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TENSION AND HARMONY IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS

TAMAR SAGUY, NICOLE TAUSCH, JOHN F. DOVIDIO,
FELICIA PRATTO, AND PURNIMA SINGH

Aggression between groups is an extreme manifestation of intergroup tension (see Chapters 16 and 17). This form of tension can result in the killing and displacement of innocent people, the destruction of infrastructure and property, and setback in the process of reconciliation. Therefore, tension between groups has traditionally been viewed as categorically harmful. In sharp contrast, harmony between groups, which encompasses positive perceptions and orientations toward outgroup members, is often viewed as ideal. These categorical views of harmony as “good” and tension as “bad” have guided much thinking in the social sciences, as reflected in research on conflict resolution (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001), prejudice reduction (see Paluck & Green, 2009, for a review), and intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998). The primary goal in these areas of research has typically been to eliminate tension between groups and create harmony.

Nevertheless, not all forms of harmony are necessarily beneficial to intergroup relations (Jackman, 1994), and not all forms of intergroup tension

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are inevitably destructive (Varshney, 2002). Particularly when the broader social context is taken into account, viewing harmony as good and tension as bad can be an oversimplification of the dynamics of intergroup relations. The context that often characterizes relations between groups is one of systematic inequality (e.g., Jews and Arabs in Israel, Blacks and Whites in the United States or South Africa, Muslims and Hindus in India, Muslims and non-Muslims in the United Kingdom). As exemplified by historical changes, societal tension can be quite constructive in creating pressure for changing unequal structures in the direction of equality. Social struggles such as those initiated by the U.S. civil rights movement or by the African National Congress in South Africa were aimed at disturbing apparent amity in order to “open the eyes of blind prejudice” (King, 1964, p. 35) and incite action for social justice (see Sharp, 2005).

Because the disruption of harmony is often necessary for stimulating change toward social equality, efforts to create harmony between groups may in fact work to undermine these potential changes (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Thus, interventions to create societal harmony can potentially have the ironic effect of sustaining negative patterns of intergroup relations, particularly those pertaining to group-based inequality. In the present chapter, we consider research on the effects of harmony-inducing strategies on psychological factors related to changes in group-based inequality.

Our emphasis is on the consequences of intergroup contact, which is psychology’s most influential and frequently used strategy for creating harmony, or improving relations, between groups (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998). In the majority of cases, intergroup contact is implemented to improve relations between members of groups that are unequal in the social system. Although it is well established that intergroup contact relates to improved attitudes toward outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), little is known about the effect of contact and improved attitudes on factors that relate to social change toward equality. Our central argument is that because harmony undermines tension, and because tension is crucial for social change, a by-product of contact interventions may be the paradoxical stability of unequal social systems that interveners hoped to change.

This chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section, we focus on intergroup tension and discuss factors that can bring about change toward equality. In the second section, we consider how intergroup contact, as a strategy that aims to increase harmony, can work to undermine these factors. Finally, we present empirical evidence that converges on the conclusion that contact may reduce the potential for change. We discuss the implications of these results for intergroup relations in general and for intergroup hostility and aggression more specifically.

PREDICTORS OF SOCIAL CHANGE TOWARD EQUALITY

Our starting point is the assumption that social inequality is likely to remain stable insofar as group members do not oppose it. Therefore, when considering antecedents of social change, we focus on psychological processes that predict group members' motivations to resist the status quo. We begin by explicating who the likely agents of change are in a hierarchical system and then turn to consider the more specific psychological processes involved in the development of social actions that can increase equality.

Who Are the Likely Agents of Change? The Psychologies of Advantaged and Disadvantaged Group Members

Without exception, societies are hierarchically organized such that at least one group controls a greater share of valued resources (e.g., political power, land, economic wealth, educational opportunities, access to health care) than do other groups (Jackman, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Group-based hierarchy is reflected in almost every aspect of social life, from poverty rates and school attrition rates to prison sentences and mortality rates—favoring members of advantaged groups over those in disadvantaged groups (Feagin, 2006; Jackman, 2001; Smootha, 2005; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Moreover, members of disadvantaged groups, compared with members of advantaged groups, are subjected to discrimination and social injustice in a wide range of domains, such as interviewing for jobs and being quoted a price for a house or a car (e.g., Ayres, 1991; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Group-based disparities accompanied by differential social treatment produce divergent daily realities for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Whereas members of disadvantaged groups find many doors to economic opportunities closed, suffer higher rates of unemployment, have a difficult time climbing the social ladder, and experience legal authorities as a source of violence and intimidation, advantaged group members experience far more economic security, opportunities to advance, and social acceptance. Thus, although the world may seem fair, hospitable, and inviting to members of advantaged groups, it often appears to be unjust, dangerous, and exclusionary to members of disadvantaged groups (Jones, Engelman, Turner, & Campbell, 2009). These different realities and divergent perspectives form the basis for different motives and goals that advantaged and disadvantaged group members often have regarding the status quo, as explained by prominent theories in sociology and social psychology.

In his pioneering work on race relations, for example, Herbert Blumer (1958) proposed that membership in an advantaged group is associated with a need to protect the dominance of one's group, which in turn can account for

phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, and opposition to egalitarian policies (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Similarly, according to realistic group-conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972), motives to advance or protect the interests of one's group are at the root of intergroup processes. Whereas members of advantaged groups are motivated to defend the existing social arrangements that benefit them, members of disadvantaged groups are motivated to gain more resources, and thus to change the status quo so that their groups' position in the social hierarchy can improve. In line with these theories, research on social dominance theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) demonstrates that individuals who hold more power in society tend to view the social hierarchy as natural and even necessary, whereas members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to see the hierarchy as in need of change.

Taken together, these views suggest that because members of advantaged groups benefit both practically (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996) and psychologically (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) from hierarchical social arrangements, they are not likely to oppose the status quo. Undoubtedly, because they hold positions of power there is much value in the attempts to reduce potential discriminatory behavior, which can occur in a variety of interpersonal contexts (e.g., in hiring decisions, when shopping in retail stores). Nevertheless, expecting advantaged group members to mobilize for structural-level change fails to consider the psychology associated with their dominant group position. In contrast, because they can benefit from changes toward greater equality, members of disadvantaged groups are generally more likely to be motivated to challenge the status quo and to raise related societal tension so that their group position can improve (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, for both practical and psychological reasons, collective action aimed at advancing more equality typically arises from disadvantaged groups.

Broadly speaking, collective action can be either normative or non-normative (Martin, 1986; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Normative collective action refers to behaviors such as protesting at legal rallies and organizing or signing a petition to government officials. Nonnormative action refers to more violent types of protest such as destroying property and, in extreme cases, harming innocent individuals. In the current program of research, we built on previous work on collective action, which has largely centered on understanding predictors of normative action (see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008, for a meta-analysis). Whereas there are parallels between predictors of normative and nonnormative action, a fuller account of nonnormative forms of action can be found in research on political violence and terrorism (Lemieux, 2006; Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004). We next consider the conditions that can increase or attenuate tendencies to partake in normative forms of collective action.

Predictors of Collective Action

Although members of disadvantaged groups are likely to desire social change in the direction of greater equality, there are cases in which this motivation is relatively subdued. A large body of research suggests that a key (but not sole) determinant of collective action on the part of disadvantaged group members is their recognition that intergroup inequality exists and that they are unjustly disadvantaged within the hierarchical system (see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for a meta-analysis). This awareness of unjust inequality depends on group members engaging in intergroup comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright & Lubensky, 2009); that is, they must perceive themselves as members of a group and compare their group's standing with that of other groups. In the context of social inequality, intergroup comparisons are likely to result in a sense of relative disadvantage or unjust deprivation within the social system (Walker & Smith, 2002).

What makes a sense of deprivation a powerful motivator for action is the emotions associated with it, such as anger and resentment (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Beyond the recognition of deprivation that can incite these emotions, members of disadvantaged groups need to perceive an external source as responsible for their situation, typically the privileged outgroup and/or the social system (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Smith & Walker, 2009). It is unlikely that collective resistance would occur if individuals attributed their own disadvantage to themselves or to their ingroup. Alternatively, when an external, outgroup-related source is identified, negative emotions such as anger can be directed toward it and can also arouse and guide relevant action tendencies.

Because intergroup comparisons are central to the process of recognizing inequality, factors that reduce the tendency to engage in such comparisons can also affect the way group members view their social standing. Research on perceived discrimination is consistent with this idea in showing that factors that reduce the emphasis on group boundaries and on unjust social structures reduce disadvantaged group members' perceptions of discrimination. For example, when primed with beliefs about individual merit, women who were discriminated against were more likely to attribute their disadvantage to their own internal characteristics than to unfair treatment (McCoy & Major, 2007). In another study, participants who were rejected from a desirable position despite their good performance were significantly less likely to act on behalf of their group when the illegitimacy of the decision was not emphasized (compared with when it was emphasized; Wright, 1997). Thus, although relative deprivation is often an objective marker of any social hierarchy (Jackman, 1994, 2001), factors that blur group boundaries can reduce the extent to which disadvantaged group members are aware of the inequality and of their position in it.

Because recognizing ingroup disadvantage and attributing it to external factors (typically related to the outgroup) are crucial for mobilizing members of an oppressed group to act for change, reduced awareness of inequality can have consequences for social hierarchy. Consistent with this idea, group-based hierarchy has been theorized to remain stable insofar as disadvantaged group members deny their disadvantage or make internal attributions for their subordination (Jackman, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). As we argue next, the emphasis on commonalities that is part of positive contact can reduce group members' awareness of group-based inequality. Because members of disadvantaged groups are likely agents of social change, their reduced awareness can ultimately stabilize the existing social hierarchy.

INTERGROUP CONTACT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The fundamental premise of contact theory is that intergroup relations can improve by bringing members of opposing groups together under conditions that involve institutional support, cooperation, equal status, and potential for personal acquaintance (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The theory has stimulated a large body of research and has been applied in a wide variety of settings, notably those marked by intergroup aggression (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005, for a review). For example, interventions informed by contact theory were implemented for reducing tension between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Hughes, 2001) and between Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East (Maoz, 2004).

Although intergroup contact is the most widely used framework for improving intergroup relations, the association between contact and change toward equality has received surprisingly little research attention. In some cases, researchers have examined the effects of contact on support for egalitarian policies, yet the majority of this work has focused on stated support for such policies on the part of members of advantaged groups, not on actual egalitarian behavior (e.g., Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2007). Moreover, the way contact affects disadvantaged group members' perceptions of inequality, which is a chief instigator of social change toward equality (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), has rarely been examined.

A fundamental component of positive intergroup contact is the focus on cooperative, commonality-focused aspects. Indeed, contact is typically operationalized as structured intergroup encounters that emphasize commonalities between the groups (e.g., Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989) or as cross-group friendships (Pettigrew, 1998). Psychologically, then, one of the main ways in which positive intergroup contact operates is by reducing the salience of the psychological distinction between the ingroup and the outgroup

(Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). In the case of cross-group friendships, a highly personalized form of contact, the goal is to reduce the salience of group boundaries so that people are perceived as individuals and not as representatives of their group (Miller, 2002). In the case of commonality-based encounters, the goal is to redefine original group boundaries so that members of both groups are perceived as part of a single more inclusive category (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Either way, weakening the salience of original group boundaries is likely to reduce the extent to which group members are focusing on group differences, including those pertaining to differences in resources and power. Thus, the focus on commonalities is likely to reduce awareness of structural inequality, which is a crucial component in motivating disadvantaged group members to advance change toward equality. The fact that this reduced awareness is likely to be coupled with positive attitudes toward the outgroup, makes the reduced motivation for change even more likely, because disadvantaged group members are less likely to attribute unfair or unjust acts to members of the outgroup (see Smith & Walker, 2009). In the next section we present empirical evidence suggesting that intergroup contact can undermine the conditions necessary for social change toward equality (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009, for a similar argument).

RESEARCH SUPPORT

We propose that beyond improving attitudes, the commonality-focused nature of intergroup contact can also affect the way group members view social inequality. Past research has established that forms of contact that are considered "optimal," which are often operationalized as cross-group friendships or as commonality-focused encounters, improve attitudes toward the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Because of the blurring of intergroup boundaries, we propose that these forms of contact can also reduce awareness of intergroup inequality. Reduced awareness of inequality along with positive attitudes toward the advantaged group can inflate disadvantaged group members' perceptions of the fairness of the advantaged group, thus encouraging optimism about the prospects of equality between the groups. Because recognition of inequality and external attribution of disadvantage are necessary motivators of collective action, we would expect this optimism ultimately to reduce motivation to advance social change.

To test these ideas we conducted a laboratory experiment and two field studies concerning the effect of intergroup contact on perceptions and motives related to social inequality. In the first study we experimentally manipulated group membership and related power (advantaged vs. disadvantaged) and type of contact (commonality-focused vs. differences-focused). According to

our theorizing, a focus on commonalities, compared with differences, should reduce awareness of group-based inequality and can thereby affect the way disadvantaged group members perceive their social standing. Therefore, we were particularly interested in whether, for disadvantaged group members, commonality-focused contact would reduce awareness of inequality in general and of relative disadvantage more specifically. In the subsequent two field studies we examined whether a similar effect would occur among members of naturally occurring disadvantaged groups: Arabs in Israel and Muslims in India. In these field studies, we further tested whether perceptions of group-based inequality predict reduced motivation for social change, our main outcome of interest.

In the laboratory study (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009, Study 1), power between two groups to which members were randomly assigned was manipulated by giving the advantaged group the opportunity to assign extra course credits to the two groups. Before the advantaged group members allocated the credits, members of both groups interacted under the influence of instructions to focus on either intergroup commonalities or differences. Consistent with prior research, commonality-focused interactions, compared with differences-focused interactions, produced more positive intergroup attitudes in both advantaged and disadvantaged group members. In addition, however, commonality-focused contact was related to reduced awareness of the inequality between the groups. Moreover, members of the disadvantaged group expected the advantaged group to distribute the credits in a more equitable fashion following commonality-focused rather than differences-focused interactions. Mediation analysis revealed that this expectation was explained by improved attitudes and reduced awareness of inequality. Thus, commonality-focused contact strengthened perceptions of outgroup fairness, reflected in expectations for equality between the groups.

However, when the disadvantaged group members' expectations were compared with the advantaged group's actual allocations, there was a significant discrepancy. As the disadvantaged group members anticipated, advantaged group members were substantially biased against them in the allocation of credits after differences-focused contact. However, although disadvantaged group members expected a more equal distribution of credits after commonality-focused contact, advantaged group members were just as biased in this condition as in the difference-focused interaction. This effect is consistent with extensive research showing that advantaged groups are motivated to maintain their power (Blumer, 1958; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Furthermore, as argued by Dixon and colleagues (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004), whereas members of advantaged groups may support equality in principle, which is a likely attitudinal outcome of favorable contact, they may still not act to create equality in practice. Thus, the results from the laboratory experi-

ment support our predictions by showing that for members of disadvantaged groups, commonality-focused contact resulted in inaccurate perception of their social standing.

Although the experimental nature of this study permitted causal analysis, the intergroup relations were situation-based and short-lived. They may therefore not reflect processes that occur in more naturalistic intergroup contexts. For instance, members of disadvantaged groups might initially be overly optimistic regarding outgroup fairness but not show the same effect following repeated intergroup experiences. Our goal in the next set of studies was to examine whether among members of real groups, intergroup contact relates to reduced awareness of inequality and increased perceptions of outgroup fairness. The naturalistic contexts also enabled us to explore whether these outcomes were related to reduced support for social change among members of disadvantaged groups.

Participants in the second study (Saguy et al., 2009, Study 2) were Arabs in Israel, a national minority that suffers notable disadvantage compared with Jews (e.g., in academic achievement, income, political power; Smoocha, 2005). We examined the statistical associations among friendships with Jews (a type of positive contact that is particularly likely to involve a focus on commonalities; Aron et al., 2004), attitudes toward Jews, awareness of inequality, and perceptions of Jews as fair. We further measured Arabs' support for social change toward equality (e.g., by asking them the degree to which they support legislation guaranteeing equal work opportunities for Arabs). Drawing on collective action research (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2008) we expected that both reduced awareness of inequality and positive outgroup orientations (i.e., improved attitudes toward Jews and viewing Jews as fair) would undermine disadvantaged group members' support for change toward equality.

Consistent with the results of our laboratory experiment, more positive contact with Jews was associated with more positive attitudes toward Jews and with reduced awareness of inequality between Jews and Arabs. In addition, improved attitudes were associated with increased perceptions of Jews as fair. Moreover, and consistent with our theorizing, both perceptions of Jews as fair and reduced awareness of inequality were associated with reduced support for social change. Thus, through its effects on the way disadvantaged group members viewed the social inequality and members of the other group, contact was associated with a decrease in support for social change. The overall model testing the proposed links between variables fit the data well and better than alternative models (see Figure 18.1).

Results of a third study (Tausch, Saguy, & Singh, 2009) replicated these findings, this time among Muslims in India. Muslims in India are disadvantaged compared with other minorities and, most notably, compared with Hindus, the

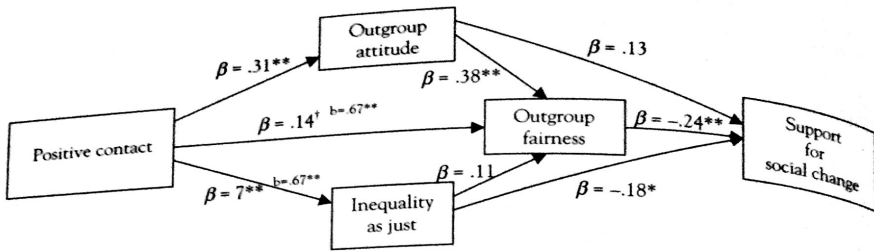


Figure 18.1. Path model examining the mediated relationships among contact and support for social change. The beta value between "positive contact" and "outgroup fairness" = .14[†]; the beta value between "positive contact" and "inequality as just" = .22^{**}.
^{*} $p < .05$. ^{**} $p < .01$. [†] $p < .09$

dominant majority group. Having more Hindu friends was related to improved attitudes toward Hindus but also to reduced awareness of inequality between Muslims and Hindus. In addition, these outcomes predicted stronger perceptions of Hindus as fair, which in turn were related to weaker collective action tendencies (measured as intentions to participate in various actions that could improve the position of Muslims in India).

Taken together, results from the field studies and the laboratory experiment converge to suggest that experiences of positive, commonality-focused contact can affect the way disadvantaged group members view the social inequality and their own disadvantage. These perceptions, which are parts of an overly optimistic view of intergroup relations, can reduce motivation to challenge existing social inequality. These effects are consistent with our theorizing that the harmony created by contact, reflected in improved attitudes between groups, can paradoxically undermine the potential for social action that might bring about an increase in equality.

More evidence for the connection between intergroup contact and reduced motivation for social change is currently emerging. Wright and Lubensky (2009), who examined data from a survey of African American and Latino/Latina students at a predominantly White university, obtained compatible findings. Positive intergroup contact was associated with more favorable attitudes toward Whites and with less support for collective action. In addition, mediation analyses revealed that the negative effect of contact on collective action was partly a result of reduced ethnic identification. Similarly, Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2007), in a survey study of Black and White respondents in South Africa, found that more positive intergroup contact was associated with Black South Africans' decreased support for social policies that might enhance racial equality. Black South Africans who reported more positive contact with Whites were less support-

ive of compensatory policies promoting the interests of Blacks in education and employment. Thus, consistent with our findings from the Arab sample, positive contact predicted less support to legal remedies for inequality offered by institutional authorities.

These recent findings, coupled with our own studies reported here, suggest that the harmony created by intergroup contact can undermine tension that might bring about change toward equality. This suggests that commonality-focused contact can be used as a strategy, or a tool, for maintaining the hierarchy that favors advantaged groups (see Jackman, 1994). If indeed harmony reduces the potential for change, advantaged group members might use it to appease members of disadvantaged groups. An additional implication of the current findings, which is highly relevant to the issue of intergroup aggression, is that in the long term, the effect of commonality-focused contact might not necessarily lead to a reduction in intergroup conflict, particularly if (or when) disadvantaged group members are disillusioned and realize that their expectations of fairness are not met. In the final two sections, we discuss these issues, among others, and offer potential solutions to some of the problems raised by the reported findings.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At the beginning of this chapter, we advocated a more refined and less categorical view of intergroup harmony as good and intergroup tension as bad. We proposed that tension can be adaptive for intergroup relations, because it can foster social change that brings about greater equality and justice between groups. For this reason, promoting harmony could be maladaptive because, by reducing potentially constructive tension, it might indirectly reinforce existing inequality.

In general, our research supports this view by showing that the harmony encouraged by contact may not translate into greater equality between groups. The orientations of both disadvantaged and advantaged groups can contribute to this "irony of harmony." For disadvantaged group members, harmony-inducing strategies can turn attention away from social inequities and cause members of the advantaged group to be perceived as fair. Both of these outcomes can lead disadvantaged group members to relax their efforts to promote change toward equality. For members of advantaged groups, improved attitudes as a result of contact do not necessarily translate to more egalitarian intergroup behavior. This finding is consistent with research showing that changes in attitudes produced by contact may reflect mainly a commitment to equality as a principle rather than equality as a reality (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; but see, Pettigrew et al., 2007).

Future research might fruitfully examine processes related to intergroup harmony that might impede egalitarian actions on the part of advantaged groups members. One possibility is that when intergroup relations are positive, members of advantaged groups feel less urgency to make changes in the social system. Their knowledge that the disadvantaged group members are content can reduce concerns about social inequality and make actual egalitarian behavior seem less necessary. A related possibility is that members of advantaged groups may strategically try to create forms of positive social relations to sustain the status quo (Jackman, 1994). Indeed, the threat of change in the system is reduced if the likely agents of change (i.e., members of the disadvantaged group) see less need for action. Therefore, from the point of view of those who wish to sustain the hierarchy, commonality-focused contact can be functional, if somewhat deceptive.

Future research might also examine the effects of commonality-focused contact over time, especially the effects on members of the disadvantaged group. As we have demonstrated, disadvantaged group members may at first become optimistic, through positive contact, about intergroup relations and the advantaged group's benevolence. In the longer term, however, disadvantaged group members may become "disillusioned," particularly if they are repeatedly appeased without achieving any real change. In addition, their situation might actually get worse rather than improve if members of the advantaged group feel no pressure to be truly egalitarian. This turn of events is likely to produce distrust, disillusionment, and strong resentment, which might fuel more extreme forms of conflict. This possibility points to the potential fragility of harmony created by commonality-focused contact and to the need to develop interventions that would help achieve a more stable and genuine improvement in intergroup relations.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Harmony-inducing strategies can have obvious and relatively immediate positive consequences for intergroup attitudes. Nevertheless, our work suggests that these benefits can turn out to be superficial and may even impede, in the long run, constructive societal changes. Practical efforts to improve intergroup relations might therefore profit from moving beyond questions about how to create harmony and eliminate tension to studying ways to create harmony without eliminating constructive tension. This requires an approach that views harmony and tension between groups as processes that can coexist. Rather than overlooking the fact that groups operate in a system of asymmetrical power, group-based differences, particularly those pertaining to power, can be acknowledged alongside a focus on commonalities. This

can allow the pressure for social change to continue while providing an avenue for communication and exchange (see Halabi, 2004). In addition, to the extent that recognizing both commonality and group-based differences, and inequalities helps people to extend moral principles across group lines, advantaged group members may more readily recognize the illegitimacy of group-based disparities and become motivated to respond fairly in a way that supersedes separate group interests.

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