

**Pro-Diversity Intervention Improves Poles' Intergroup Attitudes by Increasing Collective  
Nostalgia for more Open Polish Society**

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### **Ethics clearance**

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Robert Zajonc Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland.

## **Abstract**

The content of group-based emotions like collective nostalgia (i.e., a sentimental longing for how one's social group used to be) matters. Yet this has been distressingly overlooked despite the predictive utility that the content of a specific group-based emotion may yield. For instance, there is growing evidence that collective nostalgia for a society that is more homogenous heightens prejudice, while collective nostalgia for a society that is more open and tolerant society increases acceptance of outgroups. In an intervention-based longitudinal study with Polish adolescents ( $N = 476$ ), we tested whether the content of collective nostalgia can be influenced by highlighting particular aspects of Polish history. The intervention highlighted a history of co-existence between ingroup and outgroup members. We predicted and found that the intervention increased openness-focused nostalgia, which in turn improved intergroup attitudes. Results suggest that community-based interventions can improve intergroup attitudes by eliciting nostalgia for a more open past.

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## **Pro-Diversity Intervention Improves Poles' Intergroup Attitudes by Increasing Collective Nostalgia for more Open Polish Society**

Although nostalgia—a bittersweet emotion that reflects longing for days gone by—has been predominantly studied as an individual-level emotion (i.e., longing for one's personal past; Sedikides et al., 2004), nostalgia can also be experienced in relation to the past of one's social group (i.e., longing for the ingroup's past; Wildschut et al., 2014), even if the past that people are nostalgic for is outside their lived experience (Smeekes et al., 2015). Importantly, the consequence of feeling this group-based emotion is a desire to re-establish the group's past in the present. This can manifest constructively (e.g., ingroup favoring collective action; Wildschut et al., 2014) or destructively (e.g., hostile intergroup attitudes; Smeekes et al., 2015).

The key to understanding whether positive or negative outcomes of collective nostalgia prevail lies in the *content of the emotion*, i.e., the specific aspects of the collective past that group members long to bring back to the present (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Wohl et al., 2020a, 2020b). As evidenced by Wohl et al. (2020b), the content of nostalgia is malleable: when American participants were manipulated to think of a time in America's past that made them nostalgic for when America was more open to other cultures, they expressed more acceptance of immigrants. Conversely, when they were manipulated to nostalgize about a time in America's past when American society was more homogenous, participants expressed less acceptance of immigrants.

The current research explored the possibility that framing a particular aspect of a group's history as positive through a large-scale intervention should stimulate nostalgia for that aspect of the past. We hypothesized that when Poles learn about the historical co-existence with Jews during an intervention styled workshop about Polish history, it will stimulate nostalgia for an

open society and decrease nostalgia for a homogenous society. These changes in collective nostalgia should, in turn, relate to more tolerant intergroup attitudes. We also expected the intervention to stimulate participants' knowledge of history and interest in local history. The latter of which has been shown to relate to more positive intergroup attitudes (Stefaniak et al., 2017; Wójcik et al., 2010). We expected that the positive effects of the intervention on attitudes via collective nostalgia would emerge even when including knowledge of and interest in local history in the model.

## **Method**

### **Study Context**

The reported study was conducted in Poland due to its unique history of intergroup relations. Post-war Poland became one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world with more than 96% of the population declaring a solely Polish ethnic identification (Gudaszewski, 2015), which made intergroup contact highly unlikely (Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016) and intergroup prejudice prevalent (Zick et al., 2011). Most recently, more than one million Ukrainian citizens settled in the country, and today immigrants consist more than 5% of the country's population. From a historical perspective the post-war situation was highly untypical. Being situated in the center of Europe, at the cross-roads of cultural influences and economic interests, up until World War II many diverse ethnic groups settled in Poland.

In fact, pre-war data shows that close to a third of the Polish population at the time consisted of various ethnic minorities, with the Jewish minority being the second largest at 10.5% of the total population (Eberhardt, 2006). Even though the Jewish minority living in Poland today is very small, strong negative attitudes towards Jews persist (Bilewicz et al., 2012), also among young people (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2013). Given the historic coexistence of Poles

and Jews and the relative paucity of school education on this topic (Witkowska et al., 2014), the current study was conducted among a sample of Polish youth who live in small and medium size towns that used to be the home to large Jewish communities before the war and who, as part of an educational intervention, learned about the pre-war presence of Jewish minority in their current places of residence.

The intervention, entitled *School of Dialogue*, was designed and implemented by a Polish non-governmental organization, the Forum for Dialogue. The program comprises four workshops during which participants acquire knowledge about the Jewish heritage and culture of pre-war Poland and their influence on Polish culture, as well as about current Jewish inhabitants of the country. The main features of the program comprise the explicit focus on local Polish-Jewish history and the direct engagement with the still existing Jewish material heritage (Stefaniak et al., 2017; Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016). A more detailed description of the intervention may be found in the Supplementary Material.

### **Participants and Design**

For the purpose of the current study, we recruited participants of the 2019 edition of the School of Dialogue ( $N = 476$ ). It is important to note that although the decision to participate in the School of Dialogue program is made by the school officials, in some of the schools the students volunteer to take part in the program, in others they are selected to participate by their teachers (though they have a right not to do so). Unfortunately, how participants entered the program was not coded. As such, the extent to which self-selection into the program influences results cannot be assessed.

The participants who agreed to take part in the evaluation study were on average 14 years and 10 months old ( $M_{\text{age}} = 14.82$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ), 61.6% identified as female, 37.4% as male, and

1.1% did not provide gender self-identification. They came from 32 different locations: 18.8% of the locations were villages, 46.9% were towns with a population up to 20,000, 21.9% were from towns with a population between 20,000 and 100,000, and 12.5% were from cities with a population over 100,000. As part of the study, the participants filled out two questionnaires – one before the start of the program, one after its completion. The participants were asked to sign their questionnaires with special codes, so that Time 1 and Time 2 answers could be matched. Only data from participants who completed and correctly coded both questionnaires was analyzed. The consent to participate in the study was collected verbally from participants' parents by head teachers or school headmasters (depending on the location). Only students who agreed to participate in the study were given the questionnaires.

## Measures

Measures reported as part of this study were embedded in a longer questionnaire that aimed at evaluating the effects of the intervention also on other aspects of social functioning of participant (e.g., willingness to engage in social activism in one's local community, place attachment [Lewicka, 2005], social trust [Putnam, 2000], etc.). Unless otherwise indicated the measures used in the study had an answer scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

***Collective nostalgia for an open and for a homogenous society.*** The two types of collective nostalgia were measured with one item each taken from Wohl et al, (2020b). We asked participants about the extent to which they longed for times “when Poland was more ethnically diverse” and “when Poles were more culturally homogenous”.

***Interest in local history.*** Interest in local history was measured with three items taken from the *Interest in Place History Scale* (Lewicka, 2012)., e.g., “I am interested in the history of my place of residence”;  $\alpha_{t1} = .75$ ;  $\alpha_{t2} = .74$ .

**Knowledge of Jewish history and culture.** To evaluate whether participants' felt knowledgeable about Jewish culture and history we asked them the following two questions: "How do you evaluate your own knowledge about the history of Polish Jews compared to your peers?" and "How do you evaluate your own knowledge about the culture of Polish Jews compared to your peers?";  $r_{t1}(469) = .62, p < .001$ ;  $r_{t2}(462) = .74, p < .001$  (answer scale: 1 = *I know a lot less*; 3 = *I know about the same*; 5 = *I know a lot more*). Given that the items were strongly correlated we created composite subjective *knowledge of history* scores by averaging answers to both questions.

**Attitudes towards Jews.** Attitudes towards Jews were measured with a feeling thermometer that asked participants about the extent to which their feelings towards this group were negative or positive on a scale from 0 = *extremely cold/negative* to 100 = *extremely warm/positive*.

**Attitudes towards ethnic diversity.** Attitudes towards ethnic diversity were measured with four items: "Poland should accept more refugees from countries at war", "I wish there were more people with different skin colors living in Poland", "Immigrants enrich Polish culture", "Immigrants are taking jobs away from ethnic Poles (reversed)";  $\alpha_{t1} = .75$ ;  $\alpha_{t2} = .76$ .

## Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, changes over time, and correlations among variables in the study at Time 1 and Time 2. Data analyzed in this article is publicly available via OSF: [https://osf.io/f64qn/?view\\_only=205e31c28e0e4139b7cae31a1d3cd081](https://osf.io/f64qn/?view_only=205e31c28e0e4139b7cae31a1d3cd081)

We observed significant changes in all variables after the intervention. Specifically, upon completion of the program the participants displayed greater nostalgia for an open society, more positive intergroup attitudes (towards Jews, and towards ethnic diversity more generally), more



interest in local history, and higher subjective evaluation of their knowledge of Jewish culture and history. At the same time, participants' nostalgia for a homogeneous society significantly decreased.

Predictably, collective nostalgia for an open society was associated with more positive attitudes towards Jewish people and towards ethnic diversity at both measurement times, while nostalgia for a homogenous society related to more negative attitudes towards Jews and towards ethnic diversity (though the latter was only significant at Time 1 and not at Time 2). The two types of nostalgia were positively, though not very strongly correlated at Time 1, but did not correlate at Time 2. Knowledge of Jewish history and culture as well as interest in local history were positively related to participants' intergroup attitudes as well.

To verify the predictions that participating in the intervention will influence collective nostalgia, knowledge of history, and interest in local history, and that changes in collective nostalgia will translate to participants' intergroup attitudes, an analysis of within-participants mediation was conducted using the MEMORE macro (Montoya & Hayes, 2017). The macro is designed for testing mediational models in repeated measure designs (with two measurements) and allows for testing the relations between changes in the variables that occur over time (while controlling for the effects of average levels of the variables). Using this method we assessed the influence of the intervention on participants' openness-focused and homogeneity-focused collective nostalgia, interest in local history, and subjective knowledge of Jewish history as well as the influence of these changes on changes observed in attitudes towards Jews and towards ethnic diversity. The two models tested are presented in Figure 1.

In both models, the effect of the intervention was significant for all mediator variables. These significant changes translated to more positive attitudes towards Jews. Specifically, both

greater interest in local history and stronger nostalgia for an open society related to developing more positive attitudes towards Jews, while greater subjectively evaluated knowledge of Jewish history and lower homogeneity-focused nostalgia did not (see Figure 1a). However, only increased openness-focused nostalgia mediated the effect of the intervention on attitudes,  $B = 0.27$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ , 95%CI: 0.03, 0.78, while the indirect effects via homogeneity-focused nostalgia,  $B = -0.11$ ,  $B_{ps} = -0.004$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ , 95%CI: -0.53, 0.20, knowledge of history  $B = 0.98$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.81$ , 95%CI: -0.68, 2.51, and interest in local history,  $B = 0.83$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.04$ ;  $SE = 0.46$ , 95%CI: -0.02, 1.76 were not significant.

In the model for attitudes towards ethnic diversity as the dependent variable, greater openness-focused nostalgia and interest in local history predicted more positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity, while increased knowledge and decreased homogeneity-focused nostalgia did not (see Figure 1b). The indirect effect of the intervention on attitudes towards ethnic diversity was significant via greater openness-focused nostalgia  $B = 0.02$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95%CI: 0.003, 0.04; and interest in local history  $B = 0.03$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95%CI: 0.01, 0.06; while the effects via homogeneity-focused nostalgia  $B = 0.005$ ,  $B_{ps} = SE = 0.004$ , 95%CI: -0.004, 0.01 and knowledge of Jewish history  $B = 0.001$ ,  $B_{ps} = 0.002$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95%CI: -0.03, 0.03 were not significant.

## Discussion

A longitudinal study conducted in Poland showed that participants of an intergroup intervention that provides young Poles with knowledge about the multicultural history of their places of residence developed greater nostalgia for an open society while their nostalgia for a homogenous society decreased. Participants became more interested in local history, felt more knowledgeable about Jewish history, and developed more positive attitudes towards Jews and

towards ethnic diversity. Increased nostalgia for an open society mediated the effect of the intervention on both measures of intergroup attitudes. Additionally, greater interest in local history was a significant mediator of the effect of the intervention on more positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity. Neither decreased nostalgia for a homogenous society, nor feeling more knowledgeable about Jewish history emerged as significant mediators.

Although the lack of a control group<sup>1</sup>, participants' self-selection, and relatively small effect sizes constitute shortcomings of this research, we nonetheless believe that it provides a substantial contribution to the literature. Specifically, our results show that teaching about the history of coexistence between majority and minority groups in a naturalistic setting stimulates a sense of nostalgia for a more open society of the past and simultaneously decreases nostalgia for a homogenous society. Thus, reliable historical knowledge emerges as a possible source of nostalgia, which goes beyond the typical short instructions used to induce participants' collective nostalgia (e.g., Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Wohl et al., 2020b). The current research also demonstrates that collective nostalgia for an open society (alongside greater interest in local history) is a reliable mediator of the effects of learning about historical ethnic diversity on more tolerant intergroup attitudes, which contributes to the broader literature on prejudice reduction (Paluck & Green, 2009; Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016). Lastly, our results show that history may be utilized as a resource for building more amiable intergroup relations in contexts where lack of diversity may preclude other methods, such as direct intergroup contact (Wagner et al., 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2015, evaluation of the School of Dialogue program included a control group and showed that the effects found in the study cannot be attributed to just the passage of time or other unaccounted processes. Please see a more detailed description of that study in the Supplement and in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Stefaniak (2017, Study 3). Data from that study is publicly available on OSF: [https://osf.io/f64qn/?view\\_only=205e31c28e0e4139b7cae31a1d3cd081](https://osf.io/f64qn/?view_only=205e31c28e0e4139b7cae31a1d3cd081)

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**Table 1**

*Means, standard deviations, changes over time, and correlations among variables in the study*

	Time 1	Time 2	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	Power <sup>a</sup>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Openness CN	2.77 (1.00)	2.88 (1.05)	-2.14*	-0.11	0.67		.12**	.05	.02	.33***	.46***
2. Homogeneity CN	2.94 (1.03)	2.79 (1.01)	3.00**	0.14	0.85	-.06		.12*	-.05	-.13**	-.20***
3. Interest in local history	3.12 (0.77)	3.41 (0.78)	-8.30***	-0.39	1.00	.19***	.10*		.25***	.12**	.09*
4. Knowledge of history	2.95 (0.65)	3.38 (0.78)	-11.34***	-0.54	1.00	.14**	-.12*	.21***		.10*	-.02
5. Feeling thermometer	65.81 (25.11)	69.79 (26.16)	-3.66***	-0.17	0.96	.32***	-.07	.21***	.18***		.46***
6. Diversity	2.87 (0.78)	2.97 (0.79)	-4.16***	-0.18	0.98	.52***	-.21***	.15**	.17***	.46***	

*Note.* CN = collective nostalgia. Diversity = attitudes towards ethnic diversity. Correlations at Time 1 are presented above and at Time 2 below the diagonal.

<sup>a</sup>Observed power, two-tailed

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

**Figure 1**

Within-subjects mediation of the influence of the intervention on participants' attitudes towards Jews (a) and towards ethnic diversity (b) via changes in collective nostalgia for an open ("CN-openness") and homogenous ("CN-homogeneity") society, knowledge of Jewish history and culture ("Knowledge"), and interest in local history ("Interest in history")

