

How does Intergroup Contact affect Social Change?: Its Impact on Collective Action and Individual Mobility Intentions among Members of a Disadvantaged Group

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Tausch, N., Saguy, T., & Bryson, J., (2015). The implications of intergroup contact for social change: Its impact on individual mobility and collective action intentions among members of a disadvantaged group. *Journal of Social Issues*.

Keywords: intergroup contact, social change, collective action, anger, individual mobility, Latino-Americans

Abstract

A current debate surrounds the issue of whether prejudice-reducing interventions such as intergroup contact may reduce resistance to unequal intergroup relations among disadvantaged groups. Addressing this question, the present research investigates how positive contact with members of the advantaged group shapes action strategies to cope with disadvantage. Using survey data from a sample of Latino-Americans ($N=112$), structural equation modelling revealed that friendship contact with Anglo-Whites was overall negatively associated with interest in collective action. This relation was due to both reduced identification with the disadvantaged group and positive attitudes toward the advantaged group, which predicted reduced anger about inequality. Contact was also positively associated with an individual mobility orientation, a relation which was explained through increased perceived permeability. Individual mobility orientation did not, however, predict reduced motivation for collective action. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings for societal change and novel directions for future research are discussed.

Identifying the psychological factors that contribute to continuing group-based inequality and devising interventions that help increasing social justice have been major aims of social-psychological research in the last decades. This work has been guided by two different approaches, one that views prejudice reduction among members of advantaged groups as key to achieving social justice, and another which regards collective action by disadvantaged groups as central. While these two literatures have developed largely independently, recent attempts at integration have drawn attention to an intriguing paradox, namely that the main psychological outcomes of prejudice-reducing interventions like intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) are inconsistent with the psychological requirements for collective action (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009).

Specifically, while intergroup contact was shown to result greater awareness of commonalities and shared humanity (e.g., Tam et al., 2007), reduced importance of group identities and emphasis on personal characteristics (Brewer & Miller, 1984), identification with a common, superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and more positive outgroup attitudes (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), research on the predictors of collective action has underlined the importance of awareness of structural inequalities (and in particular as the resulting anger, see Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; van Zomeren et al., 2004), a view that group boundaries are impermeable (i.e., that advancement to an advantaged position is not possible; e.g., Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990), strong identification with the disadvantaged group (e.g., Stürmer & Simon, 2004), as well as negative views of the advantaged group (e.g., blaming them for the inequality; see Simon & Klandermans, 2001) as predictors of engagement. This observation has sparked a debate about whether positive intergroup contact could in fact increase disadvantaged group members' acceptance of a biased system, weaken their motivation to act for equality, and,

ultimately, contribute to social stability rather than change (see Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009; see also Górska & Bilewicz, in press).

Consistent with this critique, a few initial studies have demonstrated that positive contact with the advantaged group is associated with reduced support for egalitarian social policies (e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009) and lessened interest in collective action (Tropp, Hawi, van Laar, & Levin, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009) among members of disadvantaged groups. This work has also demonstrated that these effects are largely due to more positive outgroup attitudes and resulting (false) expectations for equal treatment (Saguy et al., 2009), reduced awareness of group disadvantage (Saguy et al., 2009; Tropp et al., 2012), reduced identification with the disadvantaged group (Wright & Lubensky, 2009), and a heightened belief that group boundaries are permeable (Wright & Lubensky, 2009).

The main aim of the present research is to shed further light on the implications of intergroup contact for social change. In particular, we extend previous work by examining the potential role of contact in motivating an additional action strategy that members of subordinate groups can engage in in order to deal with disadvantage: individual mobility. Individual mobility refers to the pursuit of actions that serve the improvement of one's personal position rather than that of the group as a whole (e.g., see Abrams & Hogg, 1988). This may involve attempts to physically leave the disadvantaged group and join an advantaged group, such as moving from a low-status to a higher-status organization, or from a poor to a more affluent neighbourhood, or, in particular when actual mobility is not possible, striving to obtain a high-status position that is typically reserved for members of the advantaged group, such as women or ethnic minorities moving into occupations or positions that are typically dominated by men or majority group members.

The psychological processes that foster such individualistic strategies have been widely studied within the social identity framework. According to Social Identity Theory

(SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individual mobility is likely to be pursued as a strategy to improve one's status when the existing social structure is viewed as flexible and permeable; i.e., when there is a belief that individuals can move to higher social strata or 'pass' to a higher-status group (e.g., through talent, by means of hard work, or relevant social connections) and thereby achieve the associated material advantages and prestige (see also Abrams & Hogg, 1988). An example of such a belief system is the idea of the "American Dream" which promises equal opportunity for success and upward social mobility according to ability and hard work. It should be noted that while much of the literature on SIT and most of the experimental work has defined and operationalized permeability as the ability to physically move to another group, in reality actual mobility is often impossible (i.e., one cannot change one's racial group). Thus, what seems central is the belief in one's ability to individually achieve upward social mobility by gaining access to high-status positions that are typically reserved for or dominated by the advantaged group.

In the current work we suggest that positive contact with members of the advantaged group may foster such a belief system and promote individualistic strategies among members of disadvantaged groups. As noted by Reicher (2007), pleasant interactions with outgroup members are likely to result in perceptions of the advantaged group as fair (see also Saguy et al., 2009) and of the social system as non-discriminatory and permeable (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Successful contact with members of the advantaged group may also result in the belief that one is "special" and would be accepted into the advantaged group. These beliefs, in turn, are likely to motivate individualistic action strategies aimed at upward mobility. We therefore predict that positive contact with the advantaged group will be positively associated with an individual mobility orientation and expect this link to be mediated by an increased belief that one is able to advance personally (i.e., greater perceived boundary permeability).

What are the implications of an individual mobility orientation for social change? Work within the social identity tradition views individual mobility and collective action as opposing strategies to cope with disadvantage (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this approach, individual mobility is believed to be the preferred option (as it can be less costly than engagement in conflict) that is considered first and collective strategies are only chosen when mobility is not feasible. As sustained collective action by members of subordinate groups often provides the main impetus for social change toward greater group equality, an individual mobility orientation is thus seen as contributing to the maintenance of the status quo. A similar view is expressed by Jackman (1994), who suggested that beliefs in equal opportunity steer members of disadvantaged groups toward the pursuit of individualistic goals and discourage them from collectively challenging the disadvantaged status of their group, leaving the existing (unequal) power structure intact.

There is consistent evidence from experimental studies showing that group boundary permeability increases the preference for individualistic strategies over collective action, even when access to an advantaged position is highly restricted (Wright et al., 1990). Research has also demonstrated that an individual mobility orientation can shift individuals' allegiance to the advantaged group; it is associated with attempts to disassociate oneself from one's group, increased identification with the advantaged group, efforts to display the qualities required for upward mobility, and reduced support of ingroup members (see Derks, van Laar, Ellemers, & Raghoe, in press, for a review). Based on the proposition that an orientation toward individual mobility inhibits interest in collective action (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Jackman, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we further test the hypothesis that an individual mobility orientation negatively predicts collective action intentions. Thus, we examine a pathway whereby contact reduces interest in collective action by fostering the belief that upward mobility is possible and consequently increasing individualistic strategies.

We investigate the relations between contact, perceived permeability, individual mobility and collective action over and above the established mechanisms through which contact was shown to reduce collective action. Specifically, we simultaneously examine the roles of awareness of disadvantage, identification with the disadvantaged group, and outgroup attitudes in the relation between contact with members of the advantaged group and interest in collective action. In addition, we also extend previous work by adding anger about inequality, which has been shown to be vital motivator and more proximal predictor of action (cf. van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004), to the model. In line with previous research, we expect contact to be associated with reduced awareness of disadvantage (Dixon et al., 2010; Saguy et al., 2009; Tropp et al., 2012), reduced identification with the disadvantaged group (Wright & Lubensky, 2009), and more positive outgroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Based on appraisal theories of group-based emotion (e.g., Smith et al., 2007) and previous research on collective action (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2004), we expect awareness of disadvantage to be positively associated with collective action intentions via its effect on anger. We further expect identification to be positively associated with both anger (cf. Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007) and collective action intentions (see Van Zomeren et al., 2008). As strong commitment to one's group was also shown to inhibit desire for individual mobility (e.g., Blair & Jost, 2003), we expect identification to be a negative predictor of individual mobility. Finally, we expect positive attitudes toward the advantaged group to inhibit interest in collective action by reducing anger about ingroup disadvantage. As noted above, collective action requires attributions of disadvantage to an external agent (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and this often involves characterizing the advantaged group in negative terms (see Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Appraisal theories of emotion further suggest that other-accountability for an undesired state is an important antecedent of anger (e.g., Smith et

al., 2007). This process, then, is psychologically inconsistent with holding the outgroup in positive regard.

The present model (see Figure 1a for a summary) thus represents a further integration of the contact and collective action literatures and a more comprehensive test of the mechanisms involved in the effects of contact on social change strategies. Specifically, we simultaneously consider two pathways through which intergroup contact can impact on collective action aimed at social change: (1) a novel pathway whereby contact fosters the belief that individual upward mobility is possible and thus encourages individualistic strategies to cope with disadvantage and (2) a mostly established pathway whereby contact weakens the psychological prerequisites (awareness of disadvantage, negative views of the outgroup and anger about inequality, and strong commitment to the disadvantaged group) of collective action.

Our hypotheses are tested among Latinos in the United States, who are an economically and socially disadvantaged group that lags behind Anglo-Whites in terms of income and educational attainment (Ramirez, 2004) and continues to experience discrimination (Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Dittmann, & Lagunes, 2010). To further extend previous work, the present analysis also controls for respondents' socio-economic status (SES). SES may constitute a potential third variable that could account for some of the predicted relations. For example, it is conceivable that better-off members of the disadvantaged group have both more contact opportunities (e.g., because they are less likely to live in segregated areas) and perceive disadvantage as less pronounced because of their personal privileged position. Previous research has not yet taken this possibility into account.

Method

Procedure and Sample

The survey was conducted among students at a university in California who were invited to complete an online questionnaire on attitudes related to interethnic relations in the United States in exchange for partial course credit. One-hundred and twelve students (30 men, 81 women, and 1 unknown; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.57$ years, $SD = 2.92$) who self-identified as Latino-Americans constituted the sample for the present research.

Measures

After indicating a number of background variables including their gender and age, respondents completed three items assessing their socio-economic status (SES), specifically their subjective assessment of SES (1 = *lower class*, 2 = *lower middle class*, 3 = *middle middle class*, 4 = *upper middle class*, 5 = *upper class*) and both their father's and mother's level of education (1 = *less than high school*, 2 = *some high school*, 3 = *high school degree*, 4 = *some college*, 5 = *associate or trade school degree*, 6 = *college degree*, 7 = *postgraduate degree*). The items were standardized and then averaged to yield an index of respondents' socio-economic background ($\alpha = .75$). Next, we assessed our key constructs.

Intergroup contact. Respondents' level of positive contact with Anglo-Whites was operationalized as friendship contact, which is regarded as one of the most potent forms of intergroup contact (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Respondents completed three items, indicating how many of their closest friends were Anglo-Whites (1 = *none*, 2 = *one*, 3 = *two*, 4 = *three*, 5 = *four*, 6 = *five*, 7 = *six to ten*, 8 = *more than ten*), how often they visited their Anglo friends in their home, and how often their Anglo friends visited them in their home (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *very often*). The items were standardized and averaged to yield an index of friendship contact ($\alpha = .88$).

Outgroup attitude. Outgroup attitude was measured using a feeling thermometer. Respondents indicated on a thermometer that ran from zero (0) to a hundred (100) degrees the extent to which they felt cold/warm toward Anglo-Whites.

Ingroup identification. Levels of identification with their ethnic group were measured using four items (“Belonging to my racial/ethnic group is an important part of who I am”; “I feel close to other people in my racial/ethnic group”; “I am proud to be part of my racial/ethnic group”; “I identify with other people from my racial/ethnic group”); 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *slightly agree*, 6 = *agree somewhat*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .89$)

Appraisal of ingroup disadvantage. The extent to which respondents perceived Latinos to be disadvantaged was measured with a single item (“To what extent do you think that Latinos are disadvantaged in U.S. society?”); 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*).

Anger. On scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*), respondents indicated the extent to which they felt *angry*, *resentful*, *furious* and *displeased* about the relative status of Latinos in the U.S. ($\alpha = .88$).

Perceived permeability. This construct was operationalized by assessing respondents’ beliefs that upward mobility was possible for them (“I believe I am capable, as an individual, to improve my status in society”; “Acting on my own, I can advance myself in society”); 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $r = .46$, $p < .001$).

Individual mobility intentions. Using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*), respondents indicated how likely it is that they would engage in the following behaviours in order to improve their personal situation in society: create connections with people who hold power in society, move to a neighbourhood where there are more job opportunities, work hard to be able to advance myself ($\alpha = .63$).

Collective action intentions. On a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*), respondents indicated how likely it is that they would engage in the following behaviours in order to improve the status of Latinos in the U.S.: organize

discussion meetings that address the situation of Latinos, vote for political candidates representing the interests of Latinos, demonstrate against the treatment of Latinos in the U.S., donate money to Latino interest groups, send a letter to government or the media demanding social change that would benefit Latinos ($\alpha = .79$).

Results

The data were analysed using path analysis in Mplus 5.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2007). This approach was favoured over a full structural equation model with latent variables due to the relatively small sample size. Moreover, we used bootstrapping (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) with 5000 re-samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals for all parameter estimates and the estimation of indirect paths to deal with the biases inherent in inferences based on small samples. Rather than excluding participants with missing values, we imputed three missing values for the appraisal of disadvantage variable using the expectation maximization algorithm (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 1. To assess overall model fit, we used the chi-square test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). A satisfactory fit is generally indicated by a non-significant χ^2 , a χ^2/df ratio ≤ 3 , a CFI $\geq .95$, a RMSEA $\leq .08$ (p -close $>.05-.10$) and a SRMR $\leq .08$ (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999).

First, we tested the proposed model (see Figure 1a). This test controlled for the significant relations of SES with contact and outgroup attitude (see Table 1). Endogenous variables at each level were allowed to correlate. This model showed a less than ideal fit to the data ($\chi^2(15) = 29.07$, $p = .016$, $\chi^2/df = 1.93$, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .09, p -close = .086, SRMR = .05, AIC = 3073.62). Inspection of modification indices revealed a misspecification of the relation between disadvantage appraisal and collective action intention. Inclusion of a direct path from disadvantage appraisal to collective action resulted in a significant improvement of

model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.26$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). The modified model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(14) = 21.81$, $p = .081$, $\chi^2/df = 1.34$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07, p -close = .249, SRMR = .05, AIC = 3068.43; see Figure 1b).

As expected, contact was positively associated with perceived group boundary permeability ($B = .18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .008$), which, in turn, predicted individual mobility intentions ($B = .42$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$). There was, however, no significant relations between identification and individual mobility ($B = -.01$, $SE = .04$, $p = .694$) and mobility intentions did not predict collective action ($B = .03$, $SE = .13$, $p = .792$). Replicating prior work, contact was positively associated with outgroup attitudes ($B = 7.61$, $SE = 1.52$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with identification ($B = -.45$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$). Unexpectedly, however, there was no significant association between contact and disadvantage appraisal ($B = -.07$, $SE = .10$, $p = .479$). Disadvantage appraisal was, as expected, a positive predictor of anger ($B = .24$, $SE = .10$, $p = .016$), while more positive attitudes towards Anglo-Whites predicted less anger ($B = -.02$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$). Unexpectedly, identification did not predict anger ($B = -.05$, $SE = .08$, $p = .563$). Finally, collective action intentions were positively predicted by awareness of disadvantage ($B = .22$, $SE = .09$, $p = .013$), anger ($B = .26$, $SE = .11$, $p = .016$), and identification ($B = .25$, $SE = .08$, $p = .002$).

Because the cross-sectional nature of our data does not enable us to draw confident inferences about the causal ordering of variables in our model, we also formally compared our model with an alternative to take into account the possibility that an individual mobility orientation might lead disadvantaged group members to seek friendship contact, and that a collective action orientation might motivate people to avoid such contact. In particular, this model proposes that weaker identification with Latinos, weaker perceptions of disadvantage, and perceptions of group boundaries as permeable would predict (a) more positive outgroup attitudes, (b) stronger individual mobility orientations, and (c) weaker collective action

orientations. These latter three outcomes, in turn, were expected to predict intergroup contact. We again controlled for the relations of SES with contact and attitudes and endogenous variables at each level were allowed to correlate. As this model did not fit the data well ($\chi^2(10) = 23.15, p = .010, \chi^2/df = 2.32, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .11, p\text{-close} = .050, SRMR = .06, AIC = 3077.70$), we decided to retain our (modified) model.

Finally, we examined the size of indirect effects (standardized point estimates, [95% confidence intervals]) in the model to evaluate the significance of the psychological processes through which contact affects action strategies. There was a significant overall negative indirect effect of contact on collective action intentions ($-.157, [-.255, -.059], p = .002$). Tests of specific indirect effects of contact on collective action indicated a significant indirect effect via identification ($-.11, [-.189, -.039], p = .003$) and indirect effect via attitude and anger that was approaching significance ($-.032, [-.065, -.001], p = .060$). Contact also had a significant positive indirect effect on individual mobility orientation via permeability ($.120, [.017, .204], p = .019$) and a negative indirect effect on anger via attitude ($-.128, [-.196, -.061], p < .001$). Finally, there was a significant negative indirect effect of outgroup attitudes on collective action intentions via anger ($-.077, [-.149, -.001], p = .050$). None of the remaining indirect effects were statistically significant.

Discussion

The present research speaks to a recent debate surrounding the consequences of positive intergroup contact for social change by investigating the role of contact in motivating individual mobility as an action strategy to deal with disadvantage and by examining the implications of an individual mobility orientation for collective action aimed at social change. Specifically we expected positive contact with members of the advantaged group to foster the belief that upward social mobility is possible (i.e., that group boundaries are permeable) and that this belief would predict intentions to engage in activities aimed at personal

advancement. Furthermore, based on SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Jackman's (1994) theorizing, both of which suggest that an individual mobility orientation undermines collective action, we tested the hypothesis that individual mobility intentions negatively predict willingness to engage in collective action. We examined this novel pathway over and above a mostly established pathway whereby intergroup contact reduces the prerequisites for collective action by reducing awareness of disadvantage and ingroup identification and by increasing positive regard for the advantaged group. We also extended this pathway by investigating the role of attitudes in reducing anger about ingroup disadvantage. Below we first discuss our findings regarding the two proposed pathways. We then discuss the practical implications of our findings and suggest directions for future research.

Summary of findings

Our hypotheses regarding the relation between contact and individual mobility orientation were confirmed. The present work thus provides the first empirical evidence that positive contact is positively associated with an individual mobility orientation. Thus, it seems that having positive interpersonal relations with members of an advantaged group can increase the motivation to advance individually among members of a disadvantaged group. This was explained through contact's effects on the belief in the ability to advance in society (i.e., the perceived permeability of group boundaries), a key predictor of action strategies in SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Counter to our expectations, however, there was no significant relation between individual mobility and collective action intentions. Thus, at least in the present sample, striving for individual advancement is not associated with reduced willingness to get engaged on behalf of one's group. It should be noted that individual mobility as a strategy to cope with group disadvantage has primarily been examined in laboratory studies where participants are forced to select one strategy over the other (e.g., Blair & Jost, 2003; Wright et al., 1990). In

the “real world”, however, individual mobility and collective action are not necessarily incompatible. In fact, closer inspection of data collected in the field (e.g., Mummendey et al., 1999) reveals a lack of correlation or even positive correlations between individual mobility and collective strategies. Thus, individuals can strive for personal advancement and access to the advantaged group without reducing their commitment to achieving group-level social change. In fact, socially mobile individuals may often play an important part in the struggle for equality. For example, students, who are prime examples of individuals striving for upward mobility, often become engaged in political action during their time at university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Furthermore, like challenges to the status quo originating from members of the advantaged group, protest by socially mobile members of the disadvantaged group is more likely to be perceived as reflecting objective reality as they would not be direct beneficiaries of social change (cf., Drury & Kaiser, 2014).

We tested the relations between contact, permeability, individual mobility, and collective action over and above previously established mechanisms through which contact was shown to reduce collective action. While appraisal of disadvantage as expected predicted both anger and collective action orientations, we did not replicate the negative relation between contact and disadvantage appraisal. As we relied on only a one-item measure to tap this construct, the reason for this lack of an effect may well be methodological. It is also conceivable, however, that this null-effect is due to the possibility that contact may, under certain circumstances, result in heightened awareness of group differences and an increased sense of disadvantage (Poore et al., 2002). For example, contact is likely to result in greater awareness of disadvantage when group differences are discussed rather than avoided during contact (cf. Saguy & Dovidio, 2013), or when contact provides the first real experience with the extent of material differences between groups.

We replicated the indirect effect of contact on collective action tendencies via reduced identification (Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Respondents who had more positive contact with members of the advantaged group were less likely to identify with Latinos, a finding that is consistent with much work within the contact literature which suggests that positive intergroup contact reduces both the salience and importance of original group identities (e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1984; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Reduced identification was, in line with prior work (see van Zomeren et al., 2008), predictive of a diminished willingness to engage in actions that would benefit Latinos as a group.

Finally, as expected, positive outgroup attitudes negatively predicted anger about disadvantage, a significant predictor of collective action intentions. This is consistent with the idea that positive outgroup attitudes created through pleasant interactions with members of the advantaged group are likely to create an ambiguity about who is to blame for the ingroup's disadvantage (see Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Wright & Lubensky, 2009), thereby inhibiting adversarial emotions and action tendencies.

Implications for Policy and Directions for Future Research

There has been widespread optimism about the potential of intergroup contact for the improvement of group relations (e.g., Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006), resulting in the application of many contact-based interventions in the field (e.g., Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2012). This optimism has recently been questioned through a number of studies suggesting that contact seems to reduce disadvantaged-group members' interest in measures that would increase social justice and benefit their group. The present study adds to this still emerging body of work, further demonstrating that contact reduces interest in collective action on behalf of one's group. However, by demonstrating for the first time that contact with members of advantaged groups positively predicts individuals' motivation to achieve

upward mobility, the present research also opens up a number of intriguing possibilities for both policy and future research.

Increasing social mobility among people from historically disadvantaged segments of society is among the priorities of many governments (e.g., HM Government, 2011). In addition to removing structural barriers to social mobility, a main concern is how to challenge low aspirations and expectations that prevent people from advancing and fulfilling their potential. Psychological research has demonstrated that a sense of belonging and “fit” into a new environment such as a university or a particular professional field is vital in predicting interest, personal adjustment, and academic success (e.g., Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009; Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos, & Young, 2008). One implication of the present results then is that interventions that include positive contact with members of an advantaged group may raise aspirations and success among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and thereby promote social change through social mobility.

We suggest that a potential application of intergroup contact as a method to raise aspirations among members of disadvantaged groups is preceded by an extensive research program that further investigates the interrelations between contact, social mobility, collective action and social change. The present research presents only initial evidence for the link between contact and individual mobility orientations and it is important to note that our student sample is not representative of the general population, which may restrict the external validity and generalizability of our findings. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of our data precludes confident inferences about the causal relations between variables. Thus, a first step for future research is to substantiate the proposed causal effects, as well as examine these relations in the wider population and other intergroup contexts. In addition, we suggest that future work needs to tackle four main questions:

(1) First, we need to learn more about *how* the relation between intergroup contact and individual mobility motivation comes about. For example, does positive, equal-status contact create a belief that one is similar to the advantaged group and therefore likely to receive equal treatment or the social support required to move up? Does it thus increase the perceived fit of oneself into contexts that are typically dominated by outgroup members? Or might contact with members of the advantaged group increase self-efficacy by transmitting “soft skills” (e.g., language skills, social competencies) that are likely to aid upward mobility and thus increase confidence that one has the ability to advance individually? Identifying the mechanisms through which contact raises aspirations is vital for designing targeted interventions.

(2) Second, the implications of intergroup contact for *actual* social mobility need to be established. Systems that proclaim equal opportunity and meritocracy often do not account for existing group differences in resources that facilitate upward mobility, such as access to relevant social networks, or address subtle forms of discrimination that restrict entrance to high-status positions for members of historically disadvantaged groups. Thus, members of disadvantaged groups who strive for personal advancement may still face great obstacles in achieving upward mobility. Our finding that contact increases an individual mobility orientation should therefore not be equated with contact contributing to actual mobility.

Nonetheless, initial evidence for the potential of contact to promote social mobility was provided in a longitudinal study by Kalter (2006). Kalter found that the disadvantages of second generation Turkish migrants in the German labour market, which exist even when level of education is controlled for, can in part be explained by the composition of friendship networks. Specifically, Turkish migrants who counted fewer Germans among their closest friends were less likely to be employed, and particularly less likely to have a skilled job. According to Kalter, this likely reflects the role of social capital in the job market, where jobs

are often obtained through informal social contacts (see Granovetter, 1995). While these findings are encouraging, it is important to note that this would need to happen on a wide scale to amount to real social change; the upward mobility of just a few “tokens” can in fact reduce collective efforts to remove existing societal barriers that produce inequalities (see Wright et al., 1990).

(3) Related to this last point, more focused research attention needs to be devoted to the implications of an individual mobility orientation for collective action on behalf of the disadvantaged group. Social mobility is most effective in terms of social change if socially mobile individuals serve as role models and provide support to other ingroup members. Moreover, political engagement by members of disadvantaged groups is important to achieve a more complete removal of structural barriers to equality. While existing theory (see Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Jackman, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that an individual mobility orientation reduces willingness to engage in collective action, there was no evidence for this idea in the present data. Future research should therefore identify the factors that determine whether an individual mobility orientation undermines collective action or not. For example, high levels of contact with members of the ingroup and involvement in ingroup organizations are all likely to maintain commitment to group-level social change and may even motivate individuals to use upward mobility as part of the strategy to achieve group equality. What seems to be vital is whether individuals remain psychologically invested in their group (see Derks, et al., in press). To examine this idea directly we tested whether ingroup identification moderated the relation between individual mobility orientation and collective action in the present data set. We found no evidence of moderation; however, this may be due to the relatively restricted range of identification scores in the present sample. It is also possible that identification only moderates the link between individual mobility and collective action when these two strategies are perceived as incompatible.

(4) Finally, while the relation between individual mobility and collective action might not necessarily be negative, the present research replicated the negative relation between contact and collective action intentions. More research needs to be conducted on the implications of contact for collective social change strategies and there needs to be a change of focus in intergroup contact research away from attitudes as indicators of “success” to more substantial outcome variables such as policy preferences and political behaviour that provide greater insights into the likely societal impact of contact interventions. Furthermore, too little is yet known about the conditions under which contact does not result in reduced support for actions and policies that would benefit the ingroup. Thus our research efforts should be directed at identifying forms of contact that do not have these detrimental effects. Initial work, for example, has demonstrated that contact with outgroup members who explicitly support social justice (compared to contact where their feelings about the group inequality are left ambiguous) does not undermine collective action (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013). Furthermore, successful collective action often requires the formation of strong alliances that cut across groups. Thus, we need to investigate forms of contact that motivate both members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups to demand social change as well as explore the role of intergroup contact in facilitating political solidarity between disadvantaged groups (see Dixon et al., in press, for initial results).

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among variables

	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SES ¹	Stand.	.03	.80	.32**	.30**	-.17	-.07	.10	-.15	.02	-.05
2. Contact ²	Stand.	.00	.90	-	.41***	-.35***	-.06	.24*	-.03	.24*	-.23*
3. Attitude	0-100	78.66	16.68		-	-.06	-.19*	.36***	-.36***	.35***	-.24*
4. Identification	1-7	5.93	1.15			-	-.01	-.02	-.05	-.04	.31**
5. Disadvantage	1-5	3.61	.95				-	.14	.33***	.12	.32**
6. Permeability	1-5	4.19	.67					-	.08	.46***	-.02
7. Anger	1-5	2.35	.83						-	-.01	.31**
8. Individual mobility	1-5	4.34	.60							-	.04
9. Collective action	1-5	3.10	.88								-

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ¹Subjective SES (1-5): $M = 2.62$, $SD = .76$, Father's education (1-7): $M = 4.28$,

$SD = 1.92$, Mother's education (1-7): $M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.82$; ²Number of friends (1-7): $M = 5.32$, $SD = 2.53$, visit

your friends home (1-5): $M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.31$, they visit your home: $M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.30$

Figure Captions

Figure 1a. Proposed structural model.

Figure 1b. Obtained structural model ($N = 112$); $\chi^2(14) = 21.81, p = .081, \chi^2/df = 1.34, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07, p\text{-close} = .249, SRMR = .05, AIC = 3068.43$. Only significant paths are shown. Path coefficients are standardized estimates, *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$. Correlations: outgroup attitude – appraisal of disadvantage ($r = -.17, p = .053$); outgroup attitude – identification ($r = .12, p = .182$); outgroup attitude – permeability ($r = .29, p = .020$); appraisal of disadvantage – identification ($r = -.04, p = .715$); appraisal of disadvantage – permeability ($r = .16, p = .091$); permeability - identification ($r = .07, p = .502$); anger – individual mobility orientation ($r = -.01, p = .951$). The analysis was conducted while controlling for the relations of SES with contact ($r = .32, p = .001$) and outgroup attitudes ($r = .17, p = .038$).

Figure 1a

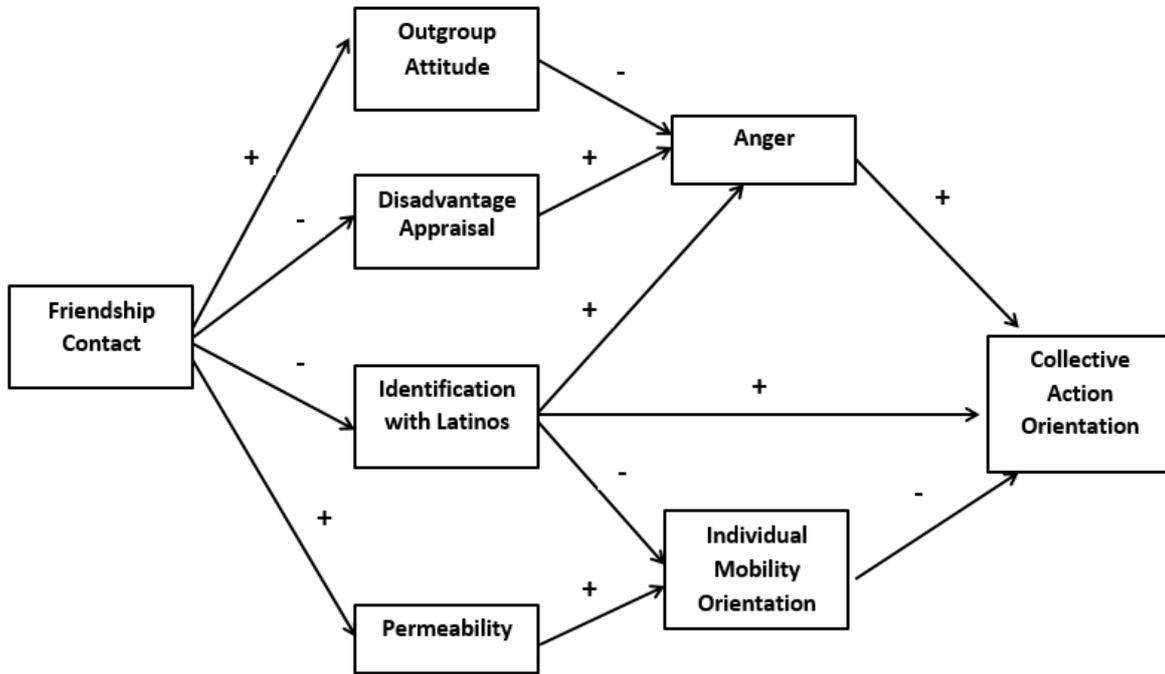


Figure 1b

