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Intergroup Psychological Interventions: The Motivational Challenge

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Social scientists have increasingly applied insights from descriptive research to develop psychological interventions aimed at improving intergroup relations. These interventions have achieved marked success—reducing prejudicial attitudes, fostering support for conciliatory social policies, and promoting peacebuilding behaviors. At the same time, intergroup conflict continues to rage in part because individuals often lack motivation to engage with these promising interventions. We take a step toward addressing this issue by developing a framework of approaches for delivering interventions to an unmotivated target audience. Along with (a) directly motivating targets by increasing their values and expectancies for addressing intergroup conflict, researchers can deliver interventions by (b) satisfying other psychological motivations of the target audience, (c) providing an instrumental benefit for engaging with the intervention, (d) embedding the intervention in a hedonically captivating medium, or (e) bypassing motivational barriers entirely by delivering the intervention outside of targets' conscious awareness. We define each approach and use illustrative examples to organize them into a conceptual framework before concluding with implications and future directions.

Public Significance Statement

Psychological interventions have the potential to reduce the intergroup violence and discrimination that threatens the fabric of societies. However, intergroup conflict continues to rage in part because people often lack motivation to engage with these promising interventions. We address this issue by drawing on theories of motivation, goals, and values to develop a framework of approaches for delivering these interventions to an unmotivated target audience—moving us further toward mitigating the specter of intergroup conflict.

Keywords: intergroup conflict, psychological interventions, motivation, values, goals

Intergroup violence and discrimination are some of the most pressing challenges that societies face, inspiring social scientists to investigate the nature of prejudicial attitudes, negative intergroup emotions, and psychological barriers to conflict resolution. Recent decades have seen an increasing shift toward applying this research to develop evidence-based interventions aimed at improving intergroup relations (Bar-Tal & Hameiri, 2020; Halperin et al., 2023; Moore-Berg et al., 2022; Paluck et al., 2021; Voelkel et al., 2023). Given that these interventions are applied in different contexts of intergroup tensions and conflicts, ranging from internal ideological polarization to international violent conflicts, we use an umbrella term referring to such interventions as *intergroup interventions* and define them as "all deliberate attempts to alter attitudes, emotions or behavior that constitute barriers to—or that can facilitate—the promotion of tolerant, peaceful, and equal relations between members of different social groups" (Halperin et al., 2023, p. 9).

Seminal intergroup interventions focused on facilitating intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), recategorizing group boundaries (Gaertner et al., 1993), and promoting taking the perspective of outgroup members (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). More recent work has uncovered the psychological mechanisms driving and moderating these interventions' effects (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Vorauer et al., 2009) and established proof-of-concept in rigorous field designs (Alan et al., 2021; E. Bruneau et al., 2021; Mousa, 2020).

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Concurrently, intergroup interventions have expanded to target a wider range of psychological processes (e.g., paradoxical thinking: Bar-Tal et al., 2021; emotion regulation: Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016; implicit theories: Goldenberg et al., 2021; perceptions of social norms: Murrar et al., 2020; self-affirmation: Sherman et al., 2017). Moreover, interventions initially limited to Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic contexts are now reaching targets throughout the world (e.g., Paluck, 2009; Ruggeri et al., 2021) and providing a more direct focus on changing intergroup attitudes and behavior beginning in childhood and including adolescence (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Killen et al., 2022; Tropp et al., 2022). And crucially, in addition to the classic goal of prejudice reduction (Paluck et al., 2021), intergroup interventions have begun to target a wider array of emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Particular breakthroughs include interventions bolstering reconciliation during intractable conflict (e.g., Halperin et al., 2011, 2013), durably reducing support for exclusionary social policies and political violence (Kalla & Broockman, 2020; Mernyk et al., 2022), and promoting more tolerant behaviors toward outgroup members (vis-à-vis changing attitudes; e.g., Mousa, 2020; Munger, 2017; Scacco & Warren, 2018).

This focus on applying insights from descriptive research to develop intergroup interventions parallels trends aiming to intervene in economic decision making (Franklin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018), physical and mental health (Sobel, 1995; van Agteren et al., 2021), conservation behavior (Goldstein et al., 2008; Nolan et al., 2008), academic achievement (Barnett, 2011; Stephens et al., 2014; Walton & Cohen, 2011), and information consumption (Chan et al., 2017; Walter & Murphy, 2018). In all abovementioned fields, an understanding of the psychological processes producing an undesired phenomenon is utilized to design and test interventions to alter that phenomenon.

Nonetheless, there is a noteworthy difference between intergroup interventions and the other cases mentioned above. Namely, the other classes of interventions target aspects of people's lives that they generally want to change—people want to increase their wealth, improve their health, and so forth. Conversely, people are often much less motivated to address the beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that sustain and exacerbate intergroup conflict (i.e., *conflict-supporting processes*; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Pratto et al., 1994).

In what follows, we elaborate on why people often lack motivation to engage with intergroup interventions. We then consider a seeming paradox: Despite lacking a motivated target audience, intergroup interventions have shown marked promise in reducing conflict-supporting processes (see above). We suggest that part of the solution to this paradox lies in the fact that, in most studies of intergroup interventions, researchers provide participants with external incentives to engage with the intervention content. However, relying on the most common forms of external incentives (namely, monetary compensation or academic credit) may limit the actual applied potential of intergroup interventions in real-world contexts where these incentives are lacking and may also distort our understanding of the fundamental psychological mechanisms through which such interventions create change. Therefore, we offer a conceptual framework of approaches to engage an unmotivated target audience before concluding with implications and future directions.

Motivational Barriers

Motivation refers to the psychological processes that inspire and sustain volitional behavior (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). *Motivational barriers*, therefore, refer to processes that prevent people from initiating and sustaining a particular behavior (here, engagement with intergroup interventions; see also Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). Such barriers arise for myriad reasons. One lies in our pervasive tendency to believe that we see the world objectively and dispassionately (Ross & Ward, 1996). Therefore, individuals simply may not recognize that their own beliefs and biases contribute to the conflict—instead placing the fault entirely on outgroup members (Pronin et al., 2002). Put bluntly, in the context of intergroup conflicts, people may not think they need to change. Given that intergroup interventions generally require at least some amount of time and effort, people are unlikely to engage with those not considered relevant to themselves.

Along with simply lacking motivation, individuals may actively resist engaging with intergroup interventions. For one, people may resist engaging with intergroup interventions because they fear doing so would put them at a material disadvantage vis-à-vis the outgroup, as when hawkish

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individuals resist interventions targeting their reticence to compromise with outgroup members out of fear that they will be exploited (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011).[1] Likewise, individuals who benefit from their membership in dominant groups and/or who are ideologically predisposed to prefer group-based hierarchy (e.g., high in social dominance orientation; Pratto et al., 1994) may be reluctant to engage in interventions aiming to attenuate intergroup inequality (Dixon et al., 2005; Ron et al., 2017).

Resistance may also arise because the conflict-supporting beliefs that interventions target are often experienced as subjectively positive. These beliefs provide a stable conceptual framework that helps individuals involved in intergroup conflict understand and adapt to their situation—providing epistemic security during chronic social discord (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Kruglanski, 2004). For instance, beliefs dehumanizing the outgroup as fundamentally evil create an easy explanation for a complex social phenomenon (e.g., the conflict began and is sustained because of the outgroup's subhuman depravity; E. Bruneau & Kteily, 2017; H. G. Kelman, 1973). Individuals may also maintain conflict-supporting beliefs because they confer a positive self-image. For instance, because we derive positive esteem from our membership in valued social groups, people often seek to elevate their group's relative worth by denigrating outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985) and thereby resist prejudice reduction interventions. Relatedly, although acknowledging the past wrongdoings of one's ingroup can facilitate conflict resolution (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006), such an admission often inspires guilt and threatens one's social identity (Van Tongeren et al., 2014)—creating resistance to acknowledging past ingroup transgressions (e.g., Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). For all these reasons, the target audience may resist intergroup interventions that threaten their group-based privileges, epistemic security, or positive self-concept.

A Seeming Paradox

How, despite these motivational barriers, have intergroup interventions demonstrated marked success in reducing a wide array of conflict-supporting processes? Consider the traditional intergroup intervention study. Here, researchers motivate participants to engage with an intervention by providing them with monetary compensation or academic credit (hereinafter, *traditional incentives*). By removing motivational barriers in this way, researchers can then identify what intervention content produces psychological change given an audience willing to engage with said content. But relying on traditional incentives may limit both the real-world applicability of intergroup interventions and our understanding of the mechanisms through which they create change.[2]

For instance, researchers may pay participants to engage in a study that trains them to regulate their hostile emotions. Although such training can promote tolerant and conciliatory attitudes (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016; Halperin et al., 2013), participants need to invest substantial attention and effort to engage with it. Absent traditional incentives, it is unlikely individuals would be motivated to engage in such effortful regulation (Tamir et al., 2019). In fact, in real conflict situations, individuals often have precisely the opposite motivation: They want to express unrestrained hostility to signal their commitment to fellow ingroup members or mobilize support for outgroup aggression (Porat et al., 2016). Similarly, researchers may pay participants to engage in relatively effortful consideration of outgroup members' subjective experiences. This perspective taking can counter negative stereotyping and intolerance (Todd & Galinsky, 2014), but it can also backfire in competitive contexts—presumably because participants are not sufficiently incentivized and default to less effortful, stereotypical processing (E. G. Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Lammers et al., 2008; Paluck, 2010; Vorauer et al., 2009).

Along the same lines, consider recent research demonstrating that correcting overly negative metaperceptions about outgroup members can reduce hostility (Landry et al., 2023; Lees & Cikara, 2020; Mernyk et al., 2022; Voelkel

[1] Relatedly, a rich line of work in organizational behavior suggests that people resist change initiatives if they perceive the change will negatively impact them (see Self & Schraeder, 2009). We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

[2] As will be described later, there are several promising intergroup interventions that do not rely on traditional incentives (e.g., Kalla & Broockman, 2020; Mousa, 2020; Scacco & Warren, 2018; Weiss, 2021). Indeed, it is these examples that we wish to highlight when building our framework. However, despite these exemplars, intergroup intervention research continues to rely disproportionately on traditional incentives (see also Paluck et al., 2021).

et al., 2023). This work provides participants with traditional incentives to view information contradicting fundamental beliefs they have about the outgroup, which they may otherwise ignore out of naïve realism (Pronin et al., 2002) or avoid in service of epistemic security (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Kunda, 1990). And despite an abundance of evidence suggesting that positive intergroup contact can improve intergroup relations (Paluck et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), this work too has largely relied on traditional incentives (Paluck et al., 2021). The impact of contact interventions in contexts of real-world conflicts may therefore be limited due to individuals' general reluctance to interact with hated outgroup members (Dixon et al., 2005; Ron et al., 2017).

This reliance on traditional incentives may help account for why promising intergroup interventions often show limited effects in naturalistic settings without such incentives (Paluck et al., 2021; Paluck & Green, 2009). Consider a recent campaign intended to persuade Jewish Israelis that the Palestinians are credible partners for peace by presenting them with real videos of Palestinian leaders affirming this sentiment. Despite painstaking efforts to craft a compelling message, the intervention had little effect because the audience resisted information that contradicted their deeply held conviction that Palestinians are untrustworthy and bellicose (Hameiri et al., 2018). Moreover, despite finding positive effects of intergroup interventions in the field, a recent meta-analytic study concluded that

> There was no explicit and detailed consideration of how scalable effective interventions may be. … Future research is needed to identify the characteristics that prejudice reduction interventions need to be scalable, and consideration should also be given to whether particular prejudice reduction interventions meet those criteria. (Hsieh et al., 2022, p. 706)

Therefore, although the field's increased focus on studying interventions in real-world contexts is a positive development and has seen marked success, the fact that most of this work relies on traditional incentives raises questions about these interventions' true applicability to real-world conflicts.

Five Approaches to Surmount Motivational Barriers

In the face of this "motivational challenge," how can interventionists deliver the content of their intervention that targets conflict-supporting processes (hereinafter, the *core content* of the intervention) to an unmotivated or resistant target audience? We draw on theories of motivation, goals, and values to propose five approaches, which range from direct to indirect (see Figure 1). Most directly, researchers can (a) make the target audience desire to address their conflict-supporting processes and expect that engaging with the intervention will produce this desirable outcome. Researchers can also deliver the core content of their intervention indirectly by (b) satisfying alternative psychological motivations, (c) providing an instrumental benefit, or (d) embedding the core content in a hedonically pleasurable medium. Finally, interventionists can (e) bypass motivational barriers altogether by delivering the intervention outside of targets' conscious awareness.

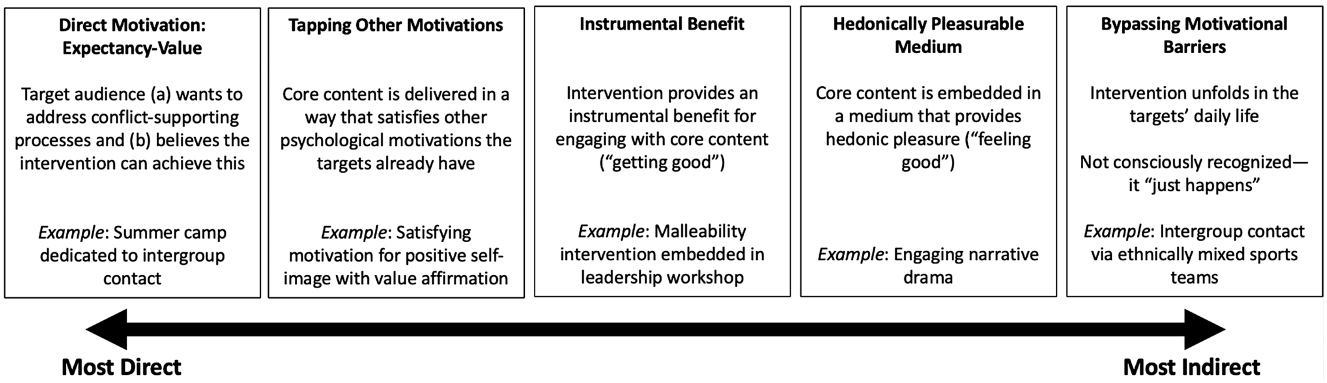
It is worth noting that most of these approaches have already been used in the past. For instance, the "motivational challenge" has been considered extensively among researchers specializing in interventions targeting children from preschool to adolescence, as they typically cannot motivate them with traditional incentives (monetary compensation or academic credit). Indeed, many of the interventions we offer as illustrative examples for surmounting the "motivational challenge" targeted children and early adolescents, and we consider the value of drawing on developmental approaches in the discussion. Thus, although the approaches we consider are not novel, our goal is to organize them into a conceptual framework that can stimulate further thought and development. To do so, we provide a definition of each approach, offer illustrative examples, and suggest directions for future work.[3]

Direct Motivation: Aligning Values and Fostering Expectancies of Success

People are motivated to engage in a behavior to the extent that they (a) desire a particular outcome and (b) believe the behavior is likely to produce that outcome (Ajzen, 1991; Atkinson, 1964; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Kruglanski et al., 2002; Vroom, 1964). Moreover, an explicit motivation to engage in course content (i.e., a "motivation to learn"; Noe & Schmitt, 1986) catalyzes knowledge and skill acquisition (Bauer et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2006; Tharenou, 2001). Therefore, the most direct method to deliver intergroup interventions is to make the target audience *value* the outcome the intervention is targeting and *expect* the intervention can produce this outcome (see Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). To do so, researchers must convince the target audience that (a) they should desire to change the conflict-supporting process(es) that the intervention is targeting and (b) engaging with the intervention can produce this desired change. However, due to the motivational barriers noted above, many people may not want to change their conflict-supporting processes. They may also doubt the efficacy of the intervention or their own ability to successfully engage with it. We suggest means by which interventionists can increase targets' values and expectancies.

[3] Rather than a definitive typology, these methods provide a general framework for researchers to draw on when developing scalable interventions. Therefore, although we have characterized these methods as distinct, they may in fact "bleed into" one another. This conceptual overlap between different methods will be discussed further below.

Figure 1
Typology of Methods to Surmount the Motivational Challenge



To cultivate a desire to change conflict-supporting processes, researchers can perhaps appeal to core human values—people's higher order conceptions of what is desirable that influence the specific motivations they have (Schwartz, 1992). Rooted in fundamental human needs, these core values reliably emerge across cultures as powerful drivers of human motivation (Schwartz, 1992). For instance, interventions aiming to attenuate intergroup inequality or violence could deliver their core content by appealing to the value of *universalism*: the understanding, respect, and protection of all people (Schwartz, 1992).[4] Likewise, researchers could appeal to the value of *societal security*—desires for the safety, harmony, and stability of society (Schwartz et al., 2012)—by highlighting the destabilizing effects of intergroup violence (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). This approach accords with work demonstrating that reframing sensitive political issues to align with people's moral values can bridge partisan divides (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2019; Kalla et al., 2022).

To increase expectancies that the intervention can produce the desired change, positive exemplars from related contexts can be provided. For instance, researchers presented targets involved in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict with instances of other intractable conflicts that ended in peaceful resolution. These positive exemplars stimulated the hope needed to change entrenched conflict narratives, leading to greater support for negotiating with the outgroup (Rosler et al., 2022). Along with the efficacy of the intervention itself, it is also important to consider targets' sense of self-efficacy to engage with the intervention successfully. Such self-efficacy can be cultivated by offering specific, proximal, and optimally challenging goals; competence-promoting feedback; and fostering personal agency and approach orientation (Bandura, 1997; Crandall et al., 1965; Dweck, 1986; Rotter, 1966; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-efficacy can also be cultivated by decomposing relatively abstract, higher order goals into concrete subgoals—which has been shown to facilitate goal commitment (Klein et al., 1999). For instance, rather than instructing participants to visualize a "pleasant interaction" with an outgroup member in an imagined contact intervention, participants could instead be asked to chain together specific imagined actions such as a welcoming smile, firm handshake, maintained eye contact, and so forth (see Husnu & Crisp, 2011, for evidence that more detailed instructions increase the beneficial effects of imagined contact).

Nonetheless, given powerful motivational barriers, directly engaging the target audience without traditional incentives is a major challenge. In fact, this approach may require the target audience to have a preexisting motivation to address conflict-supporting processes. Consider three such approaches: summer camps expressly intended to bring members of conflicting groups together (Schroeder & Risen, 2016; White et al., 2021), workshops designed with the explicit purpose of facilitating intergroup dialogue (H. C. Kelman, 2001; H. C. Kelman & Cohen, 1976), and opt-in diversity training programs (Devine & Ash, 2022; Gill & Olson, 2023; Kulik et al., 2007). Although all these approaches have demonstrated success, they also are in some ways "preaching to the converted" by targeting those already motivated to resolve the conflict (see Yablon, 2012). To reach more resistant audiences, alternative methods may be required—which we introduce below.

Satisfying Alternative Psychological Motivations

A subtler method to engage otherwise resistant target audiences is to deliver the core content in a manner that satisfies alternative psychological motivations. Rather than leading targets to adopt a new motivation (to engage with the core content of the intervention), these interventions deliver their core content by satisfying the motivations that the

[4] Indeed, people who more strongly endorse the value of universalism show greater tolerance toward an array of stigmatized groups (Beierlein et al., 2016; Schwartz, 2007; Souchon et al., 2017).

targets already have. For instance, because people want to see themselves in a positive light (James, 1890; Pyszczynski et al., 2004), they can be motivated to engage with interventions that make them feel good about themselves. One approach has targets affirm key personal values before presenting them with information about their ingroup's past transgressions. This affirmation makes people feel principled and moral, bolstering their self-concept and thereby increasing their willingness to acknowledge information that may threaten their social identity (Badea & Sherman, 2019; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011; Sherman et al., 2017).

Interventions can also deliver their core content by satisfying targets' need to feel valued and accepted by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). One approach, mentioned above, presented targets embroiled in an intractable conflict with examples of similar conflicts in which costly conflict-supporting narratives developed. This helped illustrate that such narratives are prevalent, normal, and functional responses to the social chaos of intractable conflict—a nonthreatening validation of targets' personal experiences, which increased their support for negotiating with the outgroup (Rosler et al., 2022). Researchers have also satisfied the needs for acceptance by engaging targets in a nonjudgmental exchange of personal narratives about sensitive social issues, which promoted empathy and inclusive attitudes (Broockman & Kalla, 2016; Kalla & Broockman, 2020; see also Killen et al., 2022).

Another approach taps into people's motivation to hear things that are consistent with their existing worldview (Abelson et al., 1968; Kunda, 1990). This intervention leverages the tactic of *paradoxical thinking*: A process of exposing individuals to messages that are consistent with their initial beliefs but so exaggerated—even absurd—that the target comes to question the soundness of these initial beliefs (Frankl, 1975; Watzlawick et al., 1974). Thus, rather than trying to challenge their conflict-supporting beliefs directly, researchers attract targets by presenting them with a message consistent with these beliefs (e.g., my group's persistence in this violent conflict is a symbol of our resilience). However, this message is so exaggerated that it leads targets to recognize the irrational nature of their initial beliefs and moderate them accordingly (e.g., I do not want this extremely violent conflict to end, because if it did, a symbol of my group's resilience would be lost). Indeed, this approach has reduced support for violence in the midst of protracted conflicts (e.g., Hameiri et al., 2016; see Hameiri et al., 2019, for review).

A final example satisfied people's intrinsic curiosity (Oudeyer et al., 2016; Silvia, 2019; Szumowska & Kruglanski, 2020) to reduce prejudice toward outgroups (Weiss et al., 2023). Researchers presented majority group children with episodes from a popular TV series in which members of stigmatized minority groups answered sensitive questions about their experiences that are often considered to be off-limits in polite society. Hearing outgroup members engage with risqué topics attracted the children's intrinsic curiosity, motivating them to take the perspective of the minority group members and leading to durable prejudice reduction.

Providing Instrumental Incentives (Getting Good)

These interventions provide targets with instrumental incentives to motivate them to engage with the core content. Rather than increasing the value they place on the goals of the intervention (i.e., reducing conflict-supporting processes), as in the first approach, this approach motivates engagement through incentives that the target audience already values due to the instrumental benefits they provide (see Vroom, 1964). Of course, the most prominent strategy is to provide monetary compensation or academic credit, but promising research has demonstrated more ecologically valid ways to deliver core content via instrumental incentives. Consider an intervention targeting people's conflict-supporting beliefs about the fixed nature of social groups. To incentivize targets to engage with this core content, researchers embedded it in a professional workshop teaching valuable leadership skills (Goldenberg et al., 2018). Likewise, interventionists can convince targets that the core content will improve some area of their life unrelated to the conflict. For instance, researchers motivated people to recognize their biased reasoning by telling them how this could help them communicate with their romantic partner, but this recognition also promoted more conciliatory attitudes toward the outgroup (Nasie et al., 2014).

Relatedly, individuals can be motivated to engage with an intervention's core content if they believe it will provide them with a strategic benefit. For instance, when they were told that anger impairs decision making, participants were motivated to regulate their group-based anger and expressed less outgroup hostility as a result (Porat et al., 2016). Similarly, convincing political partisans that carefully considering the other side's perspective will make their own arguments more persuasive bolstered these partisans' empathy and tolerance (Santos et al., 2022). Collectively, this work dovetails nicely with workplace interventions that aim to decrease employees' resistance to organizational change by highlighting the material benefits that will accrue to them (e.g., increased salary and job security; Armenakis et al., 1993; Rafferty et al., 2013).

Providing Hedonically Pleasurable Experiences (Feeling Good)

Interventions can also deliver their core content to otherwise resistant target audiences by embedding it in media that provides a hedonically pleasurable experience (e.g., Freud, 1933; Maslow, 1943; Morris, 1956; Schwartz, 1992; Young, 1961). These pleasurable experiences are inherently enjoyable and foster intrinsic motivation to engage with the core content—making the process of doing so

rewarding in-and-of itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, researchers have crafted engaging narrative dramas to present humanizing depictions of outgroup members or shift perceptions of social norms (Bilali, 2022; Bilali et al., 2016; Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009). Similar interventions have used captivating artistic performances to promote empathy, stimulate peaceful collective action, and reduce outgroup stigmatization (Feuchte et al., 2020; Hasson et al., 2022; Pinto-Garcia et al., 2022). An exciting new development is to use immersive virtual reality to facilitate vicarious intergroup contact and promote ingroup criticism (Hasler et al., 2021; Hasson et al., 2019). Other work has embedded its core content in fun and engaging games (DeFilippis, 2023; Gonzalez & Czlonka, 2010; Porat et al., 2020; Simonovits et al., 2018). A notable example is a mobile phone game training participants to regulate their emotions, which successfully reduced anger and disgust toward the outgroup (Porat et al., 2020). Another creative approach brought Israelis on an inspiring field trip to sites of historical importance for Palestinians, which fostered their acceptance of Palestinians' cultural narratives (Ben David et al., 2017).

Bypassing Psychological Barriers

The final, most indirect, approach is to *bypass the motivational barriers* entirely. Here, the intervention is delivered to the target in the context of their everyday life. This method does not require a conscious decision on the target's part to engage with the core content. In fact, the target does not even realize the intervention is happening. Instead, the intervention unfolds within the context of their daily life, so they have no option but to engage with it. One form of "bypassing" intervention is to deliver the core content through subtle shifts in naturally occurring dialogue. For instance, presenting sensitive policies using passive nouns instead of active verbs (e.g., "the division of Jerusalem" vs. "dividing Jerusalem") was found to promote conciliatory attitudes (Idan et al., 2018). From the targets' perspective, this framing shift "just happened" to them and required no conscious decision to engage on their part.

Interventionists can also bypass motivational barriers by embedding the core content in targets' natural environments. Consider the recent proliferation of work fostering intergroup contact by creating ethnically mixed sports teams or classrooms (Lowe, 2021; Mousa, 2020; Scacco & Warren, 2018). In these cases, the athletes or students did not consciously recognize they were subject to a contact intervention while playing on the pitch or studying in the classroom. Nonetheless, these interventions led to marked reductions in prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. Another intervention exploited targets' natural environment to increase ethnic cohesion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, teachers giving virtual instruction via Zoom presented their names in the native language of ethnic minority students (as well as in the ethnic majority language). This subtle shift in the environmental architecture of the virtual classroom reliably bolstered ethnic minority students' academic performance and sense of belonging (Endevelt et al., 2023). In another intervention deployed in targets' virtual environment, researchers created social media bots that appeared as high-status ingroup members (i.e., racial majorities with many followers). They programmed these bots to reproach users who posted hateful comments, which produced marked reductions in hate speech (Munger, 2017; Siegel & Badaan, 2020).

Although not under the direct control of social scientists, a more macrolevel approach to bypassing motivational barriers lies in the signals that prominent institutions transmit and the environments they create. For instance, heterosexual Americans' attitudes toward homosexuals have become steadily more positive following Supreme Court rulings favoring same-sex marriage, in part because these influential rulings led heterosexual Americans to perceive their society's norms as more tolerant (Ofosu et al., 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2017). Another instance of "macrolevel bypassing" occurred in Israeli healthcare facilities. Here, increasing diversity among practitioners in these institutions fostered opportunities for Israeli patients to have more frequent interactions with Palestinian caregivers, thereby reducing their prejudice toward Palestinians (Weiss, 2021).

Future "bypassing" interventions could also draw on previous interventions that have communicated information about social norms through prominent environmental signals or social referents (Cialdini et al., 1990; Goldstein et al., 2008; Paluck et al., 2016).

Surmounting Motivational Barriers: Outstanding Questions and Future Directions

Social scientists have increasingly applied insights from descriptive research to develop intergroup interventions—targeting a litany of psychological processes across a wide swath of cultural contexts and samples to reduce prejudice, foster reconciliation, and promote peacebuilding behaviors (see Halperin et al., 2023). At the same time, intergroup conflict continues to rage in part because individuals often lack motivation to engage with these promising interventions (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). We have proposed several approaches to deliver the core content of intergroup interventions to an unmotivated target audience. This conceptual framework is intended to stimulate further thought and development, so here we consider several outstanding issues. Namely, we discuss areas of conceptual overlap among approaches in the framework, the task of truly scaling intergroup interventions, and ethical questions that particular methods raise.

Overlapping Approaches and Potential for Combination

Some of the approaches we have characterized as distinct (see Figure 1) may in fact "bleed into" one another. Consider

interventions that deliver their core content through a hedonically engaging medium such as a radio drama or captivating artistic performance (e.g., Hasson et al., 2022; Paluck, 2009). In some of these cases, the audience is likely unaware that they are the target of an intervention (e.g., "Participants gathered in their respective community spaces as they do for non-research occasions to listen to the radio"; Paluck, 2009, p. 578), so these examples can also be seen as bypassing motivational barriers altogether. Rather than an iron-clad typology, the five approaches we outline are intended to offer a general framework that researchers can draw on to guide their delivery of intergroup interventions.

The "fuzzy" conceptual boundaries between approaches also suggest that different approaches can be combined to bolster an intervention's efficacy. Consider the intervention that drew on targets' curiosity to motivate them to take the perspective of outgroup members (Weiss et al., 2023). This intervention not only tapped into an alternative psychological motivation to deliver its core content but did so through a hedonically compelling medium (i.e., a popular television show). That this approach led to durable attitude change suggests the promise of combining methods in this manner.

Scaling Intergroup Interventions

Intergroup interventions have reached individuals on the scale of hundreds or thousands, but for them to truly impact the roots of conflict, they likely need to reach larger swaths of society. Interventions delivering their core content through the mass media appear particularly conducive to societal-level scalability, such as the radio dramas that changed perceptions of social norms and outgroup tolerance throughout Central Africa (Bilali et al., 2016; Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009). In another encouraging example, researchers delivered a paradoxical thinking intervention to hundreds of thousands of people via online advertisements and banners (Hameiri et al., 2016). Along with leveraging mass media, interventionists can partner with practitioners to scale interventions to the broader society (Tropp, 2018) and potentially work with prominent institutions to engineer macrolevel social change (Weiss, 2021).

Another crucial consideration is how to measure an intervention's impact at scale. Related to the point above, some researchers have partnered with institutions to attain a wealth of rich outcome measures. These researchers unobtrusively evaluated a diversity training course taken by employees of a large corporation by accessing this company's internal data on subsequent employee behaviors (e.g., whom employees nominated for awards or volunteered to mentor; Chang et al., 2019). Researchers can also quantify the impact of large online interventions by tracking the "digital footprint" of targets' social media posts or the content they click on (Munger, 2017; Siegel & Badaan, 2020; see Kosinski et al., 2016). However, such large-scale unobtrusive assessment raises ethical concerns, which we consider in the following subsection.

Any discussion of scalability must also highlight the importance of taking the target audience (e.g., their personality and political ideology) and broader social context (e.g., nature of the conflict, including the specific outgroup and prevailing cultural norms) into account. The methods we propose are not one size fits all—different approaches will be more appropriate in different situations. This is demonstrated by cases where the same intervention had markedly different effects. For instance, several interventions we have discussed are most effective for those with the highest levels of prejudice or hostility toward the outgroup (e.g., Hameiri et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2011). Many of these interventions may also be particularly effective among dominant group members because they may be particularly resistant to interventions perceived to threaten their group's privileged position or moral image (Dixon et al., 2005; Ron et al., 2017).

And crucially, interventions can backfire within certain populations. For instance, when the target audience does not value positive contact with outgroup members, interventions that bypass motivational barriers by facilitating contact in natural contexts can trigger greater exclusionary attitudes (Enos, 2014; Hangartner et al., 2019). Similarly, an intervention that delivered its core content (exposure to differing views via active discussion) through the attractive medium of a popular talk show inadvertently made longstanding grievances salient and bolstered outgroup hostility (Paluck, 2010; see also Bail et al., 2018). Interventions can also backfire if they incentivize the wrong behaviors or elicit alternative motives that are detrimental to the goal of reducing conflict-supporting processes. For instance, although affirming core personal values has consistently been found to foster intergroup tolerance, focusing on values important to one's group can foment prejudice by increasing motivation to bolster the group's positive image (Badea & Sherman, 2019). Thus, to be effective at scale, social scientists must tailor their interventions to the personalities and dominant psychological needs of the target audience (Halperin & Schori-Eyal, 2020).[5]

One particularly important factor of the target audience to consider lies with the developmental period of the participants. Intergroup interventions have been tested with children and adolescents, with successful outcomes including a reduction in bias and an increase in intergroup friendships (reviewed by Rutland & Killen, 2015). Delivering interventions to children and youth may be particularly effective, not only because their intergroup perceptions and attitudes are

[5] Related work in organizational behavior focused on increasing employees' receptivity to organizational change has also argued for the necessity of tailoring approaches to the dispositional traits and needs of the targets (Self & Schraeder, 2009). We again thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

more malleable than adults (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Liberman et al., 2017) but also because motivational barriers may not be as powerfully entrenched during childhood (Tropp et al., 2022). Intervening before motivational barriers ossify could thus be seen as another form of bypassing these barriers altogether.

However, given that developmental researchers typically cannot provide traditional incentives to youth (e.g., monetary compensation), they may need to draw on other approaches in the typology to effectively deliver their interventions. Indeed, many developmental researchers have paid careful attention to motivating engagement with their interventions absent traditional incentives, reflected in the fact that several of the examples we considered above were delivered to young children and adolescents. For instance, interventionists have directly targeted young children's conflict-supporting processes through summer camps expressly intended to bring members of conflicting groups together, providing instrumental benefits such as the opportunity to make new friends and tapped alternative motivations for acceptance, curiosity, or a sense of belonging (Berger et al., 2016; Killen et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2023; White et al., 2021). Relatedly, interventions have engaged early adolescents by embedding their core content in hedonically pleasurable experiences and communicating the instrumental benefits of learning about people from different cultural and family backgrounds (Ben David et al., 2017). Many of these examples can be applied to motivating adults as well, demonstrating the promise of integrating developmental psychology with intergroup interventions (see Counihan & Taylor, 2023).[6]

Ethical Considerations

While the approaches we offer may be effective in delivering interventions to unmotivated targets, whether this is always normatively desirable is another matter. In particular, interventions delivered to targets outside of their conscious awareness may be viewed with trepidation. Some may consider any attempt to influence citizens' attitudes outside of their awareness as undemocratic and immoral. Others may support using this method to try to improve intergroup relations but fear that it could just as easily be exploited to deliver destructive content. For instance, the same method that exposed people to paradoxical thinking messages via mass advertisement campaigns could instead fuel intergroup hostilities if these campaigns instead stoked feelings of threat and insecurity. Likewise, although useful for evaluating the efficacy of large online interventions, tracking targets' "digital footprints" (e.g., their social media posts or the content they click on; Kosinski et al., 2016) is an ethical gray zone. These digital traces can reveal intimate aspects of people's personality that they may prefer to keep private (Kosinski et al., 2013; Wang & Kosinski, 2018; Youyou et al., 2015) and can be leveraged to increase the effectiveness of psychological persuasion (Matz et al., 2017, 2020).

Interventionists must seriously consider these ethical implications. Whenever possible, participants should be thoroughly debriefed as to the purpose of the intervention, provided access to mental health resources if necessary, and given the opportunity to have their data deleted. While social scientists must pay serious attention to upholding ethical practice, in our view, part of the role of social scientists is to help alleviate the intergroup conflicts that threaten to corrode the fabric of societies. To do so, it may sometimes be necessary to intervene in the attitudes of society members without their permission. Just as medical professionals at times operate on individuals experiencing certain pathologies without their permission (Rubin, 2013; Scott, 2009; Sieber, 2001), we believe social scientists have the right to bypass motivational barriers to address societal-level pathologies. We hope this work inspires further critical thought about these ethical issues similar to debates in other areas of intervention science (e.g., "nudging" individuals toward wiser economic decisions without their full awareness; see Hausman & Welch, 2010 for discussion).

Coda

Social scientists have devoted much effort to developing core intervention content producing psychological change, achieving marked success in both lab and field studies (see Hsieh et al., 2022; Paluck et al., 2021, for recent meta-analytic reviews). However, for intergroup interventions to reach their true potential, greater attention needs to be devoted to delivering this core content to a target audience often unmotivated to engage with it. We suggested five means of doing so: (a) directly motivating targets by increasing their values and expectancies, (b) satisfying alternative psychological motivations, (c) providing an instrumental benefit for engaging with the core content, (d) embedding the core content in a hedonically pleasurable medium, or (e) delivering the intervention outside of targets' conscious awareness. We encourage the next wave of intergroup intervention research to build on this framework to deliver the core content of their interventions without relying on traditional incentives.

[6] Many of these same principles are also applied in interventions intended to increase Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics participation among members of underrepresented groups (e.g., by fostering a sense of belonging; LaCosse et al., 2020). We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

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