Power, negotiations, and the anticipation of intergroup encounters

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This review places intergroup encounters in a broad framework which considers the context in which such encounters take place, and in particular, the power dynamics at play. We address different forms of encounters, spanning from interpersonal interactions (not focused on intergroup aspects) to political negotiations between the groups’ representatives, and argue for a deeper consideration of power asymmetries in examining such encounters. We argue that because high- and low-power group members have different motivations for change in the status quo, they differ in their expectations from intergroup encounters and in the types of encounters they prefer. We describe relevant research while considering moderating factors such as the legitimacy and stability of the power dynamics. We also identify remaining gaps and topics requiring further research. This work has both conceptual and practical implications for the prospects of promoting both positive attitudinal change as well as changes to the hierarchical status quo.

Keywords: Power; Intergroup encounters; Negotiations; Stability; Legitimacy.

One of the most pressing questions faced by policy makers and researchers alike is how to attenuate intergroup animosity and advance more peaceful and just relations between groups in society. Such challenges have become increasingly relevant with the current unprecedented rates of immigration across the globe (Esses, Medlianu, & Lawson, 2013; Putnam, 2007) and the recent electoral successes of ultra-right-wing parties such as Golden Dawn in Greece and the Danish People's Party in Denmark. Solutions to problems associated with intergroup tension occur at various levels, ranging from the political level—which
includes policy formation and negotiated resolutions to conflict among leaders of different groups—to the grassroots level, aimed at promoting better relations between individuals from the communities of the opposing sides (e.g., via dialogue groups, educational programmes, and joint initiatives in professional and cultural domains). Many such approaches to conflict resolution involve some form of encounter, or interaction, across group lines.

Although the relations between sides in conflict are frequently characterised by large power asymmetries, research informing various approaches to resolving intergroup tension rarely considers the role that group power plays in shaping the process. The under-appreciation of power dynamics applies both to the domain of cross-group encounters between members of different communities or groups—about which the majority of research has been conducted—as well as research considering intergroup negotiations and support for political change. The goal of the current review is to present some of our own research that seeks to place intergroup encounters at both levels within a broader framework which considers the psychology of the context in which they take place, and in particular, the power dynamics at play.

Our central thesis is that group power, and associated preferences for change in the status quo, critically shapes the type of intergroup encounters that group members seek out and prefer, and specifically, the content they seek to address within them. We provide evidence for this at two levels of analysis: first, we discuss how power influences orientations towards encounters between individuals from the communities of the opposing sides. Second, we consider how power influences people’s orientations towards political negotiations, a context in which individuals consider political change to the relationship between the two sides. Insights at both these levels have important implications for understanding the effectiveness of potential solutions to intergroup tension, and the likelihood of these solutions for effecting changes to the status quo.

In order to place our work in its appropriate context, we first review some of the existing research on intergroup encounters. We define intergroup encounters as the full set of instances whereby members of opposing groups come into contact with one another, spanning from interpersonal encounters not directly aiming to address the intergroup relationship to political negotiations between group members specifically seeking to put an end to conflict between the groups. We treat work that addresses the coming together of group members within this spectrum as relevant, and identify areas in which it would benefit from a deeper consideration of power asymmetries. We subsequently describe how our own work begins to address some of these gaps.

EXISTING RESEARCH ON INTERGROUP ENCOUNTERS

Although intergroup encounters are certainly not limited to the context of interactions between individuals from the communities of the opposing sides,
it is nevertheless the case that a large majority of existing research has focused broadly on such encounters. This is in no small part due to the major influence that Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) has had on approaches to improving intergroup relations. According to the contact hypothesis, positive interactions between members of opposing or conflict ing groups can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations, particularly when they occur under optimal conditions (e.g., in cooperative contexts, which allow for personal acquaintance, with equal status between groups, and with institutional support). The contact hypothesis has stimulated a vast amount of research and amassed a great deal of empirical support: indeed, a comprehensive meta-analysis has demonstrated that contact reliably predicts reduced prejudice (Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), an effect largely explained by reductions in intergroup anxiety, increased empathy, as well as by increases in participants’ knowledge about outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Moreover, the benefits of positive contact have been shown to extend beyond the boundaries of the specific interactions. It has been shown that improved outgroup attitudes can transfer from the outgroup with which one has experienced positive contact to other groups with which one has not (Tausch et al., 2010). Furthermore, in recent years, researchers have begun testing the benefits of intergroup contact beyond the scope of physical face-to-face interaction. Even imagining contact with outgroup individuals has been shown to result in improved attitudes towards the other side (Crisp & Turner, 2012).

Notwithstanding the strength and breadth of evidence supporting the general tenets of the contact hypothesis, there remain important gaps to be addressed. For one, we continue to have only a limited understanding of the role that group power plays in shaping intergroup encounters of the type typically addressed in contact research. Because differences in group power have traditionally been considered an obstacle that should be overcome in contact situations, the emphasis has been on creating and maintaining equal status between interacting group members (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969). This emphasis has resulted in limited understanding of how power dynamics—those that mark the relations between the groups outside the context of the intergroup encounter—might still impact processes that occur within contact situations, even when attempts are made to achieve equal status. This shortcoming is highlighted by the findings that have begun to emerge in recent years suggesting that members of high-power and low-power groups may be affected differently by intergroup encounters. For example, although contact has been found to relate to improved attitudes among members of both high- and low-power groups, it has been shown to be significantly less effective for improving the outgroup attitudes of disadvantaged group members (for whom $r = −.18$) relative to advantaged group members ($r = −.23$; Tropp, 2007; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Even though this difference is relatively small, it suggests that conclusions generated from the contact literature...
may not be equally applicable to both high- and low-power groups, and raises important questions about potentially different mechanisms that account for the effect of contact on attitudes among each group. Indeed, whereas Allport’s (1954) proposed optimal conditions for contact have been found to facilitate the beneficial effects of contact for members of advantaged groups, they did not have a significant influence on outcomes among disadvantaged group members (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Similarly, perspective taking during contact—typically thought to be highly beneficial for promoting tolerance—has been found to have less of a positive impact on members of disadvantaged (relative to advantaged) groups. In fact, rather than benefiting from perspective taking, disadvantaged group members had better outgroup attitudes after being given the opportunity to provide their perspective (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012).

Another indication of the differential effects of contact on high- and low-power groups comes from research considering support for egalitarian policy as the outcome of contact. In one study, White South Africans (i.e., the high-power group) who had engaged in positive contact with Blacks indicated greater support for egalitarian practices (e.g., affirmative action) aimed at redressing inequality between the groups. Although this finding might create optimism about the potential for social change, it was also observed that increased intergroup contact among Black South Africans (i.e., the low-power group) was associated with less support for equality, perhaps due to the positivity of contact focusing attention away from their group-based concerns (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007; see Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012). Given that progress towards equality will likely depend both on low-power groups agitating for change as well as high-power groups acceding to it, such findings might temper some enthusiasm about the overall systemic effects of positive intergroup contact. Most importantly from our perspective, such insights (which we will return to later in this review), demonstrate the importance of giving serious theoretical consideration to the power dynamics at play between groups when structuring and evaluating intergroup encounters.

Beyond its relative under-emphasis on notions of group power, an additional (and related) gap in the contact literature is its limited focus on processes occurring during intergroup encounters. Specifically, and almost without exception (but see Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Trawalter & Richeson, 2008), research on intergroup contact has not considered how intergroup encounters actually unfold.

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1 We note that analysing the ways in which contact might have differential effects for high- and low-power groups is not to dismiss the potential for contact (or other forms of intergroup encounters) to create progress towards equality. Rather, an analysis of the power dynamics affecting intergroup encounters may generate theoretical insights that can be applied to encounters that help facilitate high-power group acceptance of policies promoting social change without simultaneously undercutting the desire of low-power group members to push for such change. We argue that only by carefully analysing the effects of power dynamics between groups can we help to uncover the mechanisms such interventions would need to target.
in terms of the content that is discussed in the encounter. Beyond the domain of intergroup contact specifically, research on intergroup negotiations (another form of intergroup encounter) has also historically given little attention to the question of which particular topics are being negotiated in any particular interaction, and how that influences the likelihood of changes to the status quo (but see De Dreu, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2008).

The question of what is actually discussed (or not discussed) and how it is discussed is important for assessing how a specific encounter might impact members of high-power and low-power groups, and how it might affect social change more broadly. Specifically, we argue that because group power is associated with different motivations towards change in the status quo (with low-power groups being more motivated to advance change than high-power groups), high- and low-power group members might approach intergroup encounters with a different set of expectations and motivations. For example, as we will elaborate below, whether or not the encounter directly engages with or ignores the power differences between groups can differentially influence high- vs. low-power group members’ favourable views towards the interaction and, thus, its prospects for success. As such, it is important to consider how individuals, whether they belong to advantaged or disadvantaged groups, approach intergroup encounters in terms of what they seek to discuss (i.e., their motivations) and how they expect the process to progress (i.e., their expectations). Considering high- and low-power group members’ motivations and expectations around intergroup encounters should contribute to a deeper understanding of how they are likely to react to a specific type of encounter and, by extension, its prospects for promoting change to the status quo.

Importantly, these ideas apply equally across the spectrum of intergroup encounters. Just as interpersonal encounters that raise (versus ignore) issues of power imbalances might vary in the extent to which they appeal to a high- versus low-power group members (and create goodwill), there may be different orientations among individuals across group boundaries surrounding what issues should be negotiated (and in what order). Consistent with high- and low-power group members’ differing orientations towards change in the status quo, a topic that is one party’s priority to discuss at the negotiating table may be the very same topic that another party would rather avoid. The consequences of such processes may be fairly dramatic, in both the domain of interpersonal interactions across group boundaries and in intergroup negotiations: if group members have different preferences for the content of intergroup encounters, an interaction that is steered in a particular direction versus another may anger one side and raise suspicions, making it more difficult to have a productive and generative conversation. Similarly, a proposed negotiating agenda that prioritises the content that one group favours may alienate the other side and reduce their willingness to negotiate. In both cases, and for similar reasons, this may short-circuit the pathway towards reconciliation.
INTERGROUP ENCOUNTERS FROM A POWER PERSPECTIVE: A NEW SYNTHESIS

Although asymmetry in group power has not received much attention in the traditional work on intergroup encounters, over the past few years researchers have begun to consider the interplay between group power and the content of intergroup encounters from a perspective that considers prospects for social change (Bikmen & Sunar, 2013; Kteily, Saguy, Sidanius, & Taylor, 2013; Saguy & Dovidio, 2013; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). This work complements the more traditional research on intergroup encounters (which has primarily focused on outcomes of positive interactions) by focusing specifically on what group members anticipate will be discussed during the encounter, and how their expectations and motivations impact the way they approach and respond to their interaction with the other side.

Here, we provide a thorough review of this work. First, we consider why individuals across group boundaries might have varying expectations, motivations, and orientations towards the content of intergroup encounters. Specifically, we focus on research documenting differences among high- versus low-power group members in orientations towards change in the existing status quo. Building on this, we then move to review our own recent work which describes how varying desire for change in the status quo influences high- and low-power group members’ responses to intergroup encounters involving different content. This research investigates both intergroup encounters at the level of interpersonal interactions by members of opposing groups coming together as well as considering the context of intergroup interactions at the level of political negotiations. Subsequently we investigate how contextual factors extend beyond the magnitude of power difference per se to examine how legitimacy and stability might influence the types of encounters group members are willing to consider, and what this implies for the prospect of social change.

This review aims to provide an integrative and comprehensive understanding of the role that group power plays in shaping how individuals approach intergroup encounters—an understanding which has both conceptual and practical implications by informing processes that shape such encounters and influence their likelihood of being effective.

GROUP POWER AND MOTIVATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Virtually without exception, societies are hierarchically organised such that at least one group controls a greater share of valued resources (e.g., political power, economic wealth, educational opportunities) than do other groups (Jackman, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Reflecting this hierarchical structure, high group power is traditionally defined as relative control of resources and decreased dependence on the other side (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Emerson,
Group-based hierarchy is reflected in almost every aspect of social life, with members of advantaged groups enjoying better outcomes than disadvantaged group members in a range of domains, spanning poverty rates and school attrition rates to prison sentences and mortality rates (Feagin, 2006; Jackman, 2001; Smooha, 2005; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Members of disadvantaged groups, compared to members of advantaged groups, also encounter discrimination and social injustice across a wide spectrum of social contexts, such as when interviewing for jobs and being quoted a price for a house or a car (e.g., Ayres, 1991; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Differential control over resources as well as preferential social treatment produces divergent daily realities for members of advantaged relative to disadvantaged groups. Whereas members of disadvantaged groups find many doors to economic opportunities closed, have a difficult time climbing the social ladder, and experience legal authorities as a source of intimidation, advantaged group members experience far more economic security, opportunities to advance, and social acceptance (Jones, Engelman, Turner, & Campbell, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Moreover, members of advantaged groups also benefit psychologically from being part of a socially valued group. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals derive an important part of their self-definition, their social identity, from their membership in social groups. Because people strive for positive self-worth, they are motivated to achieve a positively valued and distinct social identity, a need that can be satisfied by favourable social comparisons to other relevant groups. Given their dominant position in society, and their control over resources and positions conferring high status, social comparisons to other relevant groups typically yield favourable outcomes for members of advantaged groups, promoting a positive social identity. In contrast, members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience a devalued or threatened social identity when making social comparisons to other groups (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005).

Thus, relative to members of disadvantaged groups, members of advantaged groups benefit both practically and psychologically from hierarchical social arrangements. These different group-based experiences often translate to contrasting views, preferences, motivations, and strategies regarding the status quo. Members of advantaged groups—who benefit from the situation as it stands—are likely to have little opposition to current status arrangements, and indeed may be threatened by the possibility of changes to a system that advantages them. Members of subordinate groups, however, experience relative disadvantage under the existing state of affairs; as such, they are generally more likely to perceive the status quo as problematic, and to desire social change. These group-based orientations towards the status quo are described in prominent theories of intergroup relations such as the group position model (Blumer, 1958; see also Bobo, 1999; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996), social dominance theory (Sidanius &
Pratto, 1999), realistic group conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and have received substantial empirical support.

For example, a long tradition of research in social dominance theory (e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) demonstrates that individuals who hold more dominant positions in society tend to view the social hierarchy as natural and necessary, whereas members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to see the hierarchy as in need of change. This effect has been replicated in a variety of intergroup contexts including ethnic groups in Israel (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2), India (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, Pratto, & Singh, 2010) and the US (Pratto et al., 1994), and also among artificial groups for whom group position was experimentally manipulated (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 1). Extending these ideas to the physiological level, Scheepers and Ellemers (2005) showed that individuals assigned to a disadvantaged group (but not those assigned to an advantaged group) exhibited a physiological threat response (indexed by increased blood pressure), immediately following group assignment. However, when the possibility of change in the hierarchy was introduced, participants assigned to the advantaged group (but not those assigned to the disadvantaged group) exhibited physiological threat, suggesting their distress at the risk of losing their advantage.

Taken together, this work establishes a systematic relationship between group power position (advantaged vs. disadvantaged) and the desire for social change. As we will describe later, this relationship is further moderated by contextual factors other than power (e.g., the legitimacy of the hierarchical system) and is sometimes attenuated (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). All else being equal, however, wherever hierarchical social relations between groups manifest, members of disadvantaged groups will tend to exhibit greater support for social change than members of advantaged groups. The initial work which addressed how group power influences individuals’ approach to intergroup encounters has drawn on this relationship between power and the desire for change in the status quo (Saguy et al., 2008; see also Bikmen & Sunar, 2013). This work demonstrated that group power systematically predicts what group members’ wish to talk about (and when) in intergroup encounters.

Specifically, members of advantaged groups preferred to focus the encounter on topics emphasising cross-group commonalities, and to de-emphasise topics that bring to light power differences between the groups. This effect was initially found among Ashkenazi Jews (Jews whose ethnic origins are in North America or Europe), who constitute a high-status group in Israeli society in relation to Mizrahi Jews (Jews whose ethnic origins are in Asia or Africa). Socio-economic differences between the groups, favouring the Ashkenazim, are well documented in levels of education, average income, and poverty rates (Smooha, 2003, 2008; see Nakash, Saguy, & Levav, 2012). In our initial work (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2) we asked 56 Ashkenazi Jews (50% women, $M_{age} = 45$; recruited through
snowball sampling originating in research assistants who distributed the survey to people they knew) to choose topics for an encounter with Mizrahi Jews. We found that they preferred to address topics that dealt with commonalities across group lines (e.g., “Discussing cultural similarities between the two groups”) over those that dealt with power differences between the groups (“Discussing affirmative action aimed at promoting Mizrahim”; see left panel of Figure 1). Similar effects were obtained among Muslims in Turkey (in relation to both Kurds and Armenians; Bikmen & Sunar, 2013), and among Whites in the United States (in relation to both Blacks and Asians; Bikmen & Durkin, 2014).

In contrast, members of disadvantaged groups expressed an equivalently high interest in focusing on both commonalities, and power differences, such that their desire to emphasise power differences in the encounter was significantly greater than that of advantaged group members. For example, Mizrahi Jews ($N = 81$, $56\%$ women, $M_{age} = 45$) wanted to discuss issues related to cross-group commonalities with Ashkenazi Jews to a similar extent that they wanted to address issues related to power differences between the groups (see right panel of Figure 1)—with the latter preference being significantly higher than that of Ashkenazi Jews (Saguy et al., 2008).

We next turn to consider the underlying reasons behind these group-based preferences by proposing that they are, at least to some extent, strategic—that is, they serve the motivation for social change among disadvantaged groups and for stability among advantaged groups. To that end, we will consider the potential functionality of different types of intergroup interactions for promoting change in the status quo.

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure1.png)

**Figure 1.** Desire to address commonalities and power differences among Ashkenazi Jews (advantaged group) and Mizrahi Jews (disadvantaged group). The ratings were done on a 1–7 scale. © 2008 By <SAGE Publications Ltd.>>/<SAGE Publications, Inc.>>. All rights reserved. Reproduced from Saguy et al. (2008) with permission of <SAGE Publications Ltd.>>/<SAGE Publications, Inc.>>. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
Encounters that have traditionally been considered “optimal” for changing attitudes involve a focus on a common goal, or cooperation between groups (see Allport, 1954). Indeed, field applications of contact theory have typically resulted in encounters that are centred on superordinate goals and afford opportunities for the formation of acquaintance and friendships between group members (see Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). Notable examples are the Jigsaw Classroom (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997) and the countless encounters between groups in conflict (e.g., Palestinians and Israelis) that centre discussions on common themes and similarities between the groups (see Nadler & Saguy, 2004). The primary goal of such encounters has been to lead to improved attitudes between the groups such that more harmonious relations can develop.

Until very recently the question of “who benefits” from such encounters—and from an emphasis on commonalities—was rarely raised. Indeed, the assumption has tended to be that advantaged and disadvantaged group members alike are benefiting from these optimal encounters.

In recent years this assumption has been challenged by scholars who have pointed to a potential disjuncture between optimal forms of contact and the development of attitudes pertaining to changes in the group-based hierarchy (e.g., Dixon et al., 2012; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). The central argument in this line of thinking is that the focus on pleasant and cooperative relations works to diminish the tendency to view the groups in “us” versus “them” terms. Instead, optimal forms of contact promote either an individuating view of outgroup members (Brewer & Miller, 1984), or a view of the outgroup as part of a common super-ordinate category (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2009). These orientations, even though they may drive positive outgroup attitudes and emotions, are at odds with the psychological processes needed for collective action to occur (see, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009). Indeed, efforts to promote social change emerge from an awareness of group-based injustice and recognition of differential intergroup access to important resources (see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Moreover, collective action among the disadvantaged is motivated by anger towards advantaged groups over perceived group-based injustice (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). These orientations (awareness of group-based inequality, injustice, and outgroup-directed anger) are considered less likely to develop when intergroup encounters distract attention away from intergroup comparisons and differences (Dixon et al., 2012; Saguy et al., 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009).

Thus, by focusing individuals’ attention on commonalities between the groups, “optimal” contact may, inadvertently, serve to reinforce existing status relations. Several lines of work, which have primarily focused on members of disadvantaged groups, offer support for this idea. As described earlier, while
intergroup contact was associated with White South Africans’ support for egalitarian practices, for South African Blacks intergroup contact was associated with less support for such policies (Dixon et al., 2007). These effects were replicated in another study conducted in South Africa (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011), while further indicating that, for Blacks, the negative association between contact and collective action was mediated by decreased perceptions of relative deprivation. Consistent findings were obtained among Arabs in Israel (Saguy et al., 2009, Study 2). We recruited 175 Arabs (61% female, $M_{age} = 30$), all Israeli citizens, via snowball sampling as well as in college classes, to participate in a short survey. We assessed participants’ positive contact with Jews (with items assessing the quantity of friendships), support for egalitarian change (with items such as “I support legislation through which Arabs will be guaranteed equal work opportunities as Jews”) and a range of potential mediators. We found that having more Jewish friends predicted better attitudes towards Jews and less attention to the inequality between the groups. Moreover, these outcomes were associated with greater perceptions of Jews as fair, which in turn was associated with less support for egalitarian policies. The negative association between positive intergroup contact and collective action intentions was further supported by longitudinal data from a study of college students in the United States, showing that for Latino Americans, more friendships with Whites were negatively associated with collective action intentions, with a similar (albeit marginally significant) association emerging among African Americans (Tropp, Hawi, Van Laar, & Levin, 2012).

Shedding more light on the mechanism accounting for these effects, Saguy and Chernyak-Hai (2012) examined the association between friendly intergroup contact and the tendency to attribute social disadvantage of minority groups to discrimination—a perception that is a key factor in mobilising subordinate groups to act for social change (Walker & Smith, 2002). Participants were Ethiopian Jews in Israel who, compared to non-Ethiopian Jews, suffer notable, enduring social disadvantage (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013) and encounter discrimination in various life domains (Nesher, 2011). We recruited 74 participants via snowball sampling, and asked them to judge a hypothetical scenario which described an Ethiopian Jew who got rejected for a desirable job. Specifically, participants read that an Ethiopian applicant went through a long and challenging application process for a demanding position. He was optimistic about getting the job, having gone through all stages rather successfully. Nevertheless, at the end he was rejected. After reading this scenario, which left the reasons for rejection ambiguous, participants indicated whether they attributed the rejection to discrimination by answering the following question: “The reason why the applicant got rejected is probably the discrimination that Ethiopians encounter in Israel”. Results revealed that experiences of commonality-focused contact with non-Ethiopian Jews were associated with lower tendencies to make such attributions ($b = -.13$, $SE = .05$, $t = -2.77$). Indeed, further analyses suggested that this effect
was mediated by perceptions of the social system as legitimate and perceptions of
the outgroup as trustworthy. Consistent findings were obtained among members
of the Maori, a disadvantaged group in New Zealand, for whom having more
friends from the dominant group (New Zealand Europeans) was associated with
the legitimisation of inequality, which in turn predicted less support for reparative
social policies (Sengupta & Sibley, 2013).

It is important to recognise that the effects of the emphasis on commonalities
in intergroup encounters—and the blurring of power differences—are not evenly
distributed across the high- and low-power groups. That is, factors that contribute
to the maintenance of the status quo and to the reduced desire for system
challenge disproportionately benefit high-power groups (who experience relative
advantage as things stand) over low-power group members. As such, the choice
to focus intergroup encounters on commonalities vs. differences is not simply a
question of taste or abstract preference, but can be an important strategic tool that
benefits one’s group over the counterpart. Thus, by emphasising commonalities
and de-emphasising power differences, high-status groups may reduce tension
and avoid contentious issues, while further reinforcing the status quo favouring
their own group. By contrast, addressing issues that are at the heart of the power
relations may pose a threat to current hierarchical relations because bringing
them to light can promote awareness of the inequality. Stated differently, relative
to issues that are rooted in commonalities, addressing topics that are at the heart
of power differences between groups may be more contentious and difficult to
discuss, but at the same time may promote the possibility of changes to the status
quo. In recent work we have applied these ideas to the realm of intergroup
negotiations, another form of intergroup encounter specifically considering poli-
tical solutions to conflict. We elaborate on this work in the next section.

Intergroup negotiations in the context of power relations

In the context of negotiations, considering the factors that influence the willing-
ness to engage in contact with the other side is especially important given that
a willingness to negotiate is a critical first step in the process of conflict resolu-
tion (Kelman, 1987), and one that cannot be taken for granted. For example, the
peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has been put on hold numerous
times due to one of the two sides indicating a lack of willingness to negotiate
with the other side (e.g., Greenberg, 2012). Our work takes into account insights
from the research on group power and intergroup contact in assuming that
advantaged and disadvantaged group members bring their differing orientations
towards change in the status quo to the negotiating table.

Specifically, in multi-issue negotiations, issues can differ in their potential
consequence to the status quo (i.e., the potential for any changes or new agree-
ments on these issues to influence the existing power balance between the two
sides). For example, in the context of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, any
changes or agreements made on the issue of final borders between the two sides are likely to be more consequential than any agreements reached on the distribution of water resources (even though both issues may be perceived as important). Similarly, in management–labour negotiations, issues surrounding salary tend to be perceived as more consequential to the status quo than the number of allowed sick days.

Drawing on research on power-based preferences for discussing commonalities versus differences, we reasoned that advantaged group members would be more willing to negotiate when they received an invitation to negotiate from the other side with a negotiating agenda that delayed the discussion of more consequential issues until after the discussion of less-consequential issues. Conversely, we expected low-power group members to show the reverse preference, indicating more willingness to negotiate when consequential issues, at the heart of the power balance between the two sides, were prioritised (vs. delayed) in the proposed negotiating agenda. We expected these preferences to reflect the groups’ strategic motivations regarding changes to the status quo. That is, we predicted that the high-power group’s preference for delaying discussion of consequential issues would be mediated by threat at the prospect of changes to the status quo implied by immediately discussing issues at the core of their advantage. In contrast, we expected the low-power group’s preference for beginning with consequential issues to reflect their eagerness for changing the status quo and their fear that their counterpart was attempting to stall change when they proposed to discuss less-consequential issues first.

Indeed, we found support for these ideas across several experiments using both real-world and experimental contexts. Specifically, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, we asked 123 Palestinian students at a university in the West Bank (62% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.97$ years, $SD = 4.96$) in the autumn of 2010 to play the role of a negotiator from their own group, receiving an invitation to negotiate purportedly from an Israeli negotiating delegation (Kteily et al., 2013, Study 1). In the invitation to negotiate we manipulated whether the Israeli side proposed to begin with discussing more-consequential issues (e.g., the status of Jerusalem, the right of return, and final borders) and then less-consequential issues (e.g., the distribution of water resources, agricultural arrangements), or the reverse issue order. Participants were then asked to indicate how willing they would be to accept the invitation to negotiate (on a scale ranging from 1 = not willing at all, to 7 = very willing). As indicated in Figure 2, results revealed that Palestinians were significantly more willing to negotiate when they received an invitation from Israel that proposed to begin by discussing consequential issues rather than delaying them.

The exact opposite pattern of results was obtained among a sample of Israeli Jews ($N = 253$; 51% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.86$ years, $SD = 12.58$). Participants, who were all train passengers recruited in autumn 2010 as well, were presented with an invitation to negotiate, this time coming from a Palestinian delegation. The
invitation either prioritised or delayed the negotiation of consequential issues (as in the Palestinian study). Results revealed that Israelis were significantly more willing to negotiate when Palestinians proposed to leave consequential issues until later as opposed to when they sought to begin with them. As can be seen in Figure 2, an analysis considering both samples (Israelis vs. Palestinians) and both types of invitations (consequential first vs. consequential later), resulted in a significant interaction.

We replicated these findings in additional studies using experimental groups that differed in power position. For example, in one of these studies we developed a novel scenario-based power manipulation (Kteily et al., 2013, Study 3). The scenario described a conflict (based on the fundamental features in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict) between “Group A” and “Group B”. A total of 300 American participants were recruited online through Amazon mTurk platform (52.7% female; M age = 32.71 years). Participants were told that Group A and Group B had been in conflict over a piece of land in “Raga” to which they felt entitled, and that, in a war between the two sides, Group A had gained control over the majority of the resources in “Raga”. Subsequently, we experimentally assigned participants to represent either the high-power group (Group A) or the low-power group (Group B). Analyses confirmed that both high- and low-power group members perceived Group A to be higher in power. As in our earlier studies, participants then received an invitation ostensibly from the other side which proposed either to begin by discussing the more-consequential issues first (i.e., control over water resources, control over oil resources) or after discussion of less-consequential issues (i.e., control over tourist area, control over olive

Figure 2. Willingness to negotiate among Israelis (High-power) and Palestinians (Low-power) as a function of proposed issue order. The dependent variable was measured on a 1–7 scale. © 2013 American Psychological Association. Reproduced from Kteily et al. (2013) with permission of the American Psychological Association. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder. The use of APA information does not imply endorsement by APA.
fields). Consistent with our earlier findings, whereas members of the high-power Group A were more willing to negotiate when the other side proposed to leave discussion of more-consequential issues until later, members of the low-power Group B were more willing to negotiate when they received the reverse issue order (see Figure 3).

Importantly, we also found support for our proposed mediating processes, which emphasised group members’ orientations towards changes to the status quo. Specifically, high-power group members who received an invitation that prioritised consequential issues (vs. delaying them) felt an increased sense of threat at changes to the status quo (sample item: “I found the other side’s plans to be aggressive”), which mediated their willingness to enter negotiations (see Figure 4, upper panel; Kteily et al., 2013, Study 3). Conversely, low-power group members’ preference for beginning with consequential issues was mediated by a fear of stalling (sample item: “The other group seems to be simply attempting to stall the negotiations and waste time”) reflecting their fear that the high-power group, proposing to leave consequential issues until later, wanted to delay changes to the status quo (see Figure 4, lower panel).

In another study conducted with Israeli train passengers (104 participants; 60.8% female; M age = 27.00 years, SD = 9.85; Kteily et al., 2013, Study 5), we found further evidence for the role that group-based orientations towards the
status quo play in advantaged group members’ preference for agenda order preferences. Specifically, we found that Israeli Jews’ preference to leave consequential issues until later was moderated by their perceptions of the extent to which the respective agenda orders influenced Palestinians’ relative power. Among Israelis who believed that beginning with more consequential issues (rather than delaying them) would be more likely to increase Palestinians’
relative power, we observed a heightened preference for negotiating in the "consequential later" condition. Conversely, among the (smaller) subset of Israelis who instead perceived that leaving consequential issues until later would be more likely to increase Palestinians’ relative power, we observed a (non-significant) tendency for the willingness to negotiate to be higher in the "consequential first" condition (see Figure 5).

These findings extend the conclusions we derived earlier from research on intergroup contact to a different mode of intergroup encounter (i.e., intergroup negotiations). Specifically, we again observed that group power—and associated motivations towards the status quo—shape the preference for the content of intergroup encounters. This research suggests that these conclusions also apply to negotiations between groups engaged in intractable and violent conflict, as well as establishing that they generalise to several negotiation contexts. That is, members of high- and low-power groups (both those affected by real violent conflict, and those asked to imagine it in the lab) do not just prefer to talk about commonalities vs. (power-relevant) differences, respectively, when they encounter one another in intergroup interactions, but in fact are also more likely to accept or reject proposals to negotiate on behalf of their group as a function of whether these proposals prioritise or delay negotiation of the most power-central, consequential issues.
We next turn to consider how power-based preferences for the content of contact are further shaped by additional contextual factors extending beyond the power differential itself.

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON POWER-BASED MOTIVATIONS

Our work rests on the notion that members of disadvantaged groups have a stronger motivation for changing the status quo relative to members of advantaged groups. However, as stated earlier, these orientations are critically shaped by the broader social context in which the intergroup relationship is embedded. Extensive research within the social identity framework focuses on how contextual factors shape the strategies that disadvantaged groups adopt to manage their threatened identity (e.g., Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). This work has demonstrated that when group boundaries are well defined, with limited opportunities to move individually to another group, members of disadvantaged groups will likely seek to advance the position of their group as a whole (e.g., engage in collective efforts to advance social change). This motivation, however, has been found to depend on the extent to which the hierarchy between groups is perceived to be secure: namely, the extent to which the status quo is seen to be stable and legitimate (Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1999; Ellemers et al., 1993). When power relations are perceived as potentially changeable (unstable) and as morally wrong (illegitimate), attempts to advance one’s group status are likely to be particularly pronounced (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Ellemers et al., 1993; Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2008; Turner & Brown, 1978). Under these conditions of status insecurity, alternatives to the status quo seem most plausible and justified, promoting low-status group members’ efforts to advance their group’s status.

Far less research, particularly with respect to the joint influence of stability and legitimacy, has been devoted to strategies that advantaged groups adopt in order to defend and maintain their positive social identity (cf. Turner & Brown, 1978). In terms of stability, when status relations are perceived as unstable, members of high-status groups are more motivated to defend their threatened position. For example, Georgesen and Harris (2006) demonstrated that participants assigned to a high-power role were more discriminatory towards subordinates when their advantaged position was more tentative. In addition, advantaged group members, and particularly those in favour of group-based hierarchy, are more likely to engage in actions that reinforce the dependency of disadvantaged groups, such as offering help, when they perceive their group’s advantage as less secure (Halabi et al., 2008; see also Jackson & Esses, 2000). Similarly, there is evidence that when exposed to a threat associated with one’s privileged status, advantaged
group members (American Whites) increase their support for ideologies that legitimise existing disparities (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009).

With regards to legitimacy, perceptions of illegitimate advantage can threaten the moral image of members of high-status groups, which may weaken their motivation to defend the hierarchy, and increase their willingness to consider changes to the status quo (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, recognition of illegitimate advantage can provoke a variety of moral emotions (e.g., shame or guilt about the ingroup’s actions; Branscombe & Doojse, 2004; Lickel, Schmader, & Barquissau, 2004) and lead members of advantaged groups to increase their support for social equality (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006). For example, Iyer and colleagues (2003) have demonstrated that information that aroused collective guilt among White Americans increased their support for reparations toward African Americans for past misdeeds. The effects of illegitimate hierarchy on advantaged group members’ responses resonate with work on system justification, which distinguishes between a motive to develop and maintain a positive image of one’s group, and a system justification motive—a need to view the status quo as fair and legitimate (Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001). Evidence regarding the illegitimacy of the status relations creates an inconsistency between these motives for advantaged group members, who may consequently prioritise the need to restore equity and justice over the motive to protect their group. Thus, although members of advantaged groups may, on average, be relatively unlikely to desire change in the status quo, raising their awareness of the illegitimacy of status relations can increase their support for social equality.

However, unlike research on disadvantaged groups, research examining reactions of advantaged groups to illegitimate hierarchy has rarely considered the role of the stability of the power relations as a moderator. Under clearly unstable power relations, there is a possibility that the threat of losing status might overcome other orientations, including the commitment to equality, even when status relations seem illegitimate. Recent work by Saguy and Dovidio (2013) drew on these insights from social identity theory to investigate the combined effect of status stability and legitimacy on the way both advantaged and disadvantaged group members approach intergroup encounters. These authors reasoned that if the desire to address commonalities and/or power differences during contact reflects attempts to serve group interests, these preferences should be shaped by beliefs about the stability and legitimacy of status relations in systematic ways.

Insecure status relations and preferences for the content of contact

Recognising the illegitimacy of their group’s advantage can motivate members of advantaged groups to increase their support for social equality (e.g., Iyer et al., 2003; Miron et al., 2006). Applying this perspective to the realm of intergroup
contact, we found in earlier work (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2) that framing disparities between ethnic groups in Israel as illegitimate led Ashkenazi Jews, the advantaged ethnic group, to be more interested in talking about power differences with Mizrahi Jews. This prior work, however, did not take into account the potentially moderating role of the stability of the power relations.

As described earlier, research has demonstrated that the stability of hierarchical relations plays a pivotal role in determining how members of advantaged groups react in general, and particularly towards members of disadvantaged groups (Georgesen & Harris, 2006; Halabi et al., 2008; Knowles et al., 2009; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). As such, views regarding the stability of their power may also interact with perceptions of the illegitimacy of the power relations in influencing advantaged group members’ preferences for the content of intergroup encounters. When hierarchical relations are seen as illegitimate but stable, acknowledging power differences may not undermine the advantaged group’s position because the hierarchy is secure. In fact, under conditions of stable and illegitimate hierarchy, discussing issues pertaining to power may alleviate advantaged group members’ moral concerns without risking their privileges. However, the threat of losses to power elicited by an unstable hierarchy may loom large for members of high-power groups (Georgesen & Harris, 2006; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; see also Saguy & Kteily, 2011), leading them to avoid the discussion of power differences, even when the hierarchy is considered illegitimate.

The interaction between stability and legitimacy may be similarly important for disadvantaged group members. Although our previous work has revealed that disadvantaged group members generally want to address commonalities to the same extent that they want to address power (Saguy et al., 2008), their desire to discuss commonalities may decrease when hierarchical relations are unstable and morally questionable (i.e., illegitimate). Indeed, whereas stability and legitimacy can independently influence strategies for social change, their combination (i.e., unstable and illegitimate status hierarchies) has been shown to produce an especially potent impetus for social change among members of disadvantaged groups (Commins & Lockwood, 1979; Ellemers et al., 1993; Tajfel, 1981; Turner & Brown, 1978; Vaughan, 1978). Under these conditions, maintaining positive connections with those high in power can become less relevant for—and indeed detrimental to—serving the interests of disadvantaged groups. In fact, harmonious relations with the advantaged group might even interfere with attempts to advance change by limiting intergroup competition, which can be instrumental for social change (see Dixon et al., 2012; Saguy et al., 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Thus, when their group position is least fixed and when possibilities for change seem possible (i.e., the status quo is perceived to be unstable in addition to being illegitimate), disadvantaged group members’ desire to address commonalities may diminish, resulting in a clear preference for addressing power differences rather than discussing commonalities.
Testing these ideas, in two studies Saguy and Dovidio (2013) assessed the interactive role of power stability and legitimacy, looking at the attitudes and preferences of both advantaged and disadvantaged group members. In the first study they examined whether stability moderates advantaged group members’ willingness to address power differences when the hierarchy is illegitimate. As in previous work (Saguy et al., 2008), participants were again Ashkenazi Jews (an advantaged group relative to Mizrahi Jews) who were recruited online via a survey company in Israel. A total of 93 participants (M age = 28.69, SD = 4.76) answered a brief survey in which they were asked to rate their perceptions of the stability (sample item: “To what extent do you think it is likely that in the coming years the groups would become more equal?”) and legitimacy (e.g., “To what extent do you feel the inequalities between the groups are unfair versus fair?”) of the asymmetrical relations between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. We subsequently assessed participants’ perceptions of the desirability of different discussion topics for a future intergroup encounter. As in our earlier work, some of the topics addressed power differences (e.g., “discussing affirmative action aimed at promoting Mizrahim in universities and work places”) between the groups and some addressed aspects that both groups share in common (“discussing cultural similarities between the two groups”). All items were rated on a 1 (would not like to discuss) to 7 (very much support discussing) scale.

Participants rated the legitimacy (M = 3.20, SD = 1.55) and stability (M = 3.26, SD = 1.40) of power relations as slightly below the mid-point of the scale. Results revealed that the stability and legitimacy perceptions did not influence the level of desire to address commonalities, which tended to be fairly high (M = 4.74, SD = 1.63). The desire to discuss power differences, however, was predicted by an interaction between perceived legitimacy and perceived stability of the hierarchy. This interaction indicated that for those who perceived the power relations as stable, there was a significant effect of legitimacy on the desire to address power differences. Specifically, the more advantaged group members perceived the hierarchy as illegitimate, the more willing they were to discuss issues related to power differences between the groups. However, for participants who saw the status relations as unstable, there was no effect of legitimacy on the desire to address power-related issues (see Figure 6). These results indicate that perceiving the hierarchy as illegitimate is not enough to predict high-status group members’ willingness to address power differences. Such willingness is moderated by perceptions of stability, such that only among those who see their advantaged position as secure do stronger perceptions of illegitimacy predict willingness to discuss status differences.

Further corroborating this interpretation, additional analysis revealed that, for participants who perceived the status relations to be illegitimate (1 SD below the mean) but stable (1 SD above the mean), the willingness to address commonalities was not significantly different from their desire to discuss power difference (Ms = 4.8 vs. 4.22; B = 0.71, SE = 0.42, t = 1.68, p = .10). However, among
participants who considered the status relations as both illegitimate and unstable, there was a significant preference to address commonalities over power (Ms = 5.03 vs. 3.53; \( B = 1.377, \ SE = 0.31, \ t = 4.44, \ p < .001 \)). The preference to address commonalities over power differences was also significant among participants who perceived the status relations to be legitimate and unstable (Ms = 4.72 vs. 3.50 respectively; \( B = 1.09, \ SE = .32, \ t = 3.43, \ p = .001 \)), and among those who perceived status relations to be legitimate and stable (Ms = 4.39 vs. 2.83; \( B = 1.26, \ SE = .37, \ t = 5.65, \ p < .001 \)).

In a second study Saguy and Dovidio (2013) examined both advantaged and disadvantaged group members’ contact preferences by experimentally manipulating group status, and the stability and status legitimacy of status differences. Participants were undergraduate students at the University of Connecticut (N = 179; \( M \ age = 19, \ SD = 1.64 \)). The study was described as dealing with future discussion encounters between students from different academic institutions in Connecticut. To manipulate group position, participants believed the future encounter would involve students from either a more prestigious university (Yale), or a less prestigious school (Eastern Connecticut State University, referred to as “Eastern” hereafter), rendering their institution’s relative status as low or high, respectively (see Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001).
Participants in both status conditions were then presented with a fictional newspaper article which described differences in socioeconomic achievements between graduates from UConn and, depending on the condition, Yale or Eastern. To manipulate the legitimacy of the status relations, the reasons for the differences in socioeconomic success were described as reflecting either actual differences in students’ abilities or unearned privileges on the part of the advantaged group (Saguy et al., 2008; Schmader et al., 2001). To manipulate the stability of the status relations, a paragraph titled “future estimates” followed the legitimacy manipulation, in which the differences in socioeconomic success among the two schools’ alumni were described as either likely or unlikely to change over the coming years.

Participants then rated their desire to discuss several topics in a future encounter between members of the schools. Some of the topics focused on commonalities (e.g., “Discussing living in Connecticut”) and some focused on the power differences between the schools (e.g., “Discussing the advantages available to students at one school compared to the other”). In the advantaged condition the items referred to differences between students at UConn and Eastern, and in the disadvantaged condition the items referred to differences between students at UConn and Yale. We then examined the effects of the stability and legitimacy manipulations on the desire to address commonalities and differences. This analysis was conducted separately for participants assigned to the disadvantaged condition (i.e., believed they were to interact with a student from Yale) and for those assigned to the advantaged condition (i.e., believed they were to interact with a student from Eastern).

Results revealed that, as with Ashkenazim in Study 1, participants assigned to the advantaged condition had a consistently strong desire to address commonalities across levels of stability and legitimacy. Further consistent with the previous study, the high-power group’s desire to address power differences was comparable to the desire to address commonalities only when the status relations were both illegitimate and stable. When faced with an unstable hierarchy, information about the illegitimacy of one’s position produced a clear desire to emphasise commonalities over power differences (See Table 1). Consistent with prior research that showed that desire for social change is strongest when the hierarchy is perceived as unstable and illegitimate (Ellemers et al., 1993; Tajfel, 1981), results revealed that participants assigned to the disadvantaged condition showed the greatest preference for discussing power differences in the unstable-illegitimate condition. Moreover, disadvantaged group members’ desire to discuss commonalities was also lowest in this condition.

This study provided experimental support for our predictions regarding the contextual influences of group position, perceived legitimacy, and perceived stability on preferences for the content of contact. The fact that members of both the advantaged group and the disadvantaged group in this study were students at the same university, randomly assigned to believe they would be
interacting with students from either a lower-status institution or a higher-status institution, makes these results particularly compelling. Students experimentally assigned to the advantaged group condition showed the same general preference for emphasising commonalities over power differences in intergroup encounters that we had observed in our earlier research on intergroup contact and negotiations. However, as with high-power Ashkenazi Jews, there was one subset of the advantaged group who exhibited an equivalent desire for addressing commonalities and power differences: those who saw their advantaged status as morally wrong (illegitimate), but who nevertheless perceived their group's dominant position in the hierarchy as stable. However, perceptions of illegitimate advantage did not produce a willingness to address power differences among those who presumably felt threatened by the possibility of a narrowing advantage. For these participants, the insecurity of their position seemed to have predominated, rising above legitimacy-related concerns in determining their preferences for the content of the intergroup encounter. Indeed, this is consistent with the mediating role of threat that we had observed in high-power group members’ preference for leaving consequential issues until later in negotiations (Kteily et al., 2013, Studies 3 and 4).

Perceptions of status stability and illegitimacy also interacted to influence disadvantaged group members’ attitudes and preferences for the content of the intergroup encounter. When students were randomly assigned to be low in status, and believed the status relations were both unstable and illegitimate, they showed a distinct preference to prioritise the discussion of power differences over commonalities. In all other conditions, disadvantaged group members displayed the pattern we found in our previous work (Saguy et al., 2008) of wanting to

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**TABLE 1**

Desire to address commonalities and power differences as a function of the perceived stability and legitimacy of status relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stable</th>
<th>Unstable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Illegitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantaged group members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonality</td>
<td>5.30 (1.14)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power differences</td>
<td>4.36 (1.62)</td>
<td>4.94 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged group members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonality</td>
<td>5.10 (.92)</td>
<td>5.25 (.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power differences</td>
<td>5.18 (1.51)</td>
<td>5.03 (1.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results for the advantaged condition are presented in the top panel and results for the disadvantaged condition are in the bottom panel. The ratings were done on a 1–7 scale. © 2013 By SAGE Publications Ltd. All rights reserved. Reproduced from Saguy and Dovidio (2013) with permission of SAGE Publications Ltd. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
discuss commonalities and power differences to similar extents. This demonstr-
strates that when possibilities for change in their status were most evident,
disadvantaged group members wanted to address status differences the most,
corroborating the strategic value of discussing status differences in intergroup
encounters in order to advance change. These findings are consistent with the
notion that it is not enough for disadvantaged group members to feel unjustly
treated in order to act for change; they also need to believe in the feasibility of
their efforts (Klandermans, 1984; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999;
vanzomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012).

Moreover, disadvantaged group members’ particularly weakened desire to
address commonalities when status relations were unstable and illegitimate sug-
gests that they recognize that helping to generate a harmonious atmosphere with
the advantaged group might sometimes undermine, rather than promote, their
group’s interests. This is also consistent with the fact that low-power group
members in our negotiations research preferred to talk about more-consequential
issues first: although discussing consequential issues might be less likely to
generate a harmonious atmosphere, it may promote the low-power group’s inter-
ests because consequential issues have the greatest potential to affect changes to
the status quo. Under conditions where social change seems possible (perhaps
highlighted when groups are at the negotiating table and considering political
changes to their intergroup relationship), members of disadvantaged groups
might choose to actively compromise intergroup harmony in favour of promoting
support for ingroup advancement by raising attention to power differences.

In sum, the results of our studies assessing contextual factors influencing
preferences for the content of intergroup contact suggest that perceptions of
stability and legitimacy matter, for both advantaged and disadvantaged group
members. Moreover, the findings suggest that looking at either of these two
factors in isolation might obscure an important part of the story: indeed, advan-
taged and disadvantaged group members’ preferences for what to discuss in
intergroup interactions may diverge most strongly when the intergroup relation-
ship appears to be both unstable and illegitimate.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE
CONSIDERATIONS

In this work we attempted to shed light on processes pertaining to individuals’
expectations and preferences for intergroup encounters, whether these are
between members of different communities or at the level of political negotia-
tions between groups. Gaining insight into such processes is of both theoretical
and practical importance, helping to reveal the dynamics that shape people’s
willingness to approach the other side and advance conciliatory solutions to
intergroup tension and conflict. Moreover, such focus can lead to a deeper
understanding of how group members interface with one another particularly
when it comes to discussing revisions to their intergroup relationship. Such questions have taken on increasing importance in recent years with waves of revolutionary protests that have swept the Middle East, as well as debates surrounding immigration and economic equality in Europe and the US.

Our work demonstrates clearly that a deeper understanding of individuals’ preferences for the content of intergroup encounters—a question that has received very little empirical attention thus far—necessitates a consideration of their group’s power position. Whereas members of advantaged groups want to primarily emphasise commonalities between the groups while de-emphasising issues related to power differences, disadvantaged group members wish to address issues pertaining to power much more than members of advantaged groups. Extending our work on intergroup encounters at the community or grassroots level, we demonstrate that these orientations also apply to the realm of political negotiations. Indeed, members of advantaged groups wish to enter negotiations that delay the discussion of contentious and consequential issues whereas members of disadvantaged groups have a clear desire to enter negotiations that prioritise the discussion of these very issues.

An important theoretical contribution of our work is its integration of power differences with other structural elements in intergroup hierarchies such as legitimacy and stability. Although these factors have been studied for some time within social identity theory (Bettencourt et al., 2001; Doosje et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 1993), they have received relatively little empirical attention or theoretical integration in the context of intergroup encounters such as intergroup contact (or, indeed, intergroup negotiations). Our research explicitly examines how perceived legitimacy and perceived stability interact to affect the power-based preferences for the content of intergroup encounters that we document. Specifically, we find that when status differences are considered stable, members of advantaged groups may be more willing to address power differences (which are considered illegitimate), because their advantage is not threatened. Discussing inequalities in this condition may serve their basic psychological need for moral acceptance (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008) while not jeopardising their group’s advantaged position in the social hierarchy. This pattern of findings suggests that when members of high-power groups recognise unjust advantage, the kinds of actions they are willing to take to amend it may be limited to those that do not threaten the position of their group overall.

Given our findings for the high-power group, future research might investigate how members of advantaged groups—when pushed to do so—actually discuss issues related to power differences in intergroup interactions when the hierarchy is considered illegitimate and either stable or unstable. It could be the case that, under conditions of unstable status relations, power differences are discussed in ways that could re-legitimise, rather than challenge, the hierarchy. Future research might thus include topics about power differences that would either lead to greater sensitivity to unfairness (e.g., to discuss how historical or
economic forces contribute subtly to disadvantage) or are likely to produce system-justifying dialogue (e.g., how differences in effort or motivation may underlie current status differences). Indeed, recent work has demonstrated that when advantaged group members discuss power in a way that delegitimises (rather than legitimises) the hierarchy, cross-group contact does not undermine disadvantaged group members’ interest in collective action (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013). Relatedly, future research in the realm of negotiations should address whether the high-power group’s general preference for delaying the discussion of more consequential issues is diminished under conditions of perceived illegitimacy, and especially when the system seems relatively stable.

Together, our findings point to the value of investigating the impact of insecure status relations not only on how people approach intergroup contact and negotiations, but also on how they actually behave and are affected by different types of encounters. It could be the case that, under insecure and illegitimate status relations, encounters that focus on commonalities will be particularly ineffective for promoting positive intergroup relations because disadvantaged-group members may actively seek to change the topic of the encounters. Similarly, even if high-power group members might prefer to leave consequential issues until later when status relations seem unstable, this might be just the condition under which they find low-power group members most insistent that negotiations begin with consequential issues first.

Our findings also have practical implications for how to structure encounters in ways that make them more likely to affect system change. Thus, it is clear from our findings that more than just highlighting the illegitimacy of the power asymmetry, low-power group members seeking the assent of high-power group members in discussing and implementing change will need to mitigate the associated instability threat. This might be achieved, for example, by committing to working together with the high-power group in the future to achieve mutual gains rather than using their improved position in attempts to displace their counterpart. Our findings also suggest that third parties seeking to promote effective encounters between members of conflicting groups will need to be sensitive to what topics are discussed, as well as the climate in which they are discussed. In our view a successful intergroup encounter not only increases positive attitudes between the two sides, but also—and just as importantly—avoids reinforcing a hierarchical status quo (see also Dixon et al., 2012). As such, facilitators of intergroup encounters (at all levels, from discussion leaders in cross-group interactions to third-party envoys in formal intergroup negotiations) may wish to ensure that the encounter addresses issues of power imbalances, but in a collaborative tenor that avoids alienating the high-power group.

Future research may also incorporate insights from research on individual differences, relatively understudied in the context of intergroup encounters. Indeed, research shows that there exist important individual differences in variables such as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994) and...
system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994) that are highly relevant to the motivations to resist vs. advance changes in the status quo. Thus, for example, research has shown that it is particularly low-power individuals that are low on SDO who are invested in challenging hierarchical intergroup relations (Henry, Sidanius, Levin, & Pratto, 2005). Moreover, research suggests that whereas high-power group members high in SDO tend to resist changes to the status quo, high-power group members who are low on SDO are more amenable to such change (Pratto et al., 2014). These orientations may therefore further impact how high- and low-power group members approach intergroup encounters and are affected by them.

Indeed, there has been research documenting the effects of intergroup encounters (typically intergroup contact at the interpersonal level) on attitudes as a function of individuals’ pre-existing ideological orientation. For example, contact was found to improve the attitudes of individuals high in SDO (and other ideologies reflecting intolerance) to the same (or even greater) extent than more tolerant individuals (e.g., Dhont, Roets, & Van Hiel, 2011; Hodson, 2011). Nevertheless, there has been little discussion—including in our own work thus far—of how intergroup encounters are themselves affected by the ideological orientations of the individual participants. For example, it may be the case that for advantaged-group members who are low on SDO, discussions of power differences might not be threatening and might even be desired, as means of undermining the hierarchy. As such, intergroup encounters that bring together low-SDO individuals from conflicting groups can end up involving discussion of issues related to power differences and change, and less likely to be hamstrung by perceptions of threat. These encounters may result in important points of convergence—that might subsequently be “marketed” by low-SDO members of high-power groups to their high-SDO counterparts, who might be more amenable to considering the ideas coming from ingroup members than they would have been had they heard them directly from the outgroup. Although the ideal configurations remain to be worked out and tested empirically, the broader point is that a successful treatment of the effects of intergroup encounters on influencing intergroup relations (and, in particular, achieving changes to hierarchy) will require an appreciation of how all these factors—power differentials, stability, and legitimacy —interact with the participants’ ideological orientations.

In addition to topics such as individual differences that our work has not yet addressed, there are other limitations that deserve acknowledgement. For one, a relatively large proportion of the studies we describe have been conducted in the contexts of Israeli society (e.g., Ashkenazi–Mizrahi relations) and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Although the majority of the ideas described in our work have also been investigated in other contexts (e.g., Kteily et al., 2013, Studies 3 and 4; Saguy et al., 2008, Study 1; Saguy et al., 2009, Study 1), research in this area would nevertheless benefit from an examination of these ideas in additional real-world intergroup contexts. Indeed, many of the ideas in our work should apply equally in the context of gender and race relations, as well as, for example,
in the context of the relationship between immigrants to Europe and members of the host countries. Relatively, although we conducted our work both among students and among members of the general population, future work would benefit from the use of larger and more representative samples.

Moreover, although the research that we described on intergroup contact addressed issues of legitimacy and stability directly, our research on intergroup negotiations has not yet examined these factors and how they influence the willingness to negotiate. Furthermore, our research on intergroup negotiations would benefit from being examined not only among group members playing the role of a representative of their group, but also among actual practitioners involved in real-world negotiations between groups. A related limitation of our work on intergroup encounters is that it has focused thus far primarily on two ends of the spectrum: encounters at the interpersonal level (in the form of dialogue) and encounters at the political level specifically considering political change. A more complete examination of our ideas would benefit from also examining encounters that fall somewhere in between. For example, it would be important to examine structured intergroup encounters (such as dialogue groups) that specifically address the conflict (and thus move beyond “pure” interpersonal contact) but without necessarily centring on negotiations per se (a topic that brings with it its own set of pre-existing attitudes and assumptions about how best to posture and strategise).

To conclude, the studies and ideas outlined in this article suggest the importance for research on intergroup encounters of taking seriously the role of power and status differences in influencing the process. Whereas prior research has already suggested that power differences can influence the effects of intergroup encounters on its participants, the research described here further argues that power differences—and associated orientations towards changing the status quo—influence the types of encounters in which high- and low-power group members are likely to want to engage, and the topics they strategically seek to address. Moreover, these studies place the effect of power on intergroup encounters in a broader social context, taking into account how group-based orientations are influenced by facets of the intergroup relationship such as its legitimacy and stability, thus giving greater clarity to the conditions under which one can expect the general patterns observed to hold. Indeed, when change is possible and justifiable, a focus on commonalities—traditionally considered to be the hallmark of optimal contact—is less favoured by members of disadvantaged groups. Under these conditions, harmony might not be effective, or might even compromise attempts to advance change. Thus, although a focus on cooperative elements can successfully induce a pleasant atmosphere, it may, under certain conditions, better serve the interests and goals of members of advantaged groups than of disadvantaged groups.

Recognising the different ways by which advantaged and disadvantaged group members may approach intergroup encounters and be affected by them
is of crucial importance when considering the wide implementation of interventions. If such interventions inadvertently work to serve the needs of one group over the other they may ultimately do little to advance more positive intergroup relations. Understanding the complexity and range of consequences of what is typically considered as an “optimal” encounter is thus essential for creating a society that is both inclusive and just in structure and practice, not only in principle.

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