et al., 2017; Van Assche et al., 2017). Individuation of outgroup members plays a crucial role in this process, for instance by fostering perspective-taking and self-disclosure in communications (Hargie et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2009).

Higher-order categorization

Interventions can also highlight how competing groups are bound together at a higher level, for instance, because they share a common fate (suffering from historical injustice) and have common characteristics (as fellow nationals), that also make them interdependent in their ambition to realize common interests and shared ideals (hoping for a peaceful society). Recategorizing two competing us-and-them groups under a common *we* label can reduce the perceived importance of group boundaries and prevent bias in processing information about outgroup members (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1993). This is a popular intervention, which can benefit the effectiveness of providing more opportunities for intergroup contact, and often precedes additional interventions.

For instance, emphasizing the shared humanity of bereaved Israelis and Palestinians in a sustained intergroup dialogue reduced competitive victimhood claims and facilitated reconciliation and development of a vision of peace (Burkhardt-Vetter, 2018). Another study found that simply providing information about the common genetic origin of Arabs and Jews already raised more support for peace initiatives (Kimel et al., 2016). Likewise, mutually prejudicial views among different groups of White adults in the USA could be reduced by emphasizing their common descent from immigrants. This made them more willing to help each other by donating money or time (Kunst et al., 2015). However, as indicated throughout this chapter, this type of intervention is most likely to be effective when it taps into the most prominent concerns and fault lines that define the conflict. For instance, one study found that simply pointing to the fact that Israeli Jews and Palestinians lived in the same region did very little to change their way of thinking about each other. It was much more impactful to foster a higher-order recategorization that redefined their oppositional roles in the conflict. Regardless of whether their common experiences as victims or as perpetrators in the conflict was emphasized, building a common identity in this way (rather than through regional commonalities) proved more effective as a tool to reduce competitive victimhood claims and moral defensiveness, increasing perceived agency, and eliciting forgiveness of the other group (Shnabel et al., 2013).

Complementarity

Social cooperation can be fostered by emphasizing how the characteristic features or abilities of the groups complement each other. Again, note that using this as a primary intervention can also offer a narrative to keep subordinate social groups in their place. As reviewed, studies reveal how the assignment of asymmetrical value to prototypical ingroup versus outgroup characteristics can prevent movement toward more equitable social outcomes. Nevertheless, there is added value in highlighting complementary group features, especially in the context of moving toward higher-order categorizations. Valuing complementary group features can prevent resistance against

clustering members of different groups into a single overarching category (e.g., 'we are all fellow nationals').

Because group memberships help people to define their sense of self and their place in society, they do not necessarily welcome messages that downplay the importance of their identity-defining features. In fact, simply emphasizing common features and similarities to blur intergroup differences can raise distinctiveness threat and resistance (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). It reinforces the tendency to emphasize distinct features that are unique to the ingroup and can prompt members of different groups to exaggerate differences between them, only antagonizing them further (Jetten & Spears, 2003; Jetten et al., 2004). Thus, it is important to strike the right balance—to accommodate the need to belong to a larger group with a common identity as well as the desire to understand one's distinct place within the broader social structure (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). This point of optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 2003; 2012; Leonardelli et al., 2010) can be reached by remembering to explicitly acknowledge the distinct features of each group, while pointing out how these complement each other.

The effectiveness of this strategy has been examined for instance in the creation of organizational mergers, cross-cultural collaborations, and organizational diversity programs (e.g., Hogg & Terry, 2014; Gelfand et al., 2007; Terry, 2003). Creating a dual identity by respecting and valuing the distinct contributions of each group—noting their complementarity in the context of a larger overarching category—generally is more beneficial for the willingness of groups to acknowledge their interdependence in achieving joint goals than simply trying to erase ingroup/outgroup differences. For instance, organizers of the LGBT marches in Washington rallied more support with a narrative that engaged with key differences between the participating groups than by emphasizing their joint goal or highlighting similar features (Ghaziani & Baldassari, 2011). Likewise, in Portugal, public attitudes toward different groups of migrants became more positive once it was made clear how migrants as well as indigenous citizens contributed to the Portuguese society (Guerra et al., 2015).

Cross-categorization

A final type of intervention in this list consists of invoking the complex and multifaceted nature of social identities. This resonates with different literatures and research traditions. Psychological theory and research on social categorization and social identities refers to this as *multiple categorization* (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). Sociological approaches to demographic diversity and relations between groups in society commonly indicate this as *intersectionality* (Nicolas et al., 2017). The main message is that in contemporary societies, each individual can be categorized in many different ways (e.g., based on ethnicity, gender, age group, profession), allowing people to think of themselves and others as members of multiple partially overlapping groups. Scholarship on intersectionality highlights the implication that each subgroup (migrant women versus migrant men, or Muslim versus Christian members of the LGBT community) confront specific issues, which merit separate attention and require different solutions.

The focus in this review is on the psychological perspective, and the implications of shifting people's attention away from simple ingroup-outgroup or majority-minority differences. For instance, in post-conflict Kosovo, the willingness of the Albanian majority to have contact with the Serb minority related to their tendency to perceive shared features in more complex and partially overlapping categorizations and identities (Maloku et al., 2019). Thus, drawing people's attention to more complex and crossed identities is meant to invite a different subjective representation of the

situation in terms of multifaceted groups and complex identities (Brewer, 2010; Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Indeed, pointing out that members of the outgroup (e.g., migrant workers) can be considered ingroup members when focusing on a different feature (e.g., female workers) results in greater perceived variability within groups and fewer perceived differences between groups (Brewer, 2013; Brown & Turner, 1979; Hewstone et al., 1993).

Intervention studies and experiments invoking this phenomenon have shown that shifting people's perceptions of the outgroup in this way has beneficial downstream consequences. For instance, the multiple categorization of migrants enhances individuation of outgroup members that reduces threat and elicits attribution of uniquely human emotions that prevents dehumanization (Prati et al., 2016). Likewise, encouraging students to categorize others in terms of their level of education causes them to identify with other highly educated individuals, and to consider these as more worthy and deserving of fair treatment (Kuppens et al., 2015). Making Jewish Israelis aware of their partially shared identity with Israeli Arabs reduced the tendency to stereotype and dehumanize the Arab outgroup, improving attitudes toward them (Levy et al., 2017).

Feeling Differently

Next, consider possible interventions that engage with the way people *feel* about the groups in question as a result of their perceived interdependence and identity, which can elicit emotions ranging from hatred and anger, to guilt, or hope and empathy (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). The strategies considered here more directly tackle the emotional and symbolic overtones of many conflicts between groups, addressing their needs, values, and feelings of victimhood as a way to overcome and reconcile intergroup conflict (Halevy et al., 2015). Rather than targeting the way people categorize the self and others into groups, these interventions aim to help group members acknowledge their mutual worth, value, and right to a place in society. This engages with the notion that people cannot be expected to contribute to a society that does not cater to their needs or respects their identity. Indeed, in rural Uganda, people were more likely to display prosocial behavior when they were more secure about their position in the community (Baldassarri & Grossman, 2013).

Forgiveness and reconciliation

The need-based model of reconciliation (Shnabel et al., 2009) highlights the importance of addressing identities and emotions when trying to resolve conflicts between groups in real-life situations. Here, the asymmetrical position of each group typically raises different needs and concerns that require mutual recognition before being able to move forward (Pratto & Glasford, 2008). In long-standing historical conflicts, members of the victim group typically feel that others fail to acknowledge that systematic violation or exploitation of their group placed them in a position of subordination and disadvantage. To alleviate this threat, they need recognition and empowerment by the other group (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015; Shnabel & Noor, 2012). Allowing the victim group to accept or reject the apology offers an empowering experience that can increase the likelihood of forgiveness. This was demonstrated for instance in a study of the bereaved of Canadian soldiers who were killed by friendly fire from USA soldiers in Afghanistan (Kachanoff et al, 2017). Unfortunately, members of the perpetrator group typically fear social rejection when their position of privilege raises moral critique, eliciting a need for forgiveness and moral acceptance. For instance, Australian citizens who were invited to think about the socially disadvantaged situation of indigenous inhabitants, preferred to avoid the topic when this raised shame about the public

image of the ingroup. Only when they were prompted to consider what indigenous inhabitants were entitled to, did they become more supportive of apologies as well as instrumental compensation to repair past injustice, due to the experience of guilt and moral shame (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021).

These types of situations call for interventions that encourage groups to address their mutual feelings, to be able to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation (Boudreau, 2003). This can be achieved for instance through a dialogue between the groups or their leaders. Explicitly acknowledging unjust treatment of the subordinate group—offering public apologies or compensation from those who have exploited or violated them—can help overcome resentment and anger toward the dominant group. Members of the perpetrator group will find it easier to work toward reconciliation once they have been granted redemption. Explicitly stating moral acceptance and forgiveness will help reduce feelings of threat at considering an alternative social order. For instance, in post-apartheid South Africa, people were more supportive of anti-discrimination programs when these indicated entitlement to compensatory treatment, and engaged with feelings of threat (Durrheim et al., 2011). In Belgium, changes in mutual hostility between Flemish and French speaking citizens related to the extent to which collective concerns were directed at establishing justice—for instance in linguistic policies or in financial and political autonomy (Klein et al., 2012).

Inclusive victimhood

Attempts to change the way people feel about the situation can also benefit from engaging with feelings of competitive victimhood. These feelings are reinforced by each group insisting on the narrative that the ingroup suffered more than outgroup. This happens, for instance, when one party highlights the Holocaust whereas the other party emphasizes the Nakba in considering Jewish-Palestinian relations (Caplan, 2012). However, this also implies that such feelings may be reduced by adapting the narrative as a way to start resolving the conflict. Indeed, an intervention study in which the narrative emphasized equal suffering of both groups as a form of inclusive victimhood was found to reduce support for more hostile solutions (Adleman et al., 2016). Another study, investigating people involved in Turkish-Kurdish as well as Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, also found that group members responded differently, depending on whether the narrative considered the perspective of both groups. Here, levels of forgiveness and support for non-violent resolutions were increased when the struggle of both groups for independence was acknowledged, compared to the situation where each group simply condemned acts of terrorism perpetrated by the other group (Uluğ et al., 2021).

Paradoxical thinking

Techniques that have been developed in clinical psychology may also be used to change the feelings of group members. These are offered as an alternative way to reduce resistance and defensiveness, making people more open to considering new information and alternative solutions to the intergroup conflict. The term *paradoxical thinking* characterizes the strategy of pointing out contradictions in reasoning that people use to defend their social beliefs and justify negative attitudes. Effects have been examined in different contexts, documenting that this can invite people to reconsider their position toward refugees and asylum seekers, to gender-based discrimination, or to possible solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2021; Hameiri et al., 2019). This type of intervention uses messages that extrapolate people's positions to absurd conclusions, as a

way to provoke disagreement. Making people aware of some of the extreme and untenable implications of their stance raises surprise and makes them feel their stance is incompatible with their identity. It makes people see the irrationality of their beliefs and unfreezes their fixed attitudes (Hameiri et al., 2014; 2018). Multiple studies found this strategy to be effective in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Exposure to a paradoxical thinking manipulation was found to raise more conciliatory attitudes toward the other group. These effects were visible even in their impact on voting behavior for peace-supporting parties in the Israeli elections one year later (Hameiri et al., 2014).

Acting Differently

Especially when there is little contact or severe antagonism between the groups, even those who have positive attitudes and feelings about the other group may find it difficult to act accordingly. This touches upon the tendency of individuals to (implicitly) rely on their group memberships when searching for guidance about appropriate behaviors and norms, as a way to secure social acceptance (Spears, 2021; Turner, 1985). Once they venture outside the boundaries of their own group, this can raise uncertainty and social awkwardness, which is intensified when people have reason to fear rejection or hostility for doing or saying things the other group sees as offensive. Considering this possibility alone can prevent people from even trying to engage with outgroup members, let alone making an effort to build a cooperative relation with the other group. Interventions that engage with this concern focus on strategies that help people build confidence in their (collective) *self*, instead of trying to change their image of the other group. Some of the interventions discussed here support people in changing their behaviors through practice and learning (self-efficacy). Other interventions focus on enhancing people's confidence in the validity of their personal values and their groups worth as guidelines for their behavior (self- and group-affirmation).

Online interactions

The research reviewed in the previous section elucidates how online and digital interactions can contribute to the escalation of intergroup hostility. However, it would be inaccurate to portray the anonymity of digital interactions or the visibility of online communications to a broad audience as factors that inevitably cause polarization between groups (Jaidka, Zhou, Lelkes, Egelhofer, & Lecheler, 2022; Rösner, & Krämer, 2016). In fact, online interactions can also have beneficial effects. Not only can this way of communicating connect people who are geographically separated. Online interactions also tend to reduce the perceived salience of individual preferences, enhance a sense of shared identity and invite socially normative behavior (Postmes & Spears, 1998; Reicher et al. 1995). Although people are generally aware of the possible negative impact of such interactions in causing harassment, hostility, and bullying, the effects on people's behaviors can also be positive. That is, online interactions also make it easier to monitor other people's transgressions, or to publicize misbehaviors (Chung, 2019; Coppolino Perfumi et al., 2019; Davidson et al., 2020). Accordingly, online interactions and social media use can also be engaged to reduce antagonism between groups in society.

Several studies confirm that online interactions can facilitate one-on-one exchanges that improve social connectedness (Ellison et al., 2007). Connections through social media can raise empathy in adolescents as they disclose their inner self and improve their ability to understand and share feelings of peers over time (Alloway et al., 2014; Vossen & Valkenburg, 2016). Interventions making

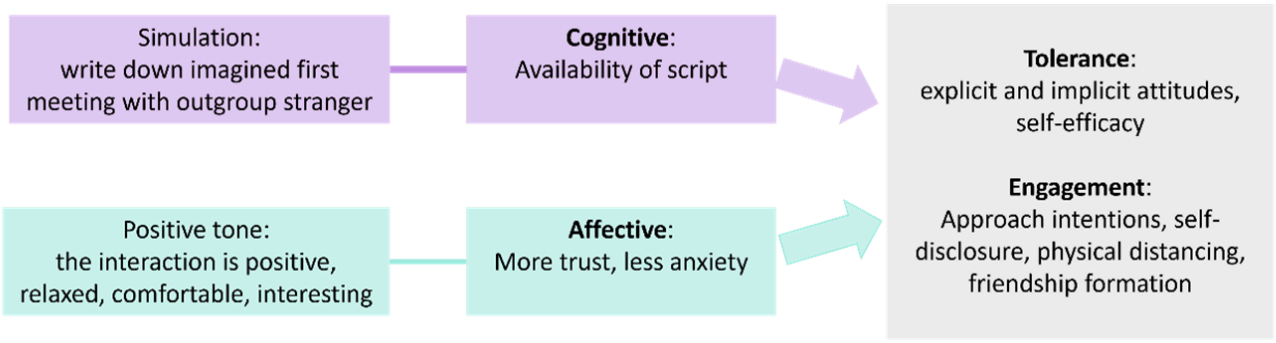
use of these phenomena under controlled conditions have revealed that online interactions can offer a channel to highlight social identity, facilitate communication between groups, and offer broader participation of group members in an emerging discourse between the groups (Carr, 2017; Carr, et al., 2016; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Indeed, organizing real intergroup contact tends to be quite challenging, for instance, because it is impractical, makes people anxious, or only involves small numbers of participants. These difficulties can be overcome by organizing positive interactions through the internet (Amichai-Hamburger, & McKenna, 2006; McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Studies have offered evidence that having people interact online with individuals who disconfirm outgroup stereotypes can help reduce antagonism against the outgroup. This is the case, even if stereotypical perceptions remain the same (Alvídrez et al., 2015). For instance, an online contact program was found to induce more respectful interactions between antagonized groups in Israel (Amzalag & Shapira, 2021). In fact, even televised vicarious interactions between USA border patrol and illegal immigrants were found to impact liking of the individual portrayed, which extended to improved attitudes of USA border patrol officers toward immigrants as a group (Joyce & Harwood, 2014).

Imagined contact

Alleviating anxiety about interactions with members of the other group is possible through interventions employing imagined contact. These interventions use imagery techniques of positive interactions to enhance attitudes toward members of the other group and promote tolerance and positive intergroup relations (Crisp & Turner, 2012; see Figure 8). A meta-analysis of over 70 studies demonstrates this can have beneficial effects across a broad range of groups and contexts (e.g., Turkish and Greek Cypriots; Husnu & Crisp, 2010). This intervention was found to significantly reduce intergroup bias in attitudes, emotions, intentions, and behaviors (Miles & Crisp, 2014). As is the case with real contact, emphasizing the intergroup nature of the interaction is important to be able to elicit these effects (Hewstone, 2000; Pagotto et al., 2013). The impact of this type of intervention seems to be stronger for those who have less prior experience with the outgroup. For instance, more improvement was observed in children after they had imagined interacting with someone that had a disability (Cameron et al., 2011) than in adults who had imagined an interaction with someone that had schizophrenia (Giacobbe et al., 2013).

Stronger effects were obtained when people were prompted to elaborate more on the context of the imagined interaction—increasing the function of the experience as a behavioral script (Crisp et al., 2010). Deeper insight into the mechanisms that are activated by this intervention can also inform and enrich other types of interventions by adding techniques that encourage people to imagine cooperative interactions, as a way to enhance empathy and trust between members of different groups (Kuchenbrandt et al., 2013; Stathi et al., 2014). This intervention seems quite powerful. It has been found to alleviate prejudice against groups that already have been dehumanized (i.e., rated low in warmth as well as competence; Brambilla et al., 2012). Further, its impact is also visible in implicit associations used to assess prejudice, e.g., toward elderly or Muslims (Turner & Crisp, 2010), and even among most ideologically intolerant individuals (Bergeron, 2012), or those suffering from intergroup anxiety (Birtel & Crisp, 2012). In fact, in line with the notion that this type of intervention also targets people's self-views, positive effects have not only been documented for others but also for the self, in that it can eliminate negative effects of stereotype threat. For instance, imagining positive contact with grandchildren reduced test anxiety and math test performance among elderly people (Abrams et al., 2008).

***Figure 8*: Mechanisms Activated by Imagined Contact**



Note: Based on Crisp & Turner, 2012; Miles & Crisp, 2014; Turner et al., 2007.

Self- and group affirmation

Finally, a class of interventions that is relevant when engaging in novel behaviors or interacting with outgroup members are affirmations focusing on the self or the ingroup, rather than the outgroup. These interventions directly target people's self-views and sense of social worth, by prompting them to remember and affirm key values or prior achievements that characterize themselves and/or their groups (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This helps people to detach their sense of self-worth from the identity threat they may experience, which undermines their ability to perform intended behaviors (Sherman, 2013). A difference compared to the reconciliation strategies just discussed is that the self-affirming experience can also be gained from broader values and ideals, or group-defining features that are unrelated to the outgroup or irrelevant to points of contention that antagonize groups. This type of intervention can take different forms. For instance, inviting people to reflect on their core values in a written statement reduced feelings of self-threat and bias, and this made it easier to see common ground with the other group (Sherman et al., 2017).

Prior work has shown that self-affirmation manipulations can alleviate feelings of self-threat and reduce expressions of prejudice that sustain intergroup hostility (Badea & Sherman, 2019; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Zárate & Garza, 2002). For instance, group-affirmation reduced the tendency to derogate the sports performance and achievements of a competing team (Sherman et al., 2007). The key focus of this intervention is to provide people with a more general sense of social value and self-efficacy, helping them to engage with novel situations and stressful tasks in an effective way (Sherman, 2013). The examination of cardiovascular responses in an experimental context revealed how a group-affirmation manipulation allowed women to reduce maladaptive stress that impaired their behavioral performance on a counter-stereotypical task (Derks et al., 2011). Bolstering people's social value and sense of self-worth can thus be an effective way to influence the way they interact with members of other groups.

Impact Of Interventions In The Real World: The Importance Of A Supportive Context

A few studies have established how interventions that engage multiple levels and processes can have measurable effects, even in long-standing real-world conflict, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Levy et al., 2022a). An examination of neural mechanisms associated with intergroup

conflict and peacemaking revealed evidence for perceptual top-down cognitive control of prejudicial responses (thinking differently), associated with intergroup dialogue (acting differently) and peacemaking attitudes (feeling differently). A randomized controlled trial study among adolescent Israelis and Palestinians invited a continued dialogue in an eight-week intervention (Levi et al., 2022b). Neural markers and stated attitudes assessed before and after the intervention offer evidence of a diminished neural prejudice response and more positive attitudes toward peacemaking. A longitudinal follow-up revealed that the impact of this intervention in terms of the degree of change in neural prejudice predicted active engagement in peacebuilding in adult civil activities and responsibilities, even seven years later.

Another rare example of a randomized controlled field experiment in a real-life intergroup conflict situation was carried out in Rwanda, where a radio soap opera included a year's worth of messages about reducing intergroup prejudice, violence, and trauma, in fictional Rwandan communities (Paluck, 2009). Effects of exposing citizens to these mass media narratives were observed in changes of their social norms as well as their behaviors relating to intermarriage, open dissent, trust, empathy, cooperation, and trauma healing, compared to a control group—all this despite the fact that little change was observed in the personal beliefs of listeners. This result engages with the prior conclusion that group-level activities are needed to activate shared narratives and social mechanisms pertaining to relations between social groups.

Impressive as these results may seem, a key factor in the success of such interventions is that they are endorsed by group leaders, and reinforced by contextual factors and institutional arrangements that signal political and economic inclusion (Alexander & Christia, 2011; Baldassarri, 2020; Baldassarri & Abascal, 2020). Throughout, research reviewed in this chapter shows that conflicts between groups rarely follow directly from the presence of scarce resources or objectively incompatible interests. Instead, they relate to the way people interpret the situation, their identity in it, and how this conflicts with the identities of other groups—which tends to be defined by group leaders and reinforced by shared narratives. A review ties together findings of many studies by noting that intergroup conflict and violence often relates to a *conflict-supporting mindset* (CSM Saguy & Reifen-Tagar, 2022). This term is used to capture a set of interrelated negative attitudes, feelings and beliefs regarding the outgroup, which devalues and demonizes its members. The studies brought together in this review identify a CSM as pivotal in endorsing and justifying violence as being permissible or even necessary. For instance, although the 'troubles' in Ireland are generally seen as stemming from incompatible religious preferences, in reality these are fed by religious, political, and national narratives and ideologies that represent distinct communities (Ferguson & McKeown, 2016). Another study in Northern Ireland accordingly found that whether highly identified group members supported intergroup violence, depended on their endorsement of a narrative in which the identity of the ingroup was defined through antagonism with the outgroup (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This chapter has connected academic research on intergroup relations in social psychology to pressing issues in society by engaging with ongoing societal challenges, relating to globalization and migration, and how these impact different group members' claims over social power and valuable resources. Throughout, the theories, studies, and analyses reviewed here highlighted concerns relating to social status and esteem, distinctiveness and identity, and inequality and change—which also impact neuro-cognitive mechanisms. This argues for the reassessment of issues relating to

classic research questions and everyday narratives about the meaning of and relationship between group memberships and group boundaries in society. The research reviewed here clarifies that lay accounts and popular analyses directly relating intergroup conflict to individual biological processes, instrumental concerns about division of scarce resources, or the status quo at any particular point in time tend to be incomplete. Hence, these offer inaccurate and even misleading guidelines to manage intergroup relations or address intergroup conflict in real life. Systematically noting the level, content, and dynamics of the situation should contribute to the development of more accurate analyses of underlying issues and should reveal the most appropriate and viable solutions.

Parallels emerge between findings from experimental studies under controlled conditions and implications in real-life intergroup situations. These include contexts where contact between group members increasingly relies on digital means and technologies for social interactions. Here, it is emphasized that the impact of interventions aiming to maintain or change intergroup relations is not only determined by the psychology of the individuals and groups involved. Instead, it crucially depends on the motives and commitment of those trying to gain control over the behavior of individuals, such as group leaders or political stakeholders. The key role of shared narratives, ideals, and justifications implies that the choices of political and religious leaders have far-reaching implications for the relations between the groups they try to mobilize and control. Such narratives can either highlight or downplay the role of scarce resources (access to labor, public space, natural resources) versus moral truths (beliefs about climate change, social fairness, international relations) as points of contention, and impact on the social meaning afforded to specific groups and categorizations. Hence, they shape the way people perceive the situation as well as the types of solutions they seek – in ways that go way beyond biological mechanisms, or availability of coveted resources. The resulting narratives and interactions can either benefit or harm the peaceful co-existence of groups, regardless of whether these are delivered in person or online.

These analyses and their implications suggest different classes of potentially viable interventions. Evidence from these intervention studies, first, reveals that not only people's thoughts, but also their feelings and behaviors need to be addressed—ideally in concert—for such interventions to be optimally successful. Second, this work clarifies how interventions can be used to balance biased concerns and compensate for common blind spots. That isthe focus of many explanations and interventions is on the perceived characteristics and behaviors of *other* groups. Yet, the more fine-grained analysis offered by emerging insights clarifies that some of the reasons why people find it difficult to accept or interact with members of other groups relate to views, concerns, and emotions focusing on the *self*. Thus, these need to be addressed for them to be able to interact more productively with outgroup members. Third, this research highlights the interactive and dynamic nature of intergroup interactions–that can gradually spiral into more beneficial or more harmful exchanges. There are many challenges in this process. For example, we directly feel our own emotions but sense those of outgroup members to a lesser extent. Conversely, we see the behaviors of outgroup members (and often interpret them negatively) and are less aware of our own behaviors that may be dysfunctional for obtaining more positive intergroup relations. Yet, both reflecting on our own behaviors and sensing the emotions and concerns of outgroup members is necessary to fully understand sources of dispute and antagonism between members of different groups, and how to resolve these (Halevy & Landry, 2023).

In conclusion, the work reviewed in this chapter nevertheless demonstrates that there are productive ways to address intergroup relations in real-life conflictual contexts, including longstanding and violent conflicts between groups in Northern Ireland, Israel, Belgium, Balkan

countries, Africa, and Australia. The scholarship in this chapter thus offers hope for the ability of groups to live together peacefully and to cooperate in coping with the challenges of contemporary societies.

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ENDNOTES