



## Can stateways change folkways? Longitudinal tests of the interactive effects of intergroup contact and categorization on prejudice<sup>☆, ☆☆</sup>



Anja Eller<sup>a,\*</sup>, Dominic Abrams<sup>b</sup>, Miriam Koschate<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico

<sup>b</sup> University of Kent, UK

<sup>c</sup> University of Exeter, UK

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### ABSTRACT

This research examined how a predictable change in the social structure over time (from segregated to integrated) can affect the way intergroup contact and subjective categorization of ingroup and outgroup members (intergroup, superordinate, dual identity) impact on intergroup bias. A three-stage longitudinal study was conducted with six-month intervals ( $N_s = 708, 435, 418$ ) involving high school students in Germany. Time 1 ( $T_1$ ) was characterized by structural segregation and Times 2 and 3 ( $T_2, T_3$ ) by structural integration. Longitudinal analysis between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  showed that intergroup categorization (but not superordinate categorization or dual identity) improved intergroup relations. Between  $T_2$  and  $T_3$ , dual identity reduced intergroup bias and marginally increased interpersonal closeness whereas superordinate categorization increased bias and reduced interpersonal closeness. There were no effects of intergroup categorization between  $T_2$  and  $T_3$ . Overall, positive effects of contact increased over time, reaching significance from  $T_2$  to  $T_3$ , supporting a *consolidation hypothesis* and intergroup contact theory more widely. These findings are also consistent with a *congruence hypothesis* that the impact of intergroup contact is partly determined by the match between how people categorize ingroup and outgroup members and the social structure that frames intergroup relations.

‘Legislation cannot change mores’

(William Graham Sumner (1907), *Folkways*.)

Sumner's often misquoted conclusion that stateways cannot change folkways, has been contested by many sociologists and psychologists (e.g., Aronson, 1999). Experimental research, largely with university student participants, clearly demonstrates that multiple factors can increase or decrease prejudice. Moreover, in society, rendering certain practices illegal (such as smoking inside buildings) or sometimes creating new structures (e.g., switching between closed- and open-plan offices) can change behaviors, norms, and opportunities. A classic example is desegregation. In research on intergroup contact, there is a great deal of cross-sectional survey evidence that positive contact is linked to lower prejudice. However, there is a dearth of evidence

regarding how, across periods or phases of structural or legislative change, contact and prejudice are related, and the role of potential mediating processes. The present research used a large field study to test hypotheses about how intergroup contact affects prejudice before and after a structural change from segregation to integration.

High-quality contact between members of different social groups is a well-established basis for reducing prejudice and stereotyping and improving intergroup relations (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, much of the literature tends to refer to the history of intergroup relations, the structure of the intergroup context, and the passage of time more generally simply as the background or context, rather than variables of interest in their own right. However, we believe that longitudinal or time-series research

\* Anja Eller is at the Faculty of Psychology, UNAM; Dominic Abrams is at the Department of Psychology, University of Kent, UK; and Miriam Koschate is at the School of Psychology, University of Exeter, UK. This work was originally supported by a PhD studentship from the University of Kent and a British Academy (PDF/2002/214) Post-Doctoral Fellowship to the first author. We wish to thank the students, teachers, and principals of the nine participating high schools in Bonn, Germany.

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\* Corresponding author at: Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Av. Universidad 3004, Ciudad Universitaria, Coyoacán, Mexico DF 04510, Mexico.

E-mail address: [eller@unam.mx](mailto:eller@unam.mx) (A. Eller).

with a greater focus on the broader social structure is indispensable if we are to fully understand the role of contact in intergroup relations (Abrams & Eller, 2017).

This research explored the effects of contact over time when there is a legitimized transition in the intergroup structure, from segregation to integration. By 'legitimized', we mean an externally or officially sanctioned change in the social structure over which people have no control and which either constrains or enables intergroup contact. Specifically, we examined how school students' relationships with peers from their parallel classes change as those classes become integrated into a common grade. We also investigated the impact of this change in intergroup structure on participants' subjective categorization of former ingroup and outgroup members and how both subjective categorization and the quality of their intergroup contact affect important outcome variables specified in the literature. We examine interpersonal closeness, intergroup anxiety, intergroup bias, and desire for outgroup friendship.

### 1.1. Longitudinal studies of intergroup contact

Among the hundreds of studies during the past 60 years examining whether, how and when intergroup contact reduces prejudice and improves intergroup relations, only a small minority have been longitudinal (e.g., Binder et al., 2009; Brown, Eller, Leeds, & Stace, 2007; Christ et al., 2014; Dhont, Van Hiel, De Bolle, & Roets, 2012; Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1978; also see Enos, 2014, for a longitudinal field experiment). Of these, even fewer have included more than two waves of data collection. Including three or more time points is very laborious and often suffers from high participant attrition rates, but it is nonetheless important because it allows for the assessment of issues such as the stability of measures over time or full longitudinal mediation (cf. Schroeder & Risen, 2016; Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011).

In one of the few multiple-time-point studies, Levin, van Laar, and Sidanius (2003) assessed the effect of contact on ingroup bias over five time points. Specifically, they found that UCLA college students of different ethnic groups who exhibited ingroup bias at the end of their first year had fewer outgroup friends during their second and third years. However, consistent with contact theory, students who had more outgrouped friends in college were more likely to have positive ethnic attitudes at the end of college. Finally, students who perceived the student body as a superordinate (common group), rather than as ingroups and outgroups had more outgroup friends.

Another study investigated Colored South African high school students' friendships with, and emotions, perceived outgroup variability and negative action tendencies towards the majority-status White South African outgroup (Swart et al., 2011). Three waves took place over a period of 12 months. Swart and colleagues found bidirectional relationships among contact, mediators (intergroup anxiety and affective empathy), and prejudice (cf. Eller & Abrams, 2003). Contact predicted increased empathy and decreased anxiety and prejudice over time. However, empathy also increased contact, and both intergroup anxiety and prejudice decreased contact. Even so, the longitudinal mediation was only present in the direction of contact (at Time 1) to prejudice (at Time 3) via empathy as well as anxiety (at Time 2), thus corroborating the contact hypothesis.

The current research, conducted with students in a school environment, was distinctive from most previous longitudinal studies of contact in several ways. Firstly, it incorporated three time points rather than two, allowing us to test temporal relationships with more confidence. Secondly, and more importantly, it examined the effect of contact across a period of known objective structural change in the intergroup context. We examined how this affects the relationships between contact, categorization, and intergroup relations. Although there are comparisons of different cross-sectional studies conducted with similar populations in different structural contexts (e.g., pre- and post-apart-

heid (Duckitt & Mphuthing, 1998; Pettigrew, 1960), or as minorities vs. majorities (Eller & Abrams, 2004), or before and after a terror attack (Abrams, Van de Vyver, Houston, & Vasiljevic, 2016), longitudinal tests of the same sample before and after a structural change are a rarity. Typically, structural change has been confounded with other major social changes in political constitution or ideology, namely, where institutional support for segregation has been challenged or regarded as non-legitimate (e.g., Duckitt & Mphuthing, 1998). In contrast, in the present study we examined how a change in the intergroup structure alone has an effect when aided by institutional support. That is, the change in structure is a normative transition that is externally sanctioned within a stable system. In sum, we examined changes in the same population across different structural circumstances.

### 1.2. Levels of categorization during intergroup contact

Three major models predict the forms of categorization that should result in optimal outcomes during intergroup contact. Hewstone and Brown (1986) proposed that intergroup contact should produce more general and important improvements when intergroup differences remain salient because this means the contact experience is not dismissed as involving atypical outgroup members (*intergroup level of categorization*). In contrast, Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio's (1989) recategorization model proposes advantages when people regard one another as part of a superordinate common group rather than members of distinct social groups (*superordinate level of categorization*). Finally, the *dual identity level of categorization* was formalized in Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM). Dual identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) constitutes an amalgam of salient categorization and recategorization, in which original group identities are maintained, but within the context of a superordinate identity. In intergroup contexts involving relatively large group memberships, such as nationality, the presence of a single, inclusive group identity may not optimally satisfy people's concomitant needs for distinctiveness as well as inclusion (Brewer, 1996). In these cases, a dual identity may be more potent in eliciting positive outgroup evaluations.

Evidence associated with the intergroup level is mixed. Increased category salience during contact — often operationalized as perceived typicality of the outgroup contact persons — has repeatedly been associated with higher intergroup bias, cross-sectionally (e.g., Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004, 2006; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Guerra et al., 2010; Stone & Crisp, 2007) and longitudinally (Eller & Abrams, 2004). On the other hand, intergroup categorization during contact has also been linked to more favorable outgroup attitudes, cross-sectionally (e.g., Brown, Maras, Masser, Vivian, & Hewstone, 2000; Brown, Vivian, & Hewstone, 1999; Voci & Hewstone, 2003; Wilder, 1984), longitudinally (Brown et al., 2007; Greenland & Brown, 1999), and experimentally (cf. Deschamps & Brown, 1983). Usually, this positive effect has taken the shape of an interaction with contact, such that contact only relates to less intergroup bias when group boundaries are salient, that is, when the intergroup level is high. Group salience also aids the generalization of positive contact effects, to different situations, to the outgroup as a whole, and even to uninvolved outgroups (Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010).

Recategorization (i.e., a superordinate group level) and the concomitant dissolution of existing and meaningful social categories can sometimes be perceived as threatening to social identity and hence induce greater, instead of lesser, intergroup bias (González & Brown, 2003; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a, 2000b; also see Hornsey & Hogg, 2002). For example, Hornsey and Hogg (2000b) investigated relations between humanities and science university students. They found greater bias among the subgroups when the common ingroup of university was made salient than when only the faculty subgroups were made salient. This finding resonates with initial discussions of CIIM. Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, and Rust (1993) argued that with real,

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