

Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination

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Summary

Scholars have developed a plethora of approaches to reducing prejudice and discrimination, many of which have been successfully applied in schools, workplaces, and community settings. Research on intergroup contact suggests that contact between members of different groups, particularly when that contact is warm and positive (for example through friendships) reduces negative emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety) and promotes positive emotions (e.g., empathy), results in more positive attitudes toward members of that group. One might expect that, in an increasingly connected world characterized by global mobility and diversity, higher levels of contact would be associated with a significant lessening of prejudice and discrimination. However, critics have pointed out that changes in attitudes at the individual level do not necessarily translate into reduced prejudice and discrimination at a societal level. Moreover, not everyone has the opportunity to engage in meaningful contact with members of other groups, and even when they do, these opportunities are not always capitalized on. One solution to lack of opportunities for contact is to capitalize on “indirect contact.” These are interventions based on the principles of contact, but which do not involve a face-to-face encounter. Extended contact, which refers to knowing in-group members who have out-group friends, and vicarious contact, which involves learning about the positive contact experiences of our fellow group members, for example via the media, online intergroup contact, and imagining intergroup contact, have each been shown to promote more positive intergroup attitudes. Another way to reduce prejudice and discrimination is to change the way people categorize social groups. When people perceive members of their own group and another group to belong to the same overarching group—that is, they hold a common in-group identity—there is evidence of reduced intergroup bias. However, when our group membership is important to us, this may constitute a threat to our identity, and lead to a reactive increase in bias in order to reassert the distinctiveness of our

group. One solution to this is to encourage a dual identity, whereby an individual holds both the original group membership and a common in-group identity that encompasses both groups simultaneously. Alternatively, given the many and varied group memberships that individuals hold, social categories become less useful as a way of categorizing people. There is also evidence that taking a multicultural approach, where differences are acknowledged, rather than a color-blind approach, where differences are ignored, is less likely to result in prejudice and discrimination. Finally, there is evidence that teaching people about other groups, and about the biases they hold but perhaps are not aware of, can help to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Keywords

- [intergroup contact](#)
- [cross-group friendship](#)
- [extended contact](#)
- [imagined contact](#)
- [common in-group identity](#)
- [dual identity](#)
- [multiple categorization](#)
- [multiculturalism](#)
- [diversity training](#)
- [unconscious bias training](#)

Subjects

- Social Psychology

Introduction

Scholars have developed a plethora of approaches to reducing prejudice and discrimination in laboratory and field settings, many of which have been successfully applied in schools, workplaces, and community settings.

This article considers a number of approaches developed primarily by social psychologists: these can be broadly defined as intergroup contact, indirect contact, changing social categorization, and training programs.

Intergroup Contact

The “contact hypothesis” was proposed by Allport in 1954. He theorized that contact between people from different groups would reduce prejudice and discrimination between those groups. He recognized, however, that for intergroup contact to result in more positive perceptions of other groups, it must have certain qualities. In particular, the groups involved must work together cooperatively, they should be aiming to achieve common goals, those involved in the contact must be of equal status during the interaction, and there must be institutional support for the contact; for example, schools and workplaces must endorse contact between different social groups. Extensive research on intergroup contact since the mid-20th century has highlighted its benefits internationally, between different ethnic groups, religions, and nationalities, and other social categorizes. Indeed, a meta-analysis of 500 contact studies spanning more than 50 years revealed a robust positive effect of contact in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, [2006](#)). This same research highlighted that Allport’s optimal conditions are in fact not essential for contact to be effective, instead playing a facilitating role. Moreover, there is evidence that contact can improve attitudes not only toward the group with whom people have had contact but also toward other, uninvolved groups, a phenomenon known as the secondary transfer effect (Pettigrew, [2009](#)). Tausch et al. ([2010](#)), for example, found that positive intergroup contact between members of the Catholic and Protestants community in Northern Ireland was associated with lower levels of prejudice not only toward members of the other community, but also toward ethnic minorities.

Why Is Contact Effective?

Research has identified a number of mechanisms that explain why contact is effective at reducing prejudice. Learning about people from other groups (referred to in this article as “out-groups”) in order to counteract a lack of *knowledge* was the first mechanism identified. Stephan and Stephan ([1984](#)), for example, found that having contact with Mexican American students was associated with greater knowledge about Mexican American

culture, which, in turn, resulted in more positive outgroup attitudes among Anglo-Americans. It is important, however, to recognize that attitudes do not change easily through the process of knowledge acquisition, in part because people have a tendency to challenge, distort, or ignore information inconsistent with their attitudes (Hewstone & Brown, [1986](#)). Research suggests that contact may in fact work best by changing how we *feel* about other groups rather than changing what we *think* (Miller, Smith, & Mackie, [2004](#)).

The most extensively investigated process underlying contact is *intergroup anxiety*. Stephan and Stephan ([1985](#)) noted that people may feel anxious about interacting with members of other groups for a number of reasons. They may fear feeling incompetent or inadvertently offending outgroup members because of expectations of discomfort, frustration, or embarrassment due to the awkwardness of the interactions, or because they fear that out-group members will take advantage of, exploit, or reject them. They may also worry about rejection or disapproval from their own group (referred to in this article as “in-groups”) for engaging in such an interaction. While intergroup anxiety can promote suspicion (Henderson-King & Nisbett, [1996](#)) and distrust (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, [2002](#)) of the out-group, positive intergroup contact reduces this intergroup anxiety. Voci and Hewstone ([2003](#)), for example, found that Italian participants who had more experience of high-quality contact with immigrants reported lower levels of intergroup anxiety and, in turn, a more positive attitude toward immigrants.

Empathy is a vicarious emotional state triggered by witnessing the emotional state of another (Stephan & Finlay, [1999](#)), and is closely associated with perspective taking, an ability to cognitively understand the internal state of another person (Underwood & Moore, [1982](#)). *Empathy and perspective taking* have a number of positive consequences for intergroup relations (Galinsky & Moskowitz, [2000](#)). First, imagining the feelings of another person may lead to a perception of increased overlap between the self and the other in which the out-group member becomes included in an individual’s self-representation (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, [1991](#)). When

an out-group member is considered to be self-like, they are likely to be ascribed the same positive traits attributed to the self, leading to a more positive evaluation of that out-group member, which may generalize to the out-group as a whole (e.g., Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, [2007b](#)). Second, taking the perspective of another person increases the perception that a common humanity and destiny is shared with the other group (Stephan & Finlay, [1999](#)). Tam et al. ([2008](#)) found that empathy mediates the relationship between cross-group friendships between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and the tendency to approach members of the other community.

Recently theorists have argued that intergroup contact changes the way we think about the world, making us more open to new ideas and ways of thinking, a process referred to as *cognitive liberalization* (Hodson, Meleady, Crisp, & Earle, [2018](#)). People who engage meaningfully with diversity through contact are better able to incorporate multiple perspectives, more open to experiences (Vezzali, Turner, Capozza, & Trifiletti, [2018](#)), and more likely to believe in equality (Van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, [2005](#)), reporting less social dominance orientation (SDO), the desire for hierarchical intergroup relations and social inequality (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, [1994](#)). These are outcomes that are associated with lower levels of prejudice (e.g., Jackson & Poulsen, [2005](#); Sidanius, Levin, Lui, & Pratto, [2000](#)), and can explain the secondary transfer effect, whereby contact has the potential to reduce prejudice and discrimination *in general* rather than in relation to specific out-groups (Shook, Hopkins, & Koech, [2016](#); Tausch et al., [2010](#)). Cognitive liberalization is especially important because in changing the way people think about the world, it has implications that go *beyond* more positive intergroup relations. For example, Meleady, Crisp, Dhont, Hoptthrow, and Turner ([2020](#)) found that in lowering SDO, positive contact predicted greater environmental concern and pro-environmental behaviors. This is because individuals high in SDO are more willing to exploit the environment to maintain hierarchical social structures (Stanley, Wilson, Sibley, & Milfont, [2017](#)).

When Is Contact Effective?

Contact with an out-group member is more likely to result in reduced prejudice and discrimination when *group membership is salient*. If groups are not aware of their respective group memberships, any positive perceptions developed toward individual out-group members are unlikely to generalize to the out-group as a whole, with people assuming that pleasant members of the other community are “exceptions to the rule” (Brown & Hewstone, [2005](#)). Van Oudenhoven, Groenewoud, and Hewstone ([1996](#)) had Dutch participants take part in a cooperative learning group with a Turkish confederate posing as a peer. The respective ethnicities of the confederate and participant were explicitly made salient either at the beginning of the session, halfway through the session, or not at all. Although the Turkish confederate was evaluated equally favorably across conditions, the ratings of Turkish people in general were more positive only in the two conditions in which group membership was made salient.

Research suggests that contact that results in the development of cross group *friendships* is more effective at reducing prejudice than more casual forms of contact (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, [2011](#); Pettigrew, [1997](#), [1998](#); Tropp & Pettigrew, [2005](#); Turner et al., [2007b](#)). Friendships, by definition, as intimate relationships, are likely to meet the key conditions of Allport ([1954](#)), be of high quality, and involve multiple positive encounters. In a meta-analysis of friendship research, Davies et al. ([2011](#)) found that time spent with out-group friends was a more important predictor of out-group attitudes than number of out-group friends, as was self-disclosure—the mutual, reciprocal sharing of personal information with members of the community (see also Turner et al., [2007b](#)). Grütter and Tropp ([2019](#)) found among children aged 7–13 that cross-group friendships based on trust, rather than on shared activities, was predictive of positive intergroup attitudes.

Finally, there is evidence that contact may be especially beneficial among individuals characterized by high levels of prejudice (Hodson, Turner, & Choma, [2017](#)), for example those high in Right-Wing Authoritarianism

(RWA; Altemeyer, [1981](#)) and SDO (Pratto et al., [1994](#)). RWA relates to an individual's preference for traditional norms and submission to authority; those high in RWA are therefore prejudiced toward groups that threaten social norms. In contrast, people higher in SDO seek dominance over other groups and are therefore prejudiced toward those considered inferior or in direct competition. Although individuals higher in RWA or SDO generally avoid out-group interactions, contact often works better for these individuals when it does occur. Hodson ([2008](#)) found that white British prison inmates who experienced contact with black inmates exhibited lower intergroup bias if higher in SDO, while Dhont and Van Hiel ([2009](#)) found a stronger negative relationship between positive contact with immigrants and racism toward immigrants among people high in SDO or RWA. Contact may be particularly effective among these individuals because it reduces the perceived threats posed by out-groups.

Limitations of Intergroup Contact

Intergroup contact is not without its limitations. Dixon, Durrheim, Kerr, and Thomae ([2013](#)) note that while effective on an interpersonal level at changing attitudes, contact often fails to address the societal inequalities that drive prejudice. Others point to the “sedative” effect of contact: when minority group members have positive contact with majority groups they are *less* likely to engage in collective action (for example protesting, advocating for their group, making demands from the majority group to enhance the rights of their group; e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, [2009](#)) because in affiliating with out-groups, contact can lower how important the in-group is to us (Wright & Lubensky, [2009](#)).

A second challenge is getting people to actually engage in intergroup contact in the first place, even in contexts where there are clear opportunities for contact. Al Ramiah, Schmid, Hewstone, and Floe ([2014](#)) found that in ethnically mixed British schools white and South Asian children avoided sitting with one another in the cafeteria outside of classes. Cross-race friendships are also relatively uncommon (Aboud & Sankar, [2007](#); Wilson,

Rodkin, & Ryan, [2014](#)), less durable than same-race friendships, and decline with age (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, [2003](#); Graham & Cohen, [1997](#)). These findings may reflect a lack of interest in contact, perhaps driven by a perceived lack of common interests (Al Ramiah et al., [2014](#); Verkuyten & Steenhuis, [2005](#)), and intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, [1985](#)). Researchers in the early 21st century are increasingly focusing on factors that predict interest in and confidence about engaging in intergroup contact (e.g., Paolini, Wright, Dys-Steenbergen, & Favara, [2016](#); Turner & Cameron, [2016](#)).

Indirect Contact

Indirect contact refers to approaches based on the principles of Allport's contact hypothesis (1954) but that don't involve a face-to-face intergroup encounter. They may be especially useful at reducing prejudice in contexts where there are limited opportunities for intergroup contact.

Extended and Vicarious Contact

Extended contact (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, [1997](#)) is the premise that knowing in-group members who have out-group friends reduces prejudice and discrimination. Wright and colleagues undertook a series of studies to illustrate the effect. Surveys revealed that white respondents who knew at least one in-group member with an ethnic out-group friend were less prejudiced than those who knew no such in-group members, and the more extended friends a participant had, the weaker their prejudice became. In an experimental test of the phenomenon, intergroup conflict was created between two small groups through competitive games. One participant from each group was then randomly chosen to take part in a closeness-building task, before returning to their groups to discuss this positive contact experience. Participants who learned about the positive contact of an in-group member reported less in-group favoritism than before this extended contact experience. A recent meta-analysis on 115 studies spanning more than 20 years of extended contact research confirms

a small-to-medium effect of extended contact that is independent of the impact of direct intergroup contact (Zhou, Page-Gould, Aron, Moyer, & Hewstone, [2019](#)).

A related approach is vicarious contact, the idea that observing the positive contact experiences of others (e.g., via media sources) may help to promote more positive intergroup relations (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, [2014](#); Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, [2011](#)). West and Turner ([2014](#)) had undergraduate students watch a two-minute video showing a male and female student having a friendly interaction. In the vicarious contact condition, they were told that the male student in the video had schizophrenia, while in the control condition they were told that it was just an interaction between two students. After watching the video, participants were told that they themselves were going to engage in an interaction with a male student who had schizophrenia. Two minutes later, they were introduced to the student (actually a confederate) for a short interaction. Among those who had experienced vicarious contact, more positive nonverbal behaviors such as nodding and smiling were displayed during the subsequent intergroup encounter, and these interactions were rated as more pleasant by the individual posing as someone with schizophrenia.

Extended and vicarious contact reduce prejudice in part by providing a positive model of intergroup contact. When an out-group member is observed being friendly to in-group members, expectations about intergroup interactions may be more positive, reducing prejudice. In addition, seeing an in-group member being friendly toward the out-group demonstrates that there are positive norms regarding intergroup contact which may influence the attitudes of other in-group members (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, [2008](#); Turner, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, [2013a](#)). By presenting intergroup contact in a positive light in this way, extended and vicarious contact also lower intergroup anxiety (Gomez, Tropp, & Fernandez, [2011](#); Turner et al., [2008](#), [2013a](#); West & Turner, [2014](#)). Extended and vicarious contact has been developed into effective classroom interventions. Cameron and colleagues had elementary school children read illustrated stories portraying intergroup friendships and then engage in

discussions about the stories regularly for several weeks. This promoted positive out-group attitudes and greater willingness to play with out-group members in the context of white English children and refugees (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, [2006](#)), non-disabled and disabled children (Cameron & Rutland, [2006](#)) and English and Indian English children (Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, & Petley, [2011a](#)). Taking a different approach, Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, and Visintin ([2015](#)) had Italian elementary and high school students work in small groups on a competition to come up with the best essay about friendships with immigrants. In doing so, they exchanged information about their own experiences with immigrants to create a good quality essay. This resulted not only in more positive perceptions of intergroup contact, but also in more cross-group friendships three months later.

Imagined Contact

Imagining a social interaction with an out-group member can promote more positive intergroup contact and behaviors (Crisp & Turner, [2009](#), [2012](#)). Imagining what a positive encounter with an out-group member might be like is thought to activate concepts normally associated with successful interactions with members of other groups, such as feeling more comfortable and less apprehensive about contact (Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, [2007a](#)). In addition, imagined contact provides a behavioral script that can provide a cognitive road map for future behavior, potentially making those encounters more positive and comfortable. Imagined contact reduces intergroup anxiety (Birtel & Crisp, [2012](#); Turner et al., [2007a](#)) and promotes more positive behavior during interactions with out-group members (e.g., Birtel & Crisp, [2012](#); West, Turner, & Levita, [2015](#)). In 2020, there were more than 100 studies on imagined contact showing that it promotes more positive perceptions of ethnic minorities, immigrants, physically disabled individuals, asylum seekers, older adults, higher weight people, and individuals with mental health difficulties (see Miles & Crisp, [2014](#), for a meta-analysis).

An advantage of imagined contact over many other approaches is that it avoids the practical constraints of bringing members of different groups together, being easy to implement and inexpensive. Indeed, imagined contact has been successfully applied as an intervention in schools. Stathi, Cameron, Hartley, and Bradford ([2014](#)) asked white elementary school children to create three weekly stories using pictures about a day spent with an Asian child. Compared to classmates who did not undertake the intervention, children held more positive out-group attitudes and greater willingness to engage in future contact. Cameron and colleagues ([2011b](#)) similarly found that non-disabled elementary school children who imagined a positive interaction with a child with a disability subsequently reported more positive attitudes and greater intentions for friendship with children with disabilities.

Online Contact

Online intergroup contact, or e-contact (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, [2006](#); White & Abu-Rayya, [2012](#)), involves interacting via chat software with someone from another group. Although online chat-based contact involves personally interacting with someone from another group, it remains distinct from face-to-face contact because of the reduced proximity and lack of visual cues from the interaction partner. Online contact may be less anxiety inducing than direct contact, because individuals can meet the interaction partner within their own familiar physical surroundings, without any visual scrutiny, and with time to formulate appropriate responses. People also tend to self-disclose, or share personal information about themselves, more during online intergroup encounters than face to-face, a factor that is important in promoting empathy and trust (Turner et al., [2007a](#)).

White and Abu-Rayya ([2012](#)) ran an eight-session program between Muslim and Christian students from segregated religious schools in which children from the two schools worked together in small groups on cooperative online activities. This led to reduced intergroup anxiety and intergroup bias, which

remained several months after the completion of the program. In a different intergroup context, White, Turner, Verrelli, Harvey, and Hanna ([2019](#)) found that Catholic and Protestant undergraduate students in Northern Ireland who took part in a brief cooperative online interaction with a fellow student from the other community subsequently reported lower levels of intergroup anxiety and more positive expectations about intergroup contact.

Changing Social Categories

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, [1979](#)), intergroup bias arises because group members' need for a positive social identity motivates social comparisons that positively differentiate the in-group from out-groups. People also have a better memory for information about ways in which in-group (vs. out-group) members are similar to the self (Wilder, [1986](#)), and remember less positive information about the out-group (Howard & Rothbart, [1980](#)). Given these consequences of social categorization, changing the way in which we categorize people may help to reduce prejudice and discrimination. There are four main approaches: common in-group identity, dual identity approach, multiple categorization, and endorsement of multiculturalism.

Common In-Group Identity Approach

According to the common in-group identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, [2000](#)), an effective way of reducing intergroup bias is to alter category boundaries so that opposing groups are included in one superordinate group. An example of this would be re-categorizing black and white individuals in the United Kingdom as British. The idea is that when former out-group members become in-group members, they no longer pose a threat to our positive social identity and in-group bias is therefore eliminated. Moreover, because they are now in-group members, viewing them positively will serve a group-enhancing function. Testing this idea, Gaertner, Mann, Dovidio, Murrell, and Pomare ([1990](#)) manipulated members of two groups' representation of the aggregate as one or two

groups through seating arrangements. Participants who were induced to feel like one group reported more favorable evaluations of the out-group during group exercises than those who were induced to feel like two groups. The benefits of holding a common in-group identity have been identified in numerous contexts. Bagci and Celebi ([2018](#)), for example, found that Turkish and ethnic group members in Turkey who held a shared national identity held the most positive out-group attitudes and the greatest endorsement of multiculturalism which, as outlined in the section “[Endorsement of Multiculturalism](#),” is beneficial for promoting positive intergroup relations. In the context of the 2012 Northern Italian earthquake, Andrighetto, Vezzali, Bergamini, Nadi, and Giovannini ([2016](#)) found that Italian natives’ perception that they belonged to the same common in-group as Italian immigrants predicted their intention to help Italian immigrants in the aftermath of the disaster.

There are, however, a number of concerns with the utility of the common in-group identity model. Hewstone ([1996](#)) questioned whether re-categorization can overcome powerful ethnic and racial categorizations on more than a temporary basis, or work where there is intense intergroup conflict. There is, for example, evidence that holding a common in-group identity does not necessarily reduce intergroup bias among those who highly identify with their original group membership (Crisp & Beck, [2005](#)). A common in-group identity may also reduce the extent that disadvantaged groups engage in collective action. Ufkes, Calcagno, Glasford, and Dovidio ([2016](#)) found that black and Latino American participants who were encouraged to see themselves as American were subsequently less likely to fight to improve their position in society because—perhaps in seeing themselves as part of the same group as privileged white Americans—they felt less angry and perceived there to be less inequality. Holding a common in-group identity did not, however, reduce collective action when participants’ disadvantaged group membership was simultaneously made salient.

Dual Identity Approach

Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, and Rust ([1993](#)) noted that maintaining the salience of subgroup identities within the common in-group may be particularly helpful when groups are very similar to one another and therefore forcing a superordinate group on the separate groups may lead to a threat to distinctiveness. Supporting this dual identity approach, Gaertner et al. ([1999](#)) found that although a one-group representation reduced bias, bias reduction was greatest when participants perceived there to be two subgroups within one-group. Eller, Abrams, and Koschate ([2017](#)) found among German high school students that holding a dual identity with classmates in a different stream predicted lower levels of intergroup bias, while holding a common in-group identity actually increased intergroup bias.

The effectiveness of dual identity theory may vary depending on whether the group in question is in the numerical minority or majority. According to in-group projection theory (Mummendey & Wenzel, [1999](#)), the image of the common in-group held by the majority coincides with their image of themselves, making this the ideal strategy for them. In contrast, lower status and minority groups find it less easy to project themselves onto the common group, preferring to hold a dual identity. In line with this, Gonzalez and Brown ([2006](#)) found that a dual identity resulted in less bias than a common identity for numerical minority group members but not for numerical majority group members.

Multiple Categorization

A third approach to reducing prejudice involves encouraging people to simultaneously use numerous ways of categorizing people, rather than thinking about others all the time in terms of just one social category. Crisp, Hewstone, and Rubin ([2001](#)) asked university students to think about a number of different categorizations that they could use to describe someone from a rival university, other than this simple out-group status. In line with predictions, thinking about the multiple different ways that others can be

construed reduced intergroup bias. By increasing the complexity of the intergroup context, perceivers may be unable to use, or combine, social categorizations in any meaningful ways. Perceivers may, for example, be able cognitively to combine categories such as “single” and “mother,” but may find “single, black, educated, working mother” too difficult to process. Rather than using social categories to form social judgements, the perceiver may instead switch to an individuated mode of processing (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, [1990](#)), alleviating intergroup bias.

Multiple categorization reduces the tendency to perceive out-group members as less human than in-group members (Haslam, [2006](#)). Albarello and Rubini ([2012](#)) presented participants with an out-group target who was described either in terms of simple categorization (e.g., black or white) or in terms of six different social dimensions (e.g., race, religion, age, gender, nationality, origins). Compared to the simple categorization condition, participants in the multiple categorization condition showed less dehumanization of the out-group. Prati, Crisp, Meleady, and Rubini ([2016](#)) showed that multiple categorization reduces dehumanization by increasing individuation, which in turn reduced the perceived threat posed by the out-group.

Endorsement of Multiculturalism

Changing how positively people perceive the diversity of social categories around us may also influence intergroup relations. Wolsko, Park, and Judd ([2006](#)) measured participants’ personal endorsement of assimilation (the belief that minority groups should abandon their cultural identity and adopt the majority culture) and multiculturalism (the belief that people should recognize and appreciate different but equally valid attributes of different ethnic groups) along with a range of attitude and policy measures, with students and adults from the general population from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Endorsement of multiculturalism was associated with less intergroup bias and greater endorsement of a number of public policies, including affirmative action, lenient immigration policy (allowing more

immigrants into the United States), and lenient English-speaking policy (allowing bilingual classrooms). In contrast, assimilation was associated with more intergroup bias and less endorsement of public policies affecting out-groups.

These findings suggest whether information is presented as pro-multiculturalism or not may influence intergroup relations. Richeson and Nussbaum (2004), for example, conducted a study in which they presented white American college students with either a multicultural message or a color-blind message. Participants who were exposed to the multicultural message showed lower levels of intergroup bias against black people than those exposed to the color-blind perspective. A meta-analysis of studies with majority group participants revealed that while multiculturalism and color-blindness were both negatively related to prejudice, multiculturalism played a more powerful role in reducing prejudice than color-blindness (Whitley & Webster, 2019).

It is important to note that there is a stronger preference for multiculturalism among minority group members than among majority group members (e.g., Verkuyten, 2005; Zick, Wagner, van Dick, & Petzel, 2001). As multiculturalism implies acceptance and recognition of minority group identity and offers the possibility of obtaining higher social status in society, it is unsurprising that minority group members are in favor of it (Berry & Kalin, 1995). In contrast, multiculturalism may be a threat to the social identity and cultural dominance of the majority group (Verkuyten, 2007). Accordingly, majority group members are more likely to support an assimilation ideology (Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko et al., 2006).

Training Programs

Training programs to reduce prejudice and discrimination have been developed and evaluated by academics and practitioners in schools and workplaces. Arguably, the three most commonly used approaches are school multicultural programs, diversity training, and unconscious bias training.

School Multiculturalism Programs

Multiculturalism interventions have been extensively applied in schools to reduce prejudice. Some of these programs simply present information about the out-group to participants in order to reduce ignorance while others explicitly provide counter-stereotypic information about the out-group (e.g., Bigler, [2002](#); Hill & Augoustinos, [2001](#)). These interventions use a variety of media sources, including books, videos, games, and activities. Several studies have evaluated these programs, with some finding evidence for a positive impact. Salzman and D'Andrea ([2001](#)), for example, examined a multicultural prejudice-reduction intervention program that was administered to a fourth-grade class in Hawaii, and consisted of 10 weekly sessions designed specifically to address the issue of multicultural awareness by encouraging children to identify their own and others' cultural and ethnic group and highlighted the differences and similarities between cultures. Children were also introduced to the concept of prejudice and were invited to examine their own prejudice and bias. Teachers observed a significant improvement in children's cooperative social skills compared to a control group that did not receive the intervention.

Cole et al. ([2003](#)) evaluated an intervention in which Israeli and Palestinian children watched a TV series, *RehovSumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, which presented messages of mutual respect and understanding. This led to more positive out-group attitudes. While not examining structured programs, in a recent longitudinal study, Gaias, Gal, Abry, Taylor, and Granger ([2018](#)) found that exposing four-year-olds to materials that support diversity in U.S. preschools, through the presence of books, toys, costumes, and art displays that reflect different languages and cultural holidays, predicted lower levels

of racial bias at six years old, which in turn predicted lower levels of racial bias at eight years old.

Other studies have, however, found that multicultural interventions are ineffective and may even have a detrimental effect on intergroup attitudes (see Bigler, [2002](#), for a review). People have a memory bias in favor of stereotypic information over counter-stereotypic information, and this is especially the case for children with less advanced cognitive abilities (Bigler & Liben, [1993](#)). Recipients of such interventions may therefore not remember the counter-stereotypic information presented, and instead focus on differences between the in-group and out-group rather than what they have in common. This may, therefore, contribute to a stereotyped knowledge of a group rather than counteracting it (Bigler, [2002](#)).

Diversity Training

Diversity training refers to programs run by organizations for employees that aim to increase cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Their ultimate goal is to protect the organization against civil rights violations, increase the inclusion of different groups at work, and promote better teamwork and better performance. The use of these programs is highly popular, with an estimated \$8 billion spent on corporate diversity training in the United States alone (Paluck & Green, [2009](#)). Hanover and Cellar ([1998](#)) evaluated white managers in the human resources department of a company who took part in diversity training that involved watching videos and taking part in role-plays and discussions about diversity.

Participants were subsequently more likely to rate diversity practices as important and to report that they discourage prejudiced comments among employees, when compared to control managers who had not yet taken part in diversity training. In contrast, other diversity training programs have increased prejudice. Business students who were instructed via diversity training videos to suppress negative thoughts about the elderly subsequently evaluated older job candidates less favorably (Kulik, Perry, & Bourhis, [2000](#)). This is in line with research that shows that suppressing a

thought can lead to an ironic increase in the accessibility of that thought in our mind, as we try to monitor our mind to ensure that it does not appear (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, [1994](#)). It is difficult to know the true impact of work-based diversity training because the evaluations are often methodologically flawed (Paluck & Green, [2009](#)). Many involve participants who have volunteered to take part and are thus more likely to have positive out-group attitudes to begin with (Ellis, [1994](#)).

Unconscious Bias Training

People tend to show implicit intergroup biases (also referred to as unconscious biases), stronger association between in-groups and positive attributes on the one hand, and out-groups and negative attributes on the other. Whereas explicit biases are conscious, deliberative, and controllable (and are usually captured by traditional self-report measures), implicit biases are unintentionally activated by the mere presence (actual or symbolic) of an attitude object, and are therefore less likely to be influenced by social desirability than are explicit measures. There is some evidence that while explicit attitudes are associated with deliberative behaviors, implicit measures are associated with more subtle, indirect, and spontaneous nonverbal behaviors (e.g., McConnell & Leibold, [2001](#)). It is important that these behaviors can be tackled because they help to maintain biases even in overtly egalitarian societies.

This has been extensively demonstrated on a time reaction task called the implicit association test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, [1998](#)). Unconscious bias training involves highlighting to people through workshops the biases that they hold, usually through completing an implicit bias measure and seeing the results of this, and then using techniques developed in the laboratory to reduce implicit bias (see Lai et al., [2014](#), for a comparative test of 17 such techniques). Interventions successful at reducing such bias include exposure to counter-stereotypical stories about out-groups (Dasgupta & Asgari, [2004](#)), getting people to actively reject stereotypes (e.g., Johnson, Kopp, & Petty, [2018](#)), and taking the perspective

of out-group members (e.g., Shih, Stotzer, & Gutiérrez, [2013](#); Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, [2011](#)).

Devine, Forscher, Austin, and Cox ([2012](#)) developed a program with multiple components. Participants were asked to try to recognize their stereotypes, reflect on why they hold them, and consider how they could avoid them in, to picture counter-stereotype examples of stereotyped groups, to think of stereotyped group members in individualized ways, and to imagine oneself as a member of a stereotyped group. Participants also had the opportunity to engage in positive intergroup contact. Unconscious bias was reduced four and eight weeks after completion of the program, showing the potential long-term impact of a multi-pronged approach. Van Ryn and colleagues ([2015](#)) ran a course for medical students across 49 medical schools, in which students learned about and engaged in discussions about unconscious bias and interacted with ethnic minorities. Compared to when they started medical school, students showed a small but significant reduction in implicit bias toward racial minorities. Moreover, these reductions in implicit bias translated into greater comfort working with minorities and greater awareness of implicit bias when treating minorities. These findings suggest that there are potentially tangible benefits of unconscious bias training in health care settings.

However, the IAT, the implicit bias measure used in many of these programs, has been the subject of heated debate. A recent meta-analysis conducted by Forscher et al. ([2019](#)), for example, found that changes in implicit bias were generally fairly short lived, and relationships with explicit attitudes and behaviors small and inconsistent. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that unconscious bias is a real phenomenon that impacts on how people treat members of other groups, and finding effective ways to both measure it and tackle it remains crucial if prejudice and discrimination are to be reduced in the workplace and beyond (Payne, Niemi, & Doris, [2018](#)).

Conclusion

A diverse array of approaches and interventions has been developed to reduce prejudice and discrimination, from bringing members of different groups together through intergroup contact, to indirect contact interventions based on the tenets of contact theory, to changing the ways people categorize themselves and others, to promoting multiculturalism and diversity, to getting people to recognize and challenge their unconscious biases. In contemporary society, where prejudice, discrimination, and conflict is rife despite increased opportunities for contact through social mobility and internationalization, understanding how prejudice and discrimination can be reduced remains an exciting and fruitful area of research.

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