

Research article

Warm or competent? Improving intergroup relations by addressing threatened identities of advantaged and disadvantaged groups

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Abstract

Applying the Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation to contexts of group disparity, two studies examined how messages from outgroup representatives that affirmed the warmth or competence of advantaged or disadvantaged groups influenced their members' intergroup attitudes. Study 1 involved natural groups differing in status; Study 2 experimentally manipulated status. In both studies, advantaged-group members responded more favorably, reporting more positive outgroup attitudes and willingness to change the status quo toward equality, to messages reassuring their group's warmth. Disadvantaged-group members responded more favorably to messages affirming their group's competence. Study 2 further demonstrated that the effectiveness of reassuring a disadvantaged group's competence stemmed from restoring its threatened dimension of identity, irrespective of a change of the status quo. In line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), these results indicate that beyond the competition over tangible resources, groups are concerned with restoring threatened dimensions of their identities. Exchanging messages that remove identity-related threats may promote not only positive intergroup attitudes but also greater willingness to act collectively for intergroup equality. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Intuition suggests that conveying positive gestures and messages to members of another group is likely to promote positive intergroup attitudes and relations (Osgood, 1962). The Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), however, further proposes that the *specific* contents of such positive intergroup messages are critical to shaping the resulting intergroup attitudes. Research conducted within the framework of the Needs-Based Model (Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009) on the exchange of positive messages between victimized and perpetrating groups (e.g., Jews and Germans) has revealed that messages that satisfy the *unique* motivations of members of victimized and perpetrating groups were particularly effective in increasing their willingness to reconcile with each other. Specifically, members of victimized groups suffered from impairment to their sense of power and experienced an enhanced motivation for gaining power as a result. Consequently, they were more motivated to reconcile with the perpetrating group when the other group conveyed an empowering, rather than accepting, message to them. Members of perpetrating groups, in contrast, suffered from impairment to their moral image, which enhanced the anxiety of their members over social exclusion. Perpetrating groups consequently experienced an enhanced motivation for gaining

moral-social acceptance and therefore were more motivated to reconcile when the victimized group communicated an accepting message.

The goal of the present work, consisting of two experiments, was to explore how these previous insights into psychological needs associated with victim and perpetrator roles can be applied to better understand mutual relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Based on the premise that the social roles of “victims” and “perpetrators” correspond in several respects to those of advantaged and disadvantaged groups (see also Siem, von Oettingen, Mummendey, & Nadler, 2013), we incorporated general principles of intergroup perception, drawing mainly from the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and literature on the “Big-Two” (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008), to extend the Needs-Based Model to the context of status differentials between groups. In particular, we examined how the content of intergroup messages, which targeted different dimensions of disadvantaged and advantaged groups' identities (i.e., competence or warmth) and thus addressed different motivations, influenced their members' intergroup attitudes and willingness to act for social change. Applying the Needs-Based Model to contexts of intergroup inequality, we confronted two major challenges that we turn to discuss in the next two sections.

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Nature of Impaired Dimensions

We suggest that much in the same way that direct violence threatens victims' sense of power and perpetrators' moral image, group disparity threatens disadvantaged groups' competence and advantaged groups' warmth, the two fundamental identity dimensions identified by the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002). While there is strong similarity between these constructs, it is important to note that moral image and warmth, on one hand, or sense of power and competence, on the other, are not exactly the same. For example, as part of their research on agentic women, Rudman and Glick (2001) distinguished between competence and dominance, the latter referring to advancing one's interests at the expense of others. Correspondingly, Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007) showed that warmth and morality constitute separate dimensions of groups' identities. Nevertheless, we suggest that competence and power, on one hand, and warmth and moral image, on the other, can be subsumed under the same two broad, multifaceted categories—the “Big-Two” dimensions—that underlie various social judgments and perceptions (Abele et al., 2008). We further argue that different components within the Big-Two dimensions may become more salient as a function of the specific context: In contexts of direct violence, such as the ones examined so far within the Needs-Based Model's framework, groups may be motivated to restore their sense of power and moral image, whereas in contexts of group disparity, they may be particularly concerned about defying their stereotypical portrayal as incompetent or cold.

Indeed, competence and warmth are generally perceived in compensatory ways: When a group is perceived as high on one dimension, it tends to be perceived as low on the other (Kervyn, Yzerbyt, & Judd, 2010). Thus, disadvantaged groups are often stereotypically perceived as warm but incompetent, whereas advantaged groups are often stereotypically perceived as competent but cold and immoral (Fiske et al., 2002). Such stereotypic portrayals can arouse different identity threats among groups differing in status. Specifically, members of disadvantaged groups are likely to experience a threat to the competence dimension of their identity, whereas advantaged-group members may typically experience a threat to their warmth dimension (i.e., the “moral-social dimension”; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007).

Consistent with this suggestion, Bergsieker, Shelton, and Richeson (2010) found that within interpersonal interactions between Blacks and Latinos (disadvantaged groups in the USA) and Whites (an advantaged group), Blacks and Latinos were motivated to gain respect, whereas Whites were motivated to be liked. The motivation to gain respect or to be liked corresponds to the removal of threats to the competence and warmth dimensions, respectively, of their identities. Whereas Bergsieker and colleagues suggested that these divergent motivations may lead to misunderstandings and negative attitudes toward individual interaction partners, the present research studied the consequences of *addressing* these motivations in terms of improving positive intergroup attitudes and cooperation at the group level.

Meaning of Reconciliation in Contexts of Group Disparity

In the field of peace psychology, positive peace represents the promotion of social arrangements that reduce social, racial, gender, and economic injustices as barriers to peace (Christie,

Tint, Wagner, & DuNann Winter, 2008). (By contrast, negative peace refers to the cessation of direct violence.) Consistent with the definition of positive peace, we suggest that whereas in contexts of direct violence, reconciliation denotes “a changed psychological orientation toward the other” (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005, p. 301); when translated into contexts of group disparity, reconciliation may additionally mean readiness to support structural change toward equality. This additional aspect—willingness to act for social equality—is of particular importance in light of the findings that in contexts of group disparity, positive intergroup attitudes may be dissociated from collective action tendencies. Specifically, among disadvantaged groups, positive attitudes toward the advantaged group may reflect the justification of group disparity, which is related to reduced collective action tendencies (Saguy & Chemyak-Hai, 2012; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). Among advantaged groups, positive attitudes toward disadvantaged outgroups are often dissociated from willingness to act for changing the status quo to improve the situation of these outgroups because such action requires to give up power and privilege (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2008; Saguy et al., 2009). In summary, in terms of the ultimate outcomes of the reconciliation process (i.e., intergroup harmony *and* support for equality), the translation of groups' willingness to reconcile into contexts of group disparity would correspond to both having positive intergroup attitudes and willingness to act for social change to eliminate group disparity.

Of course, collective action toward achieving equality has different meanings, in terms of underlying motivations, for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For members of advantaged-group members, willingness to act for social change constitutes a particularly strong indicator of “willingness to reconcile” because, beyond an abstract positive orientation toward the disadvantaged outgroup, such tendencies signify an altruistic readiness to relinquish privilege for the sake of the disadvantaged group. However, for the disadvantaged-group members, collective action tendencies reflect their readiness to act for their own “egoistic” cause rather than their positive orientation toward the advantaged group. Therefore, if the underlying motivation is taken into account, advantaged but not disadvantaged groups' readiness for collective action would be considered as the equivalent of willingness to reconcile in contexts of structural violence. Indeed, this consideration has initially led us to include a measure of collective action tendencies only for the advantaged group in Study 1. However, our theoretical interest gradually broadened from reconciliation as a process (i.e., the promotion of positive intergroup orientations) to reconciliation as an outcome (i.e., the promotion of intergroup equality). We therefore added a measure of willingness to act for social change for both the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups in Study 2.

The Present Research

Using existing (Study 1) or experimentally created (Study 2) structural disparity, two studies investigated how messages from the outgroup that reassure the warmth or competence of disadvantaged or advantaged groups can, depending on group status, improve outgroup attitudes and influence willingness to support social change. In both studies, the cover story

addressed the relations between students of universities of unequal academic prestige and mentioned a structural disadvantage of the lower-status group regarding admissions to graduate programs at the high-status university.

STUDY 1

Participants in Study 1, who were from two different institutions that differed in prestige, were presented with “recent findings” about graduate admission statistics that reinforced the status difference between the institutions. Participants next read a message from a representative of the outgroup that emphasized their group’s competence or warmth, or in a control condition a message that reiterated the recent findings. Participants then indicated their attitudes toward the outgroup. Also, advantaged-group members’ willingness to change the status quo toward greater equality was measured as an additional indicator of their positive outgroup attitudes.

We predicted that members of the disadvantaged group would show more positive outgroup attitudes after receiving a message from the advantaged outgroup that reaffirmed their competence than after a message that reassured their warmth or a neutral message. Also, we anticipated that a message reassuring the disadvantaged group’s warmth, despite its positive content, would not improve disadvantaged-group members’ outgroup attitudes compared with the neutral message, because it does not address their identity-relevant motivations.

We further predicted that members of the advantaged group would show more positive outgroup attitudes after receiving a message that reaffirms their warmth, compared with a message that reassures their competence or a neutral message, because such a message directly removes the threat posed to the warmth dimension of their identity. A similar pattern was predicted for advantaged-group members’ willingness to change the status quo. Specifically, analogous to the positive responses of perpetrators to expressions of forgiveness by their victims (Leunissen, De Cremer, & Reinders Folmer, 2012), we predicted that a message that restores advantaged-group members’ warmth dimension of identity would likely produce reciprocal, generous actions to benefit the disadvantaged group, which are consistent with the group’s restored morality and sociability.

Method

Participants

Participants, who volunteered to participate in an “academic survey,” were 55 Israeli undergraduate psychology students (33 women, 22 men) from a university that has an open admission policy, which is associated with lower educational status (Roccas, 2003), and 144 undergraduate psychology students (79 women, 65 men) from a prestigious academic institution.¹

¹A previous version of this manuscript used a different sample of advantaged-group members with a similar pattern of results except that the difference in outgroup attitudes between the warmth and the competence message conditions was not significant. Thus, we felt it necessary to do a replication study. Based on a rough calculation of statistical power to detect a medium-sized effect, we targeted a sample size of the advantaged group of at least $N = 128$. For simplicity, only the results of the replication are reported in the present article. The results of the previous study are available upon request.

Procedure

To make the groups’ gap in status and privilege salient to participants, they first read a short text describing “recent findings” indicating that students from the lower-status university were less likely to gain acceptance into a clinical psychology program in the higher-status university than were students from the higher-status university, even when they had equal grades. Importantly, the cause of the disparity was not specified: Participants could interpret it as reflecting either an illegitimate bias against the disadvantaged group or a justified preference for graduates of a prestigious academic institution based on their (more prestigious) group affiliation. Such ambiguity regarding the legitimacy of group inequality is a major characteristic of contexts of group disparity (see Christie et al., 2008; Galtung, 1969) and distinguishes the present work from previous research on the Needs-Based Model that used clear-cut transgressions (e.g., the Holocaust). The particular context of admission to a clinical psychology program was chosen because (i) it was highly relevant to participants, who were pursuing undergraduate degrees in psychology, and (ii) both dimensions—competence and warmth—are relevant to success in clinical psychology and thus were plausible elements in the message.

The text mentioned that the official stance of the high-status institution was that the selection procedures to the program were transparent and fair, whereas the official stance of the low-status institution was that the existing group disparity in admission rates was too large and demanded its investigation. This gap in advantaged and disadvantaged groups’ views on the same objective reality are typical of the relations between groups of unequal status; compared with members of advantaged groups, members of disadvantaged groups tend to view group disparities as more illegitimate and are less satisfied with the status quo (Dovidio et al., 2008).

This information on group disparity was followed by a response from a representative of the outgroup that conveyed, depending on the experimental condition to which participants were randomly assigned, reassurance of the competence or warmth of participants’ ingroup, or neither (i.e., control). The *competence message* expressed an appreciation of the high academic qualifications of students from the participants’ university (e.g., “We are aware of the fact that students of the [disadvantaged/advantaged] university are highly motivated and talented”). Because warm people are more likeable and arouse more sympathy (Fiske et al., 2002), the *warmth message* sympathized with students from participants’ university and conveyed an appreciation of their interpersonal skills (e.g., “We are aware of the fact that students of the [disadvantaged/advantaged] university are particularly nice people”).

The *control message* for both groups merely repeated the official stance of the outgroup to which participants were already exposed. In this sense, the control condition for both groups was identical. Yet, because of the asymmetry in disadvantaged and advantaged groups’ stance with regard to the selection procedures and resulting group disparity, the exact content of the message differed between the two groups. Specifically, while a message from the advantaged group that “the selection procedures were transparent and fair” did not add anything regarding this group’s stance and thus constituted

a neutral message, the same message from the disadvantaged group would mean that it endorsed the initial stance of the advantaged group (i.e., it changed its own initial stance), which would constitute a positive rather than a neutral message. Similarly, while a message from the disadvantaged group that “the existing group disparity was too large” did not add anything regarding its stance, the same message from the advantaged group would mean that it endorsed the initial stance of the disadvantaged group, which would constitute a positive message. Thus, to allow *conceptually* comparable control messages for both groups, the advantaged-group’s representative repeated its official stance that the selection procedures were transparent and fair, whereas the disadvantaged group’s representative restated that the existing group disparity was too large and needed to be investigated.

Measures

Immediately following the exposure to the text (and before their assignment to the experimental conditions), participants indicated on a 5-point scale (1 = *didn’t believe* to 5 = *strongly believe*) the degree to which they believed that advantaged and disadvantaged university students had unequal chances of being accepted to the clinical psychology program. After reading the outgroup representative’s response, as a manipulation check for message type, participants indicated on a 5-point scale the degree (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*) to which they felt that the message expressed an acknowledgement of their ingroup’s (i) academic qualifications and (ii) interpersonal skills.

Next, participants were asked to respond on 5-point scales (1 = *definitely not* to 5 = *definitely yes*) to five statements reflecting various aspects of Outgroup Attitudes (“I have a positive image of the other university,” “I support the academic cooperation between the two institutions (sharing resources such as libraries, labs, etc.),” “I am willing to participate in activities designed to improve the atmosphere between students of the two institutions (e.g., a common “student day”),” “I think that students from both universities can benefit a lot from the cooperation between the universities,” and “I am likely to register to MA studies in the other university”; $\alpha = .63$).

Finally, we assessed the advantaged group’s willingness to act using five 5-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*) assessing the extent to which participants were ready to “participate in a demonstration demanding a change in the selection policy,” “sign a petition that calls for a change to prevent the existing discrimination,” “meet with department heads to discuss the current selection policy,” “take part in common brainstorming teams intended to think of ways to solve the problem,” and be “unwilling to take any action regarding this matter” (reverse scored). Ratings for the five items were averaged to obtain a single measure of Willingness to Act ($\alpha = .86$).

Results

Manipulation Checks of Status

Confirming the effectiveness of the cover story participants generally believed that intergroup disparity existed in admission to the clinical psychology graduate program, $M = 3.76$

(on the 1–5 scale): 23.2% of the participants “very strongly” believed, 42.4% “pretty strongly” believed, 23.2% “moderately” believed, 9.6% “somewhat” believed, and only 1.5% of the participants “didn’t believe” that disparity existed (one participant did not indicate her belief). Consistent with the common finding that victims and perpetrators have divergent perspectives regarding the severity and illegitimacy of the same transgression (i.e., “the magnitude gap”; Baumeister, 1996), although they were exposed to identical information, the belief that intergroup disparity existed was significantly stronger among disadvantaged-group members, $M = 4.22$, $SD = .88$, compared with advantaged-group members, $M = 3.59$, $SD = .94$, $t(196) = 4.28$, $p < .001$.

Manipulation Checks of Message Content

The manipulation checks of the messages’ content revealed that this manipulation was also successful. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant effect for Message Type on perceived competence, $F(2, 196) = 78.87$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using a Tukey honestly significant difference test indicated that, as intended, the competence message produced higher ratings of perceived competence, $M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.12$, than the warmth message, $M = 2.13$, $SD = .98$, and the control message, $M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.09$ ($ps < .001$). Similarly, Message Type significantly affected perceived warmth, $F(2, 196) = 56.80$, $p < .001$. As intended, the warmth message produced higher ratings of perceived warmth, $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.15$, than the competence message, $M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.13$, or the control message, $M = 1.75$, $SD = .90$ ($ps < .001$).

Although these results demonstrate that the messages of competence and warmth were perceived as intended, we note that the warmth message was perceived by participants as conveying some degree of competence reassurance compared with the control condition, $p = .047$, whereas the competence message was perceived by participants as conveying some acknowledgment of warmth compared with the control condition, $p = .056$. These somewhat generalized effects suggest that the warmth and competence messages *emphasized* warmth and competence rather than affected them exclusively.

Main Dependent Variables

For *Outgroup Attitudes*, a 2 (Group Status: Advantaged vs. Disadvantaged) \times 3 (Message Type: Warmth, Competence, or Control) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Group Status, $F(1, 193) = 9.43$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .047$. Advantaged-group members held more favorable attitudes toward the disadvantaged outgroup than the other way around, $Ms = 3.39$ ($SD = .88$) and 2.99 ($SD = .59$), respectively. The main effect for Message Type was also significant, $F(2, 193) = 4.64$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .046$, such that both reassurance messages led to significantly more positive outgroup attitudes than the control message ($ps < .01$), $Ms = 3.47$ ($SD = .82$), 3.36 ($SD = .65$), and 2.99 ($SD = .93$), in the competence-reassurance, warmth-reassurance, and control conditions, respectively.

Importantly, these main effects were qualified by the predicted two-way interaction, $F(2, 193) = 3.15$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$. As expected, disadvantaged-group members in the

competence condition had more favorable Outgroup Attitudes than did those in the warmth condition, who did not significantly differ from participants in the control condition (see Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and significance levels for analytical contrasts). For advantaged-group members, as expected, participants in the warmth condition had more favorable Outgroup Attitudes than did those in the competence-reassurance and control conditions. Unexpectedly, the difference between the competence-reassurance and control conditions was marginal ($p = .069$, see Table 1) such that a competence message tended to yield somewhat more positive outgroup attitudes than the neutral message.

Finally, the one-way ANOVA testing our hypothesis for *Willingness to Act* among advantaged-group members revealed a significant overall difference among Message Type conditions, $F(2, 141) = 10.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .131$. As expected, advantaged-group members in the warmth condition indicated greater Willingness to Act for changing the status quo than did those in the control and competence-reassurance conditions ($ps < .005$), which did not differ from each other ($p = .331$), $Ms = 2.35$ ($SD = .81$), 3.00 ($SD = 1.02$), and 2.16 ($SD = .98$), in the competence, warmth, and control conditions.

Discussion

The findings of Study 1, which took place in a naturalistic setting relating to participants' membership in a psychologically meaningful group, supported our predictions: Members of a disadvantaged group held more positive outgroup attitudes following a message from their advantaged outgroup's representative that reassured the competence dimension of their ingroup's identity than participants who received a message that reassured their ingroup's warmth, or a control message. By contrast, a warmth-reassuring message, despite its positive content, did not improve disadvantaged-group members' outgroup attitudes. As for the advantaged group, as expected, a message that reassured the warmth dimension of its identity produced more favorable outgroup attitudes and increased advantaged-group members' willingness to act for changing the status quo toward equality. Unexpectedly, a message that reassured the advantaged group's competence also produced marginally more positive attitudes than the neutral message. Nevertheless, in line with predictions, not only was this message less effective than a warmth-reassuring message in promoting positive attitudes, but it also failed from increasing advantaged-group members' willingness to act for changing the status quo.

The current study extended previous research on the Needs-Based Model, which has focused on responses to blatant transgressions, by focusing on a context of disparity, typical

of structural inequality (Christie et al., 2008), that was open to subjective interpretation with regard to the extent of its severity and (il)legitimacy. This ambiguity, despite the general support for our predictions, made the interpretation of the obtained findings more complex. With regard to disadvantaged-group members, we initially proposed that a competence-reassuring message was effective because it restored disadvantaged-group members' image as competent. However, a second explanation is that a competence-reassuring message could also be interpreted as an indication that the advantaged group is challenging the status quo and willing to change it. While theoretically distinct, in practice, these two mechanisms likely constitute two sides of the same coin (one implies the other): Because the "warm but incompetent" stereotype actively functions to preserve the status quo (Fiske et al., 2002; Kay & Jost, 2003), challenging the stereotype also involves challenging the status quo. Nevertheless, our conceptual focus was on the unique contribution of restoration of disadvantaged groups' identity as a mechanism to improve intergroup relations. We therefore designed Study 2 to rule out the possibility that the effect of the competence-reassuring message stemmed from its conveyance of advantaged group's interest in changing the status quo.

Regarding the advantaged group, although our hypotheses were generally supported, we found an unexpected marginal increase in positive outgroup attitudes following a competence-reassuring message. This effect might reflect the fact that unlike the contexts examined so far in which perpetrators were motivated primarily to restore their moral image but not their sense of power, in contexts of group disparity, both messages address motivations that are equally important to advantaged-group members. Specifically, it is possible that because the portrayal of advantaged groups as competent serves to justify their higher status (Fiske et al., 2002; Kay & Jost, 2003), competence reassurance addressed advantaged-group members' motivation to maintain this high status (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), resulting in more positive outgroup attitudes. This possibility is consistent with the finding that despite the increase in their positive attitudes, advantaged-group members in the competence-reassurance condition did not show increased willingness to change the status quo toward equality, perhaps because such change becomes unwarranted once the status quo is justified.

Alternatively, the effect of the competence-reassuring message might have stemmed from the fact that this message was perceived by participants as conveying some acknowledgment of warmth compared with the control message. Possibly, such "spillover," which was also found in previous studies (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), stems from the fact that receiving a positive message from the

Table 1. Disadvantaged and advantaged group members' outgroup attitudes following different types of messages

	Type of message		
	Competence reassurance	Warmth reassurance	Control
<i>Disadvantaged</i>	3.30a (.60)	2.92b (.46)	2.79b (.64)
<i>Advantaged</i>	3.38a (.68)	3.72b (.83)	3.06a (1.01)

Note. $N_{\text{disadvantaged}} = 55$; $N_{\text{advantaged}} = 144$. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

The contrasts were calculated for each group separately because a Levene's test revealed a significant difference between the variances in Outgroup Attitudes among the two groups, $F(1, 197) = 11.58$, $p < .001$.

For the advantaged group, the difference between the competence-reassurance and control conditions was marginal, $p < .069$.

outgroup with whom the ingroup is in competition is unexpected. It may therefore be interpreted, at least to some extent, as an acknowledgement of the group's warmth. A more sensitive test of this hypothesis may require pitting warmth and competence directly against each other to draw group members' attention to the difference between the contents of these messages (see Birnbaum, 1999). Therefore, Study 2 used a within-participants design to examine advantaged-group members' outgroup attitudes and willingness to act for change following warmth and competence messages.

STUDY 2

Study 2 extended Study 1 in three ways. First, it experimentally manipulated participants' membership in an advantaged or disadvantaged group to bolster internal validity. Second, Study 2 aimed to eliminate the possibility that competence-reassuring messages to disadvantaged groups may be effective not only because they restore the threatened dimension of their identity but also because they signal that the advantaged group perceives the status differential to be illegitimate and intends to promote intergroup equality. For this purpose, the competence-reassuring message in Study 2 emphasized the identity-related aspect while explicitly stating that there was no intention to act for changing the status quo.

And third, Study 2 included a measure of willingness to act for changing the status quo toward greater equality for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups. As mentioned earlier, the willingness to act for change indicates a genuine concern for the welfare of the other group for advantaged-group members but not for disadvantaged-group members. However, because intergroup reconciliation, or "positive peace," requires stable, equitable relations, collective action on the part of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups may be a critical step toward its attainment. Importantly, collective action research shows that although members of disadvantaged groups tend to perceive inequality as unfair and wish to amend the situation (Dovidio et al., 2008), they often fail to act collectively to challenge the status quo (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). One reason they fail to do so is because they feel a lack of collective efficacy (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). Similar to the sociological concept of agency (Gergen, 1999), group efficacy is the belief that one's ingroup can resolve the injustice inflicted upon it through unified effort, and it reflects group members' sense of collective power and capability to transform the situation of their group (Reicher, 1996; see also Zomeran, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). We hypothesized that whereas warmth-reassuring messages might inhibit disadvantaged-group members' collective action tendencies (e.g., Becker & Wright, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 1997), competence-reassuring messages would restore their belief that they are competent and worthy of receiving equal treatment, as well as capable of achieving it through collective action. The result would be greater readiness for such action.

In Study 2, student participants were randomly assigned to membership in advantaged or disadvantaged groups based on false feedback on their institution's access to scarce spots in a Master's program. Members of the advantaged or disadvantaged

group received both competence-reassuring and warmth-reassuring messages from their outgroup. To illuminate the process by which a message of competence operates to influence the responses of the disadvantaged group, the relevant message from the advantaged group reassured the disadvantaged group's competence while explicitly expressing no intention to act for changing the status quo. For participants assigned to the advantaged group, we hypothesized that a warmth-reassuring message would produce more positive outgroup attitudes and greater willingness to change the status quo than a competence-reassuring message. The opposite pattern was predicted for participants assigned to the disadvantaged group.

Method

Participants and Design

Seventy undergraduate psychology students (56 women, 14 men; mean age = 22 years) from a large German University voluntarily completed an "academic survey" at a lecture and were compensated with research credit.

The study had a 2×2 design² with Message Content (competence-reassuring vs. warmth-reassuring) as a within-subjects factor and Status (disadvantaged vs. advantaged) as a between-subjects factor. Participants were randomly assigned to either

²Beyond the reported design, Study 2 included two additional experimental cells ($N=63$) that are not reported in the present article for the sake of brevity and clarity. Participants in these two additional cells were assigned to the disadvantaged group. The general procedure was the same as for other disadvantaged-group participants except that the content of the competence message was varied. In the first cell, disadvantaged group members were exposed to a message that conveyed an explicit intention to change the status quo, yet without reassurance of the disadvantaged group's competence. In the second cell, they were exposed to a message that reassured the disadvantaged group's competence and conveyed an explicit intention to change the status quo. These two additional cells were compared with the cell reported in the article, in which a message that reassured the disadvantaged group's competence explicitly conveyed no intention to change the status quo. This comparison allowed us to determine the respective roles of competence reassurance versus the advantaged group's intention to change the status quo in improving intergroup attitudes among disadvantaged group members. In brief, we found that (i) the message that challenged the status quo without reassuring the disadvantaged group's competence did not improve disadvantaged group's outgroup attitudes compared with the warmth reassuring message, $M_s = 2.90$ ($SD = .97$) vs. 3.32 ($SD = 1.12$). In fact, this message tended to reduce positive outgroup attitudes, $t(96) = 1.77$, $p = .08$ (degrees of freedom are based on the whole sample of disadvantaged-group members). Similarly, this message failed to increase disadvantaged-group members willingness to act for change compared with a warmth message, $M_s = 3.61$ ($SD = .94$) vs. 3.42 ($SD = 1.15$), $t(95) = 1.12$, $p = .26$; (ii) by contrast, compared with the warmth-reassuring message, the "combined message" that included both reassurance of the ingroup's competence and intention to change the status quo marginally increased participants' outgroup attitudes, $M_s = 3.55$ ($SD = .84$) vs. 3.20 ($SD = .79$), $t(96) = 1.65$, $p = .10$, and significantly increased their willingness to act for change, $M_s = 3.78$ ($SD = .95$) vs. 3.39 ($SD = 1.02$), $t(95) = 2.57$, $p = .01$. Importantly, however, the effectiveness of the "combined message" did not exceed the effectiveness of the message that reassured the disadvantaged group's competence without signalling an intention to change the status quo regarding either the outgroup attitudes, $t(96) = .53$, $p = .60$, or the willingness to act for social change, $t(95) = .44$, $p = .66$.

These results, which are available upon request, increase our confidence that reassuring the competence of the disadvantaged group improved its members' outgroup attitudes and willingness to act for change because it restored their threatened dimension of identity rather than because it signaled the advantaged group's openness to creating greater intergroup equality. Whereas a message indicating only the advantaged group's openness to change failed to increase disadvantaged group members' intergroup attitudes, a message reassuring competence, regardless of whether it was combined with openness for change, elicited more positive attitudes and greater willingness for collective action.

low (disadvantaged) or high (advantaged) status groups, and for each participant, the competence-affirming and warmth-affirming messages were presented side by side.

Procedure

Participants first read a short text describing current disparity in admission to a newly established graduate program in which students from their own university were either advantaged or disadvantaged. Specifically, participants read about the “Bologna Process” in which, as part of an initiative of 29 European countries, comparable Bachelor and Master degrees were being introduced across Europe. Although the introduction of a Masters Program in Psychology was imminent and relevant for the Bachelor students participating in the current study, only rumors existed about the actual admission policies, which made the manipulation of group disparities plausible.

Participants read that because of the “Bologna Process,” universities were now free to decide how many spots they would make available to students who had completed their undergraduate education at other universities. Against this background, University A [participants’ ingroup in the advantaged condition, participants’ outgroup in the disadvantaged condition], which was “well above average in terms of the available spots in its graduate psychology program,” announced it would not provide spots to undergraduates from University B [participants’ outgroup or ingroup in the advantaged or disadvantaged conditions, respectively], where “considerably fewer graduate spots were available.” The text also mentioned that according to University A, they were concerned about the dilution of their academic standards.

As in Study 1, our manipulation did not indicate whether the disparity was legitimate. Thus, participants could construe groups’ unequal access to resources (i.e., available Masters’ spots) as justifiably stemming from the differential academic level of the two universities or as reflecting the unfairness of the university administration. Similarly, the advantaged university’s selection policy could be construed as reflecting either a legitimate concern for its academic standards or an unjust favoritism of its students.

Following the manipulation of group status, each participant read two short excerpts allegedly summarizing the main messages of two speeches by representatives of the participants’ outgroup (the other university) at a conference on the future of the Masters degree in Germany. The warmth-reassuring message sympathized with students from participants’ university and conveyed liking and brotherhood (e.g., “We should remember that we have always perceived students from [participants’ ingroup] as extraordinarily likeable and nice”). The competence-reassuring message expressed an appreciation of the high academic qualifications of students from participant’s university, regardless of a change in the status quo (e.g., “Whether the current admission policy will be abandoned or not, we should remember that students from [participants’ ingroup] are highly motivated and competent”). The two messages were presented sequentially in counterbalanced order. Each message was followed by a series of questions measuring participants’ responses to this message.

Measures

As a manipulation check for Group Status, participants rated on a 5-point scales (1 = *absolutely not true* to 5 = *absolutely true*) the degree to which they believed that students of their own university were disadvantaged in the graduate admission process.

We next administered the manipulation checks for Message Content. To assess perceptions of competence conveyed in each message, participants indicated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*) the degree to which each of three statements would reflect the main idea that the speaker (i.e., the outgroup’s representative) had intended to convey to participants’ ingroup: (i) “[your ingroup] members are entitled to assert their academic qualification”; (ii) “[your ingroup] is entitled to being perceived as competent”; and (c) “we appreciate the contributions of [your ingroup] to the academic community.” For each message, ratings for the three items were averaged to obtain a single measure of perceived competence, thus creating two variables: Perceived Competence in the competence-reassuring message ($\alpha = .64$) and in the warmth-reassuring message ($\alpha = .72$).

To assess perceptions of warmth conveyed in each message, participants indicated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*) the degree to which each of three statements would reflect the main idea that the outgroup’s representative had intended to convey to participants’ ingroup: (i) “we are on friendly terms with [your ingroup];” (b) “we like [your ingroup];” and (c) “we perceive [your ingroup] as especially likable.” Ratings for the three items were averaged to obtain a single measure of Perceived Warmth for each message: Perceived Warmth in the competence-reassuring message ($\alpha = .83$) and in the warmth-reassuring message ($\alpha = .73$).

The relevance of admission to a graduate program was measured with a 4-point scale (1 = *not relevant* to 4 = *absolutely relevant*) and was high, as expected, $M = 3.57$ ($SD = .64$).

Next, using 5-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*), three items measured participants’ *Outgroup Attitudes* following each message: (i) “I have a positive image of the [outgroup]”; (ii) “This message increases my willingness to promote harmonious relations between the [ingroup] and the [outgroup]”; and (c) “This message increases my willingness to deal with the concerns of the [outgroup]”. For each message, ratings for the three items were averaged to obtain a single measure of Outgroup Attitudes, thus creating two variables: Outgroup Attitudes following the competence-reassuring message ($\alpha = .70$) and following the warmth-reassuring message ($\alpha = .70$).

Three items measured participants’ *Willingness to Act* for changing the status quo toward equality. Participants rated their agreement (1 = *absolutely* to 5 = *absolutely not*) with the following statements: “This message increases my willingness to (i) sign a petition aiming at a change of the regulations of admission to graduate programs, (b) participate in a meeting with the dean of the faculty of psychology to demand a change of the regulations of admission to the graduate programs, (c) mobilize other students to prevent unfair admission to graduate programs.” Ratings for the three items were averaged to obtain a single measure of Willingness to Act for changing the status quo, creating two variables: Willingness to Act following a competence-affirming message ($\alpha = .90$) and Willingness to Act following a warmth-affirming message ($\alpha = .84$).

Results

Manipulation Checks of Status

As intended, participants in the low-status condition agreed more strongly with the item that their group was disadvantaged regarding admission to a graduate program, $M=3.53$, $SD=.94$, which was significantly above the midpoint of the scale, $t(35)=3.37$, $p=.002$, whereas participants in the high-status condition disagreed with this item, $M=2.27$, $SD=.98$, which was significantly below the midpoint of the scale, $t(32)=4.28$, $p=.001$.

Next, we examined the perceived content of the messages and our dependent variables; because there were no effects for presentation order, it was not included in the main analyses.

Manipulation Checks of Message Content

Perceptions of reassurance of warmth and competence in the messages from the outgroup were analyzed using 2 (Group Status: advantaged vs. disadvantaged) \times 2 (Message Content: competence vs. warmth) ANOVAs. Supporting the intended interpretation of the competence message, there was only a main effect of Message Content on perceived competence. Participants felt that the competence-reassuring message expressed an acknowledgement of their competence, $M=4.13$, $SD=.67$, more than did the warmth-reassuring message, $M=2.95$, $SD=.88$, $F(1, 68)=80.76$, $p<.001$. Likewise, there was only a main effect of Message Content on perceived warmth, $F(1, 68)=111.14$, $p<.001$. As intended, participants perceived the warmth-reassuring message as expressing greater appreciation of their warmth, $M=4.09$, $SD=.70$, than the competence-reassuring message, $M=2.77$, $SD=.80$.

Main Dependent Variables

Both outcome variables were tested using a 2 (Status: advantaged vs. disadvantaged) \times 2 (Message Content: competence vs. warmth) ANOVA, with repeated measures on the latter variable. For Outgroup Attitudes, a significant Status \times Message Content interaction, $F(1, 68)=19.27$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.221$, was obtained (see Figure 1). As anticipated, participants in the advantaged condition had more favorable outgroup attitudes after receiving a warmth-reassuring message, $M=3.57$, $SD=.57$, compared with a competence-reassuring message, $M=3.00$, $SD=.86$, $t(68)=3.25$, $p=.002$, whereas participants in the disadvantaged condition showed more favorable outgroup attitudes after receiving a competence-reassuring message, $M=3.37$, $SD=.63$, compared with a warmth-reassuring message, $M=2.86$, $SD=.78$, $t(68)=2.97$, $p=.004$.

Paralleling this pattern of findings, a significant Status \times Message Content interaction, $F(1, 68)=4.29$, $p=.042$, $\eta_p^2=.059$, was obtained for Willingness to Act for changing the status quo toward equality. An even stronger interaction effect was obtained when two outliers that ran counter to the general pattern were removed, $F(1, 66)=9.22$, $p=.003$, $\eta_p^2=.123$ (see Figure 2). As anticipated, participants in the advantaged condition indicated a greater willingness to act for changing the

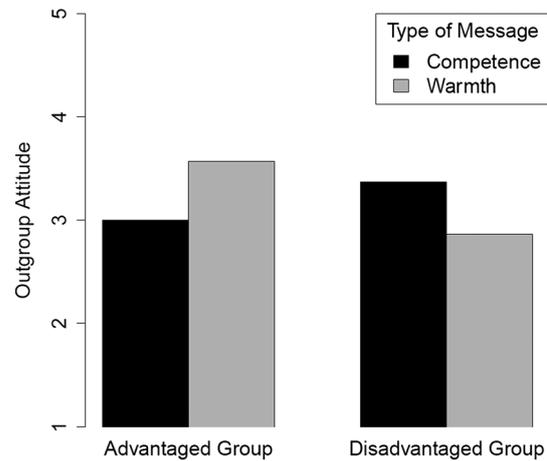


Figure 1. Study 2: group members' outgroup attitudes as a function of their ingroup's status and type of message conveyed by the outgroup

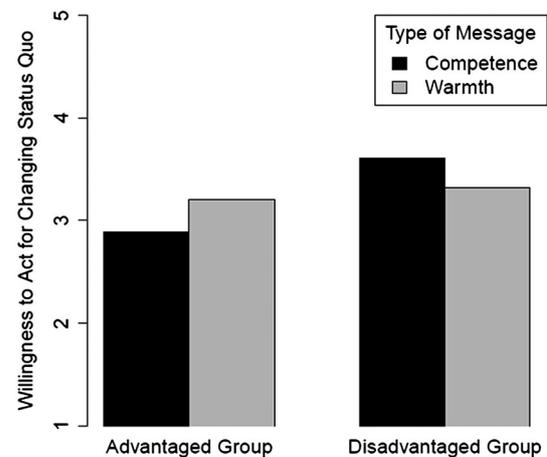


Figure 2. Study 2: group members' willingness to act for change as a function of their ingroup's status and type of message conveyed by the outgroup

status quo after receiving a warmth-reassuring message, $M=3.21$, $SD=.85$, compared with a competence-reassuring message, $M=2.89$, $SD=1.15$, $t(66)=2.19$, $p=.032$, whereas participants in the disadvantaged condition indicated a greater willingness to act for change after receiving a competence-reassuring message, $M=3.62$, $SD=1.00$, compared with a warmth-reassuring message, $M=3.32$, $SD=.92$, $t(66)=2.09$, $p=.040$.

Discussion

Beyond generally supporting our hypotheses and replicating Study 1 with experimentally induced status groups, Study 2 addressed two additional issues. First, Study 2 demonstrated that among disadvantaged-group members, a competence-reassuring message, compared with a warmth-reassuring message, led to more positive outgroup attitudes as well as willingness for collective action even when it explicitly conveyed no intention to change the status quo (see also Footnote 2). Second, directly supporting our hypotheses, among advantaged-group members, the warmth-reassuring message led to more positive outgroup attitudes and greater willingness to act for changing the status quo compared with a competence-reassuring message. Thus, the restoration of advantaged-group members' warmth seemed to remind them that as moral, sociable people, they

are expected to be sensitive to others' distress and take moral responsibility (Nadler & Liviatan, 2004) to act for changing the existing disparity from which their outgroup suffers.

Importantly, this effect cannot be attributed to mere priming, because in both Studies 1 and 2, disadvantaged-group members did not reveal greater warmth (i.e., show more positive attitudes) toward their outgroup following a warmth-reassuring message. Also, reassurance of morality has often been shown to result in greater immoral behavior because of moral "credentialing" or "licensing" (Monin & Miller, 2001; Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009; Zhong, Liljenquist, & Cain, 2009). Thus, warmth reassurance may lead groups into moral, generous behavior primarily when it mitigates an existing threat to their warmth identity dimension.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Intuition may suggest that an exchange of positive messages can pave the way to improved relations between adversarial groups. Yet, based on convergent evidence obtained in different countries (i.e., Israel and Germany), using different types of advantaged and disadvantaged groups (i.e., natural and experimentally induced), and alternative designs (i.e., between-participants and within-participants), the present research reveals that the specific content of these positive messages between members of groups of unequal status is critical.

Specifically, we found that a message from an advantaged group that restored the competence identity dimension of disadvantaged groups increased their members' positive outgroup attitudes and willingness to act for change toward equality. Interestingly, this positive effect was obtained even when the advantaged group's competence-reassuring message explicitly lacked an intention to change the status quo (Study 2). Moreover, an explicit commitment of the advantaged group to change the status quo had no added value (i.e., it did not contribute to a further increase in disadvantaged-group members' outgroup attitudes or willingness to act) once the disadvantaged group's competence was affirmed (see Footnote 2). As for advantaged-group members, a message from the disadvantaged group that restored their ingroup's warmth increased both their positive outgroup attitudes and willingness to act for changing the status quo. Thus, once their threatened dimension of identity (i.e., warmth) was restored, advantaged-group members showed generosity toward the disadvantaged outgroup and were willing to act for equality, even though it implied giving up their own advantage.

Theoretically, our findings that addressing the *identity-related* aspects involved in intergroup competition or conflict may be even more critical than addressing the *material* aspects (e.g., resource reallocation) are consistent with the perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As opposed to the Realistic Conflict Theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966), which argued that intergroup conflicts are grounded in disputes over tangible, instrumental resources, Social Identity Theory has pointed to the critical role of groups' motivation to maintain a positively distinct identity in the creation and maintenance of intergroup conflict. Our findings suggest that groups' motivation for positive identity may also play a critical role in the route to reconciliation and conflict reduction.

One the practical level, our findings have implications for the planning of interventions intended to promote constructive intergroup relations. Traditionally, these interventions highlighted the importance of mutual intergroup acceptance and empathy, which are related to restoration of the warmth dimension (Nadler & Shnabel, 2011). For example, interventions based on the "contact hypothesis" often focus on increasing mutual liking and friendship between the groups (Dixon et al., 2005). However, this approach leaves the primary motivation of disadvantaged-group members—to gain respect and acknowledgment of their competence—potentially unsatisfied, which may explain why intergroup contact interventions are generally less effective for improving outgroup attitudes among members of disadvantaged than advantaged groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Consistent with our finding that a warmth-reassuring message failed to promote favorable outgroup attitudes among members of disadvantaged groups (Study 1) despite its highly positive content, we argue that even well-intentioned gestures may fail to bring about positive outcomes if they do not address the unique motivations of the recipient group. Hence, interventions that aim to foster positive intergroup relations should be planned in a way that allows the addressing of the disadvantaged group's need for respect and acknowledgment of competence.

Acknowledging advantaged-group members' competence is also important in light of our finding that a message from the advantaged group reassuring the competence of the disadvantaged group promoted not only positive intergroup attitudes but also greater willingness to act to achieve equality among members of a disadvantaged group. This finding is important in light of research on system justification, which has found that disadvantaged groups sometimes rationalize their status position and support the system that exploits them (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Our results suggest that affirming the identity dimension of disadvantaged groups that their stereotypical portrayal denies (i.e., competence) may be an effective way to overcome their passive acceptance of the status quo.

Another practical implication of the present research emanates from the finding that following a warmth-reassuring message advantaged-group members showed not only positive outgroup attitudes but also increased willingness to change the status quo. A growing body of research suggests that beyond the collective efforts of disadvantaged groups to promote their own cause, advantaged-group members, who have more resources and influence, may also exhibit "solidarity-based collective action" (Becker, 2012) and collectively act for equality (e.g., Harth, Kessler, & Leach, 2008; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2010). Our research suggests that warmth reassurance may be an effective strategy through which members of disadvantaged groups can encourage advantaged-group members to engage in such solidarity-based action (see also Dovidio, Gaertner, Dittmann, & West, 2012).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research may explore whether the positive responses of advantaged-group and disadvantaged-group members to warmth-reassuring and competence-reassuring messages are

moderated by their perceptions of the legitimacy of group disparity. Specifically, in the present research, we made the privilege experienced by the advantaged group salient by exposing participants to information about group disparity; yet, we did not directly implicate unfair discrimination. It is possible that directly manipulating the legitimacy of group disparity (e.g., by explicitly attributing it to either fair or unfair reasons; see Harth et al., 2008) would affect the effectiveness of competence-reassuring or warmth-reassuring messages. This possibility is consistent with the findings of a recent study by Siem et al. (2013), which, similar to the present study, aimed to apply the Needs-Based Model to context of group disparity. Siem and colleagues found that disadvantaged and advantaged-group members expressed greater need for empowerment and acceptance (respectively) only to the extent that they perceived group disparity as unjust. Apparently, when group disparity was legitimized, the identity of disadvantaged and advantaged groups was not particularly threatened. Admittedly, Siem and colleagues examined the emotional needs of advantaged-group and disadvantaged-group members but not their responses to messages intended to address these needs. Yet, by integrating their findings with our theorizing that competence-reassuring or warmth-reassuring messages promote positive outgroup attitudes only when these identity dimensions are threatened in the first place, it is likely that the effectiveness of such messages would be contingent upon the perception of disparity as illegitimate.

An alternative prediction may be derived from Vorauer and Sakamoto's (2008) information search model. According to this model, members of disadvantaged groups attach greater importance to advantaged-group members' evaluation of their competence when group disparity is perceived as legitimate because under such conditions, advantaged-group members are perceived as "competence experts" (i.e., as better capable of judging the competencies required for success in society). Conversely, members of advantaged groups attach greater importance to disadvantaged-group members' evaluation of their morality (i.e., an aspect of warmth; Fiske et al., 2007) when group disparity is perceived as illegitimate because under such conditions, disadvantaged-group members are perceived as "morality experts" (i.e., as better capable of judging moral goodness). If so, disadvantaged-group members may respond more favorably to competence-reassuring messages when group disparity is perceived as legitimate, whereas advantaged-group members may respond more favorably to warmth reassurance messages when group disparity is perceived as illegitimate (i.e., an interaction of group status by legitimacy may be predicted). Regardless of the specific predictions made, perceived legitimacy seems likely to moderate the effects found in the present research and should therefore be explored in future research.

CONCLUSIONS

By integrating the processes described by the Needs-Based Model and the Stereotype Content Model, our research demonstrates how the fields of intergroup relations and conflict resolution, which represent separate traditions in the social psychological study of intergroup conflict (Nadler & Shnabel, 2011), can be

mutually informative theoretically and empirically. The insights gained from the present research may contribute to the reduction of inefficient intergroup communication. For instance, because group members project their own group's needs and views on the outgroup (Pearson et al., 2008), they may fail to realize that their outgroup's motivations and responses are fundamentally different than their own. Understanding the consequences of including different elements in intergroup messages may prevent groups' good intentions from "paving the road to hell" and lead, instead, to communication that effectively improves intergroup relations and promotes concrete effort for social change.

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