Looking Back as We Look Ahead: Integrating Research, Theory, and Practice on Intergroup Relations

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This article looks back at the origins of intergroup relations in social psychology just over 50 years ago. Pioneers in the field—Robin Williams, Gordon Allport, and Kurt Lewin—were all deeply concerned with integrating social science and social action. We seek to re-center this mutuality of research and practice, and to expand the focus of intergroup relations from prejudice reduction to social inclusion. The articles in this issue document cutting-edge research, theory, and practice, and make substantive contributions to the future of intergroup relations. A unique feature of this issue is a set of commentaries by prominent scholars and practitioners in the fields of intergroup relations and education. Walter Stephan, James Banks, Thomas Pettigrew, and Patricia Gurin each reflect on the collection of articles through the lens of their own personal and professional biographies to help define the intersections of research, theory, and practice on intergroup relations.

More than 50 years ago, the emergence of two early, seminal volumes catapulted the study of intergroup relations to a central place in social psychological theory and research. Williams's (1947) monograph, *The Reduction of Intergroup*

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Tensions, examined existing research on conflict and hostility in the context of racial and ethnic relations, with an eye toward identifying new theoretical propositions and effective intergroup programs. Commissioned by the Social Science Research Council, the stated goal of this monograph was to "consider social psychological theory and research bearing on the problem of group conflict" and to derive "from any promising theory, not now practically applied, an action technique which might be tested for its effectiveness in reducing hostility and resolving conflict" (ix). Growing from these early perspectives, Gordon W. Allport then developed one of the most comprehensive and influential volumes in research on intergroup relations, with the publication of his 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. In this book, Allport expresses his trademark concerns of integrating social science and social action (Pettigrew, 1999). In theorizing about intergroup contact, he challenged the notion that simple encounters among different people would be sufficient to reduce prejudice. In its stead, he proposed a series of situational conditions for intergroup contact that he deemed necessary for fundamental changes in intergroup prejudice.

These social scientists' deep concern for linking psychological research and theory to substantive social issues was echoed in the writings of their contemporary—Kurt Lewin. Lewin's (1946) "full-cycle psychology" approach to action research—incorporating the scientific study of social problems, the thoughtful development of solutions to those problems, and the generation of new knowledge from the practice—intimately tied explorations in academia to the real world. Lewin advocated for a mutuality between theory-driven experiments and field-based interventions:

> Many psychologists working today in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished . . . . if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951, p. 169, as quoted in Bargal, Gold, & Lewin, 1992, p. 6)

This issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*, along with other recent writings celebrating a half-century of work on intergroup relations (see Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005; Zirkel, Lopez, & Brown, 2004), encourages us to look at the past and look ahead to the work that lies before us in the next half-century. Early investigations of intergroup processes reveal high degrees of involvement with communities and a direct commitment to application. For example, field studies of housewives in desegregated housing projects (Deutsch & Collins, 1951), seamen in the Merchant Marine (Brophy, 1945), police officers in Philadelphia (Kephart, 1957), and soldiers fighting in World War II (Stouffer, Schuman, Devinney, Star, & Williams, 1949) offered cumulative evidence that contact between groups could reduce intergroup prejudice across many segments of society (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, for a recent review). However, it appears that the interplay between research and

practice has diminished over the years, such that the trajectories of researchers and practitioners have developed in largely divergent directions.

As we approach a second half-century of intergroup relations research, we seek to revisit and extend Lewin's full-cycle approach, which prioritizes theory and data collection in close collaboration with actors in the real world. This concern for establishing bridges between research and application has been shared by Aboud and Levy (1999), in their issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*. Entitled "Reducing racial prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping: Translating research into programs," the issue sought to identify ways in which basic research on prejudice and discrimination could be used to inform applied programs. Now, 7 years later, the present issue updates the ongoing dialogue among theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners in the field of intergroup relations. Moreover, we build upon this earlier contribution by exploring both how intergroup theory and research can inform applied programs, and how applied programs can contribute to the development of intergroup theories and research.

Scope and Context of the Field of Prejudice Reduction and Social Inclusion

Although most would agree that addressing the issue of prejudice requires a multi-layered response, relatively few collaborative efforts have been able to strike a balance between scholarly and applied approaches to understanding and reducing intergroup prejudice. Dialogues among theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners are often fraught with suspicion, judgments about valid knowledge, and concerns about unequal status, while at other times there have been no dialogues of which to speak. Attempts to bridge theory, research, and practice may be especially complex today, as our field continues to grow in breadth and depth. The present issue seeks to highlight many of the achievements, current questions, and visions of future collaborations which lie at the nexus of these distinct approaches to the study of intergroup relations.

Furthermore, in this issue, we seek to broaden our focus beyond concerns for prejudice reduction, that is, to consider how we can promote social inclusion within our work on intergroup relations. As we review examples from the research literature, it appears that much of the first half-century of scholarship on intergroup relations has focused on the problem of intergroup prejudice. Indeed, Allport (1954) originally defined prejudice as an "antipathy" toward other groups (p. 9), and this primary emphasis on negative aspects of intergroup relationships has persisted during the last several decades. However, new questions and important extensions of intergroup research continue to surface, in response to the many societal changes that have occurred since Allport's time; in particular, greater emphasis is now being placed on establishing multi-ethnic communities and promoting social inclusion (see Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999; Hewstone et al., 2005; Jones, Lynch, Tenglund, &

Gaertner, 2000). The growth of our field to address concerns about social inclusion suggests a positive approach, and one that moves beyond simply the absence or breakdown of prejudice. Our issue traverses some of this newly expanded terrain, and examines the various responses to these new concepts in the field of intergroup relations.

The questions guiding this issue grew from our discussions at the June 2003 Anti-bias Education Conference in Evanston, Illinois. Co-sponsored by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues and the Slifka Foundation, the conference emerged from the work of the Anti-bias Education Workgroup of the American Jewish Committee Chapter in Chicago. The conference, and the origins of the workgroup, mark a growing movement and imperative of exchanges among scholars and practitioners to work collaboratively in improving intergroup relations (see, e.g., Stephan & Vogt, 2004). Whether it is the growing concern for the persistence of inequalities (Massey & Denton, 1993), the resegregation of schools (Orfield, 2001), or the educational value of diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), scholars and practitioners are being called to envision new ways of improving intergroup relations. Colleagues from the United States, Israel, Germany, and South Africa gathered at the conference to mutually inform and strengthen the common work of anti-bias education. A follow-up conference was held a year later in Tempe, Arizona, under the auspices of Arizona State University. This interest in bringing together researchers and practitioners was similarly reflected in the 2004 conference on "Building Constructive Frameworks for Improving Ethnic Relations" sponsored by the University of Denver Conflict Resolution Institute.

In light of these discussions, two critical questions inform our approach to this issue: How might we improve intergroup relations through focusing both on reducing intergroup prejudice and promoting social inclusion? And, as we explore these issues, how can we engage in an inclusive dialogue that is not limited to simply scholars *or* practitioners, but expanded to include scholars *and* practitioners? Both questions, in their own way, center on deepening the connection of social psychology's longstanding commitment to effecting social change: one, through continually examining how scholarly foci meet the challenges in the real world; and two, through fostering meaningful exchanges among the actors in these two broad realms to advance a mutually beneficial agenda.

These questions are not new to us; they draw deep into social psychology's disciplinary roots. Yet, we believe we are at an important juncture in the development of the field of intergroup relations, such that these themes call for especially careful and thoughtful attention. Not only are we bringing together scholars and practitioners in this issue, but we are also honored to include pioneers in intergroup relations—Walter Stephan, James Banks, Thomas Pettigrew, and Patricia Gurin— who have all provided insightful commentaries reviewing the contributions in this issue. As esteemed colleagues, they bring home the teaching of *Sankofa*, of the

Akan people in West Africa. A simple translation of *Sankofa* means that we look back into our past and reclaim our history so that we may move forward.[1] In this issue, we seek to return to the rich heritage of intergroup relations work in social psychology, toward the integration of research, theory, and practice.

Integrating Research, Theory, and Practice on Intergroup Relations

This issue serves as a platform for the interaction and exchange of ideas between researchers and practitioners in the area of intergroup relations. The conferences described above provided useful opportunities for the attending practitioners and scholars to share their expertise and reflect on their common interests. We encountered tremendous enthusiasm and willingness among researchers, practitioners, and practitioner–researchers to pull together our individual and collective work to forge new directions in the field of intergroup relations. Nonetheless, while researchers and practitioners work toward the same goals of reducing prejudice and promoting social inclusion, we often approach these issues from different starting points, and occasional meetings are not sufficient to provide a sustained intellectual engagement among us.

Intergroup researchers typically seek to further our understanding of how basic motivational and perceptual processes contribute to shaping our responses to members of other groups. Practitioners tend to focus their attention on developing programs and interventions that can effectively reduce prejudice and promote social inclusion in applied settings. Given these differing orientations, practitioners and researchers often find that they ask different questions and frame their work in different ways, along with encountering distinct obstacles as they pursue strategies for prejudice reduction (Stephan, this issue). Thus, by highlighting an integration of cutting-edge research, theory, and practice, this issue can enhance a mutual understanding and sharing of perspectives among scholars in academic and applied settings who work to improve intergroup relations.

Generally speaking, there are three possible ways to bridge theory, research, and practice. First, we can consider the approach of *bridging theory to practice*. Allport's specification of conditions for optimal intergroup relations (e.g., equal status between groups, cooperation, common goals, and authority sanction) may be seen as an illustrative example. While Allport's articulation of these conditions led to many waves of research on intergroup relations, it is still widely used as a basis for designing and improving programs (see Association for the Study and Development of Community, 1999; National Conference for Community and Justice, 1998; Stephan & Stephan, 2001).

A second approach, *bridging research to practice*, fine tunes aspects of a program that can be enhanced based on research findings. For example, Gaertner and

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[1] See http://www.duboislc.net/SankofaMeaning.html.

Dovidio's theoretically driven and laboratory-tested Common In-group Identity Model was field-tested in an ongoing elementary school program known as the Green Circle Program (Houlette et al., 2004). The goal of the program was to promote social inclusiveness of all children, an appreciation of differences, and a feeling of common humanity. The research application to practice resulted in reinforcing the sense of a common identity—"we"—through physical manifestations of the green circle of inclusion, e.g., a green circle made of green plastic tape was constructed around the perimeter of a classroom, and students given vests to wear with the green circle logo.

Lastly, we can consider the approach of *bridging practice to theory and research*, an approach which is admittedly more difficult and rare. Two examples are instructive, however. Nagda's article in this issue offers a useful example of how a deep engagement in intergroup dialogues can enhance the interactive communication processes that underlie psychological change. The theoretical contribution is clear: the practice pushes for a more nuanced understanding of both the different processes that are involved in intergroup contact and a refinement of the complexity of intergroup communication processes when social identity and status are salient. A community practice example draws on the work of The Study Circles Resource Center that has focused on enhancing intergroup relationships in communities to bring about effective change (Flavin-McDonald & Barrett, 1999). Study circles incorporate Allport's conditions in bringing a diverse group of people in an equal status situation to work together toward the common goal not of prejudice reduction but of community change. A qualitative study of 17 study circle sites focused on the best practices to improve race relations in the community (Roberts, Houle, Kay, Nagda, & Elliott, 2000). McCoy and Scully (2002) translated these findings from a practice approach to a rich, conceptual model of multiple pathways toward community change. Rather than a prescription for one or two paths, the rich conceptualization and theorizing calls for a deepened contextualized understanding of the community-level conditions that influence certain pathways. This understanding, in turn, influences research and theorizing about intergroup relations and community change.

Organization of This Issue

The current issue is organized in three sections: the first focuses on prejudice reduction, the second on social inclusion, and the last on theory–research–practice intersections.

Research, Theory, and Practice on Prejudice Reduction

Prejudice reduction has been one of the longstanding and sought-after outcomes of intergroup programs. The first section includes empirical papers from

researchers and practitioners concerning the psychological underpinnings of prejudice and the potential effectiveness of prejudice reduction programs.

In the first paper, Esses and Hodson discuss their research concerning people's lay perceptions of ethnic prejudice, and how different conceptions of prejudice suggest different strategies in our attempts to change prejudiced attitudes. Specifically, these authors contend that understanding people's lay beliefs about the nature of prejudice is important, as these beliefs can often provide a vehicle for legitimizing one's prejudices, which in turn can contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of intergroup biases. Across two studies, Esses and Hodson present compelling results that reveal clear relationships between measures of the perceived causes of prejudice, beliefs about the extent to which prejudice is inevitable and justifiable, and specific solutions that could be recommended to reduce prejudice. Moreover, these authors find that those who score high on social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism are especially likely to hold beliefs that can serve to maintain and perpetuate intergroup biases. Esses and Hodson conclude their paper by discussing implications of these trends for implementing prejudice reduction programs and achieving support for these programs among individuals in positions of power.

Next, Cameron and Rutland demonstrate the benefits of using psychological theory and rigorous research methods to design and evaluate an anti-bias intervention. Their randomized controlled evaluation of an intervention, based on the "indirect cross friendship hypothesis" or "extended contact effect" (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997), suggests that reduced bias might result from "vicarious" experiences of friendship. Using a 3 (between-subjects condition) × 2 (time) × 3 (disability of target) design, Cameron and Rutland involved children without disabilities in a 6-week intervention with one of three conditions: neutral (no mention of individual or group attributes), decategorized (emphasizing individual identities), or intergroup (emphasizing category membership and typicality). Those who listened to and discussed stories involving children who had close friendships with children with disabilities, responded with increased positivity toward the disabled in terms of intended behavior and explicit outgroup attitude. The positive effect was most evident for those in the intergroup condition. Their findings are important theoretically in supporting Hewstone and Brown's (1986) theory of maintaining group distinctiveness and salience for the generalization of positive contact effects. Practically, the extended contact intervention could be used to create a more accepting climate in schools prior to the inclusion of children with disabilities, and potentially, children of other disadvantaged or devalued groups.

Molina and Wittig examine the precise conditions under which intergroup contact can be effective in reducing prejudice using multiple, longitudinal studies of ethnic minority and majority high school students. Molina and Wittig note that while many conditions for contact have been regarded as important for achieving

positive contact outcomes, researchers have yet to test the extent to which each of these conditions contributes significantly to producing positive contact effects. Findings from their studies indicate that conditions of acquaintance potential and interdependence between groups tend to predict reductions in intergroup prejudice; yet these effects also vary somewhat, depending on the outcomes of interest. In particular, acquaintance potential largely predicts reductions in affective prejudice, whereas interdependence most strongly predicts perceptions of a common ingroup. Molina and Wittig discuss the broader significance of these findings, in terms of our attempts to establish optimal contact conditions in prejudice reduction programs, along with considering the varied effects of these conditions for members of different ethnic groups.

Wessler and De Andrade then focus on manifestations of intergroup bias in middle schools and high schools, in the form of verbal harassment. Growing from their combined experiences in research, hate crimes prosecution, and leadership of a non-profit civil rights organization, Wessler and De Andrade discuss the content and consequences of degrading words based upon race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other categories. Their focus group data show the pervasiveness and shocking intensity of degrading language, slurs, and jokes. The impact of the harassment on targeted students varies from depression to school dropout to self-inflicted harm. Their research with perpetrators of harassment found a disjuncture between the use of degrading language and an understanding of their hurtful impact. The perpetrators were typically motivated to use charged language simply because they thought the words were funny, or because they were looking for peer approval themselves. The authors then discuss the potential effectiveness of two anti-bias education interventions: a student leader project that educates students about the nature and impact of harassment, and a controversial dialogues program that facilitates sustained contact among perpetrators, targets, and pro-diversity advocates.

Research, Theory, and Practice on Promoting Social Inclusion

Other papers in this issue expand on the list of intended outcomes of intergroup programs. While prejudice reduction may be conceived of as involving individual-oriented outcomes, social inclusion broadens the sphere of outcome measurement to encourage positive changes at social and societal levels. With this broader focus, this volume incorporates emerging scholarship that pays closer attention to the influence of social identities and social statuses on participants' intervention experiences and outcomes. Many of the authors look at intergroup issues through the lenses of both dominant group and subordinated group members. Attention to the perspectives of different participants in intergroup programs highlights the need for a concerted study of processes and conditions of effective interventions.

These papers distinguish between successful outcomes and the conditions and experiences that are crucial to these outcomes.

Tropp and Bianchi begin this section by examining how placing a value on diversity can enhance interest in intergroup contact among members of ethnic minority and majority groups. Using open-ended responses, these authors demonstrate that ethnic minority group members are less likely to perceive that diversity is valued than ethnic majority group members; yet those who perceive that diversity is valued tend to express greater interest in intergroup contact. Similar trends are observed in subsequent survey studies, which also show that valuing diversity uniquely predicts interest in intergroup contact among majority group members, whereas perceiving that outgroup members value diversity predicts interest in intergroup contact among minority group members. Tropp and Bianchi conclude their paper by discussing the significance of diversity for reformulating aspects of intergroup contact theory, emphasizing how diversity can often enhance a sense of inclusion; yet the precise role diversity plays is likely to differ among members of minority and majority groups.

Nagda reviews the emerging focus on process in intergroup contact, and brings in interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology, education, and communication. The majority of the research to date in social psychology has focused on psychological processes as mediating processes, while education focuses on the pedagogical processes used in training programs or classrooms. Emerging out of over 15 years of practice in intergroup dialogue, Nagda suggests situational and interactional processes that he calls communication processes. Factor analysis of survey data collected from participants in intergroup dialogues over 5 years reveals four factors that participants report were important in their learning—appreciating difference, engaging self, critical self-reflection, and alliance building. Each of the communication processes has a significant and positive relationship to a previously identified psychological process–bridging difference. More important, however, is that the impact of intergroup dialogue encounter on bridging differences is fully mediated by the communication processes. In the discussion, Nagda proposes a new construct of critical-dialogic empathy that goes beyond simple perspective taking or cognitive empathy to a relational model that takes into account the societal power inequities which impact upon the parties in contact.

Paluck reviews the field of diversity training and maps out a plan for future action research that would integrate theory and rigorous research with current diversity training practice. Her overview of various types of diversity training reveals gaps in the theoretical foundations of this work and also in our knowledge about training impact. Two examples illustrate her vision of future action research. As a case of rigorous and theoretically driven impact research, she describes a recent field experiment that evaluated the impact of a school diversity training program. She then points to the intergroup contact literature as one existing body of psychological theory and data, which could inform unresolved questions about

the procedure and goals of diversity training. A selective list of these questions is matched to relevant theoretical insights and research results from the intergroup contact literature, illustrating potential directions for future action research projects. Paluck's envisioned research agenda is another instance of full-cycle psychology and a call to theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners alike.

Intersections Between Research, Theory, and Practice Toward Improving Intergroup Relations

The volume also seeks to chart continued scholarship and practice in intergroup programs by taking a reflective, retrospective view to inform a future vision. Each article in this volume seeks not only to document cutting-edge research, theory, and practice, but also to make substantive contributions to the future of intergroup relations. The authors share important insights about how their own research and/or practices help forge the road ahead. To help us think collectively and holistically about these individual contributions, we, the issue editors, invited prominent scholars and practitioners in the fields of intergroup relations and education to provide reflections in defining the intersections of research, theory, and practice on intergroup relations. Walter Stephan, James Banks, Thomas Pettigrew, and Patricia Gurin each crafted their commentaries based on the following questions:

(a) What are the critical issues we must address in integrating research and practice on intergroup relations?
(b) What are their visions or insights regarding how research, theory, and practice on intergroup relations might be integrated in the future?
(c) How do the articles in this volume relate to this vision?

As a group, the commentators bring immense breadth, depth, and longevity of experience and wisdom in intergroup relations work. But their commentaries are not necessarily restricted to their established expertise; the commentaries also include their own continued engagement in intergroup relations. Indeed, we begin our introduction of each of the commentators with a personal–professional biography that speaks to their lived commitments to improving intergroup relations and the unique perspectives they bring to their specific commentaries.

Conclusion

The second half-century of our work in intergroup relations, as reflected in the articles and commentaries in this issue, promises to be rich in all ways—theoretically, empirically, and practically. Like the subject of our work—intergroup

contact and intergroup relations—such promise needs to be carefully cultivated and not left to random chance. As Walter Stephan says in his commentary, multiple avenues for practitioner–researcher collaborations need to be availed of not only to bridge the practitioner–researcher divide, but also to powerfully advance the work of intergroup relations and social change to which we *all* have a deep commitment. As one of our student-practitioners noted, "We are here for different reasons, but we are headed in the same direction." It is in this spirit that we, as the editors, have collaborated in offering this issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*.

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as the McKeachie Early Career Award for the teaching of psychology. Her research concerns experiences with intergroup contact among minority and majority status groups, identification with social groups, interpretations of intergroup relationships, and responses to prejudice and disadvantage. In addition to conducting research in these areas, she lends her expertise to the "Safe Schools Initiative" sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Attorney General's office, a program which has been developed to reduce bullying, hate crimes, and harassment in Massachusetts schools.

ELIZABETH LEVY PALUCK, MS, is a doctoral candidate in the Psychology Department at Yale University. Her research interests include the psychology of intergroup prejudice and conflict reduction, research methodology, and gender psychology. For her dissertation, she reviewed evidence on the efficacy of prejudice reduction interventions in the laboratory and in the field, and conducted two field experiments on existing real-world interventions: a high school anti-bias program in the United States, and a reconciliation radio program in Rwanda.