



Twenty years of group processes and intergroup relations research: A review of past progress and future prospects

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**Dominic Abrams¹ and Michael A. Hogg²****Abstract**

The 20th anniversary of *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* offers an opportunity to reflect on progress in research. We describe the changing context of research and the scope and progress in the field. This special issue includes reviews by distinguished scholars in the areas of social identity, ideology, crowds, intergroup contact, crossed and multiple social categorization, communication, majority–minority conflict, group-based emotion, group decision making, group performance, ostracism, and social-cognitive development. Achievements and current knowledge in all of these areas are raising significant new questions, challenges, and opportunities for future research, strongly demonstrating the growing scientific strength and societal relevance of research in group processes and intergroup relations.

Keywords

group processes, intergroup relations, review

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Why GPIR?

In 1996 when we planned to launch *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, social psychology had reached a complex juncture. European traditions in social psychology, notably the social identity perspective and the social representations perspective, had been augmented by an emerging discourse-analytic approach to the key questions of conflicts between groups, the nature of social influence, and the psychological processes involved in social change. Meanwhile, North American perspectives on groups had moved from a focus on realistic conflict and

psychodynamic/motivational accounts towards, on the one hand, a social-cognitive account of individual decision making, stereotyping, and prejudice, and on the other, a more formal modelling approach to capturing group decisions and processes.

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There appeared to be a chasm between dominant levels of explanation (Abrams & Hogg, 2004, 2016). On the European side, research proceeded from the top-down question, “how is society represented through individuals?” On the North American side, the question seemed to be “how do individual cognitions and interactions give rise to society?” Yet, between these two perspectives and despite some fiercely critical assessments made by each of the other, as relatively junior scholars we felt strongly that social psychology as a whole, and the areas of group processes and intergroup relations in particular, would have little to lose and an enormous amount to gain through efforts to bridge these two traditions and learn from the best that each had to offer.

How GPIR?

Following initial conversations with a highly enthusiastic editorial team at SAGE, and encouraged by Geoffrey Stephenson, Jim Davis, Jack Dovidio, and many others, we put out feelers to some emerging and experienced international scholars to ask whether they were interested in the project and would consider working with us as action editors. We wanted to be sure to cover a range of areas that we believed belonged together, conceptually and in terms of shared methods and knowledge. These included social identity themes relevant to Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell’s (1987) self-categorization theory, and our own (Hogg & Abrams, 1988) wider development of the social identity approach. But we went well beyond this to include communication, social relationships, social cognition, gender, group decisions and interdependence, social influence, collective behaviour, cultural perspectives, social cohesion, organizational behavior, gender relations, deviance, intergroup contact, and a host of related topics.

To our delight, and a little amazement, we were able to launch the journal with an outstanding editorial team, including Diane Mackie, Jack Dovidio, Anne Maass, Scott Tindale (all contributors to the current issue) together with Dick

Moreland and Don Taylor. They were also instrumental in recruiting our board of consulting editors, which also included a stellar group (among authors in this issue, they included Kip Williams, Steve Reicher, John M. Levine, Tatsuya Kameda, Miles Hewstone, Howard Giles, and Marilyn B. Brewer). It was as much their experience, excellent guidance, hard work, and enthusiasm, as it was our effort and persistence, that gave the journal such a strong launch and successful trajectory. Our first editorial assistant, Barbara Masser (who recently completed a term as one of our Associate Editors) dealt with the substantial volume of international postage and correspondence, and kept everything on track from the outset. Many of our action editors have very generously extended their original terms of appointment, and we are particularly grateful to Scott Tindale who has remained as a Coeditor and touchstone for advice for the entire life of the journal.

We are also enormously grateful to the various scholars who have edited special issues of the journal (some are among the authors in this issue). The special issues were a feature of GPIR before other social psychology journals introduced them as a routine feature. The themes of GPIR special issues have ranged from subjects such as intergroup contact, to music, to social neuroscience, and from social protest to methodology. A complete list of those produced so far is provided in the Appendix to this paper. After 20 years, there are now too many Associate and Guest Editors of GPIR to name individually but if you happen to spot a GPIR coffee mug, notebook, or pen in someone’s hands, the chances are that they have at some point supported the journal as an Editor.

Progress in Research

At the time we launched GPIR, there were relatively fewer journals around, and many fewer in social psychology than there are now (cf. Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994; Sanna & Parks, 1997). GPIR’s role was to provide a focus for a somewhat specialist subfield of the discipline. As we noted in a series of reviews of the strength of

the field, its presence both through GPIR and its occupancy of space in the major general journals grew substantially (Abrams & Hogg, 1998, 2008; Randsley de Moura, Leader, Pelletier, & Abrams, 2008). This growth, most notably but not exclusively in **intergroup relations research**, has been sustained and we are very optimistic that it will continue. The natural **intersection with other fields** (developmental social psychology, neuroscience, behavioral economics, etc.) has meant that there has been a constant renewal of the three elements of theory, method, and evidence, and all the while, the fundamental questions that link society and the individual require that these three elements must be joined through an analysis of the role of groups. Perhaps our greatest debt of gratitude is to the community of readers and researchers that have enabled the field as a whole to flourish so spectacularly.

Research in group processes and intergroup relations tends to be labor intensive, sometimes difficult to conduct, and likely to generate more work that takes time to complete. This is reflected in the pattern of citations of papers in GPIR. We inspected data from 2003 onwards. The median numbers of citations for each volume of GPIR increases steadily as we go back each year. Looking back from 2016, for papers published 5 years earlier (2011), all substantive articles have been cited and the median citation count per article is 8. Go back 10 years (2006) and the median cites per article is 18, and back 13 years (2003) the median cites per article is 32. Across the years, GPIR's highly cited papers have covered a wide range of topics. A few examples across different years include: **intergroup contact** (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003); **social coordination** (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005); diversity and group decision making (Phillips, Northcraft, & Neale, 2006); gender (McRae, Ochsner, Mauss, Gabrieli, & Gross, 2008); social value orientation in social dilemmas (Balliet, Parks, & Joireman, 2009); dehumanization (Costello & Hodson, 2010); **collective action** (van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011); antigay prejudice (Bosson, Weaver, Caswell, & Burnaford, 2012); and **imagined contact** (Miles & Crisp, 2014).

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* we invited a set of distinguished experts in different areas of the field to review and offer their own analysis of what we have learned over the last 20 years, where we stand now, and what will be some of the key questions for future research. All the contributions to this issue underwent peer review and a standard editorial process. The terms of reference for contributions gave authors freedom either to share their analysis either as a personal story, as an overview of their own work, or as a review of a particularly relevant topic. Each was also asked to consider where their contribution sits in terms of the connection between small group (intragroup) and intergroup theory and research. The collection that follows is therefore by no means an exhaustive coverage of the field (there are handbooks for that kind of thing), but is intended to allow the authors to share in some depth their particular perspective on what they consider to be important developments and questions.

The Anniversary Issue

Michael A. Hogg, Dominic Abrams, and Marilynn B. Brewer (2017) consider what the field has yielded in terms of our understanding of the role of **social identity processes**, and more particularly, **the self, in group processes**. Social identity theory spawned multiple derivations and specifications (e.g., in applied areas such as health or organizational psychology; more detailed theories of categorization salience, and crowd behaviour). However, it has also stimulated other theoretical developments that required different assumptions (such as the different needs and cognitive processes at work, the ways that different levels of categorization can combine, the possible copresence of different levels of the self-concept, and their coordination across different contexts). Hogg, Abrams, and Brewer celebrate what has been achieved but also point out the exciting prospects and directions that emerge from linking social identity theory to different perspectives in social psychology and for research in areas



including health, e-behavior, migration, extremism and populism, and inclusive and diverse social identities.

Theories regarding ideology are to be found in a variety of disciplines, and even within social psychology there are different perspectives. Brenda Major and Cheryl Kaiser (2017) consider the question of why people tolerate inequality and injustice that affect their own or other groups. They summarize decades of work on the types of legitimizing ideology that seem to underpin and sustain such inequality. They show how such ideology impacts stereotyping, perceptions of discrimination, and expectations of entitlement. Threats to these ideologies are manifested affectively, cognitively, physiologically, and behaviorally. Major and Kaiser's review highlights the importance of understanding how higher status as well as members of disadvantaged groups are likely to respond when the status quo is threatened or questioned. They show that ideology is a powerful motivator, sometimes in surprising ways—evidence of fairness can be unsettling to a low-status group that embrace a delegitimizing ideology, and high-status group members may engage in competitive victimhood to resist diversity or other equalizing factors. They suggest that fascinating questions for future research will be to explore social factors involved in changing ideologies, such as wider use of social media and the instant accessibility of video and new information about comparable intergroup relations beyond people's immediate situation.

Stephen Reicher (2017) provides a narrative of his personal engagement with the question of crowd psychology. He shares his insight into how and why the study of crowds is a fundamental question for social psychology, and explains how his own observations and experiences of collective action and crowd behavior shaped his understanding of collective phenomena. A central question for social psychology is how people collectively change their shared situation. Reicher argues forcefully that the psychology of crowds helps to anchor our research in real-world phenomena, and that it hinges on how those external to and within the crowd categorize one another.


Crowds play a critical role in constituting, reproducing, and changing the social world. Reicher identifies as priorities for future research developing theory to account for the consequences of crowd action and for ramifications of crowd psychology beyond the crowd itself, such as radicalization.

John Dovidio, Angelika Love, Fabian Schellhaas, and Miles Hewstone (2017) consider the major problem of whether and how intergroup bias can be reduced through intergroup contact. They review the last 20 years of developments in theory and method, focusing on forms of contact, relevant mediators and moderators, temporal stages, and outcomes of contact. They have also helpfully provided a systematic analysis of the content of all GPIR articles on this topic (available both through supplementary materials and as a curated line resource at SAGE's GPIR website). As key areas for future research, they highlight the role of contact in linking intergroup and small group processes, differentiating structural- and individual-level processes, considering different types of outcomes for individuals (e.g., well-being), and implications for social change. They also note the importance of understanding contact in multiply categorized contexts.

As the world becomes decreasingly segregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and other categories, social psychological theorizing still has much to do to adequately capture how people make sense of and use these multiple categories. Gandalf Nicolas, Malena de la Fuente, and Susan T. Fiske's (2017) paper focuses directly on what we have learned about the nature of multiple social categorization. Early models limited themselves either to the consequences of the salience of binary categorizations or sometimes of crossed categorizations, usually considering outcomes such as stereotype recall or bias toward particular category members. This review considers how more recent models have incorporated the idea that people can view themselves and others as members of multiple categories, organized vertically and horizontally, but notes that different approaches have advanced independently of one another. Integrating questions addressed by this



research and using the stereotype content model as a vehicle for illustrating their point, Nicolas, de la Fuente, and Fiske propose that it is both feasible and valuable to develop more integrated models. There are many fascinating and important research questions ahead such as whether theories themselves start from essentializing assumptions, whether people can hold two active categorizations that are usually assumed to be mutually exclusive for the same target, and what the more emergent and dynamic results of such perceptions are. A particularly interesting issue raised by categorical ambiguity (e.g., mixed-race membership or appearance) is its implications for the linkages between intra- and intergroup relations.



Lauren Keblusek, Howard Giles, and Anne Maass (2017) examine the role of communication in group life, an area of research that has grown substantially in recent years. Critically, they argue that much of the complexity and subtlety of group processes is mediated through communicative elements not only of language but also of other symbols including dress style, fashion, and other bodily adornments. They integrate motivational and social cognitive approaches to discuss how social norms work dynamically, and how identities and boundaries between groups may be shared and contested within and between groups. This article makes a distinctive contribution by integrating language and dress into a coherent theoretical frame drawing on research on both psychology and communication. They identify several areas for new research, including the role of phonetics in intergroup communication and category labelling, the use of different types of figures of speech in expressing social identities, and the use of language and other symbols in intergroup phenomena such as system justification, intergroup threat, terror management, and ideology.

Theoretically and practically, the study of minority and majority influence requires linkage between theories of interpersonal influence, small-group decision processes, and intergroup relations, and in many senses captures questions at the core of the mission of this journal.

Reviewing the field of minority and majority influence, John M. Levine (2017) argues that factional influence is ubiquitous, and he offers new and intriguing questions for how we should understand factional relations within groups. Most groups, at least those larger than three people, form factions or subgroups, sometimes in opposition to one another. Most of the time these factions will constitute minorities and majorities, and this inevitably means that information, power, and other resources in the group are unequal. How then do minorities gain influence, and how do majorities either accept influence or else manage to contain or resist it? Although traditional influence studies of the Asch and Moscovici variety are now less common, factional influence is well represented across a host of related research topics in social psychology, greatly enriched by the growing recognition that influence and resistance to influence, may have multiple sources, multiple motives and emotions, and a host of different goals.

Diane Mackie and Eliot Smith (2017) outline their groundbreaking theorizing and research on group-based emotion. Although the advent of multilevel modelling now makes the idea of group-level variance quite unextraordinary, when this theory was first developed it made researchers think differently about what an emotion is. No longer a purely personal construct, it was now possible to consider an emotion as being an essential product of particular group memberships. Reviewing the last 20 years of research, the power, and value of this conceptualization, Mackie and Smith show how it has impacted theory and research in both group processes and intergroup relations. They also identify intriguing and important issues for future research, including how best to measure group-based emotions to understand how people represent emotions of their own and other groups, both in specific situations and over time; the linkage between group-based emotion and identity; and the role of group-based emotion in driving behavior and in reducing or exacerbating relations between groups.

Scott Tindale and Tatsuya Kameda (2017) consider how evolutionary theory can help us

understand the nature of group decision processes. They take an adaptationist approach to this question, arguing that for both accuracy and acceptance, human groups have evolved various decision-making procedures and ways of accounting for the collective preferences of the group. Although it is tempting to think that evolutionary accounts of social psychological phenomena are inherently untestable and post hoc, Tindale and Kameda review an impressive body of research and draw on parallel evidence on animal and insect behavior to argue that insights from evolutionary theory are extremely helpful in framing theories addressing more meso-level phenomena and constructs that are often studied in our labs, such as shared reality, group ethics, and parochial altruism. They conclude by highlighting that future comparative animal–human research is likely to be fruitful, and that the evolutionary/adaptationist perspective may be particularly useful in understanding the linkages between intragroup and intergroup processes.

Norbert Kerr (2017), developing his recent keynote address to the INGROUPE conference, argues for a return to some fundamental insights offered by Joe McGrath in the late 1990s. He argues that our understanding of group processes, particularly group decisions and group performance, requires greater attention to the nature of the task facing the group—not just the task that an experimenter or external agent imposes, but the task as construed by group members themselves (which is sometimes quite different). Kerr argues that many apparent inconsistencies or anomalies in findings are attributable to the fact that they emerge from different tasks rather than different underlying processes. He urges authors, reviewers, and perhaps particularly editors, to take heed of whether evidence is likely to be task-specific, and to articulate what the nature of the task is when considering the generality of findings or theory.

Ostracism and rejection are two aspects of social exclusion and the three terms are not interchangeable. Eric Wessellmann and Kipling Williams (2017) reflect on a now extensive volume of research into the nature and effects of

ostracism. Although ostracism is generally expressed as a one-to-one act, it is very often the case that one or both parties are representing a larger set of people, and that ostracizers claim their actions are justified because the target does not fit their group. Research has concentrated largely on interpersonal or intragroup ostracism, but of course it fits well with other research on people's reactions to deviance, conformity pressure, and so on. The work also potentially scales up to ostracism at the intergroup level. In their overview of the field, Wessellmann and Williams argue that greater attention is now needed to the distinctions between exclusion, ostracism, and rejection, and to more explicitly understand how they relate to inclusion, belonging, and acceptance respectively (as these are not simply opposites). They also identify two areas for future research that are germane to group-based theory—groups ostracizing groups, and also the (perhaps often group-related) causes, benefits, and drawbacks of using ostracism.

Social psychology sometimes takes the external world for granted, for there to be a psychology of groups and intergroup relations, people must apply their understanding of what it means to be a group member. Melanie Killen and Maykel Verkuyten (2017) consider two critical aspects of this process—the social developmental and cultural contexts. Focusing on these issues helps to expand conceptualizations that typically dominate group/intergroup research. They consider the developmental bases of moral and social reasoning about group-based behavior and its normative and cultural context. It is curious that social psychology has depended so much on snapshot measures such as implicit biases, stereotype judgments, evaluations, and even nonverbal behavior, but has relatively rarely asked about the more elaborated reasoning that people might use to make sense of socially inclusive and exclusive treatment of groups and their members. Moreover, the world of the child and adolescent may more often involve exposure to blatant and aggressive prejudice, as might also arise in many national and cultural contexts that are less well represented in theory and research. Equally

important is to consider minority perspectives and cross-cutting memberships of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, and gender that give specific meanings and roles, and to consider the role of religious teaching and ideology in framing our understanding of these. Killen and Verkuyten's review also highlights that children often engage very prosocially with groups, and that developmental research offers important insights into how to prevent negative attitudes and prejudices from supplanting that positive orientation.

Conclusions and Prospects

We consider that this anniversary issue achieves three things. First, it reflects on 20 years of progress in research on group processes and intergroup relations and identifies important directions for new research. Second, it provides an important and relevant reference point of the thinking of some of the most experienced and distinguished scholars across major areas of research in group processes and intergroup relations. Third, it will be fascinating and engaging to read. Every paper is fluent, lively, and stimulating, just as we'd hoped and expected of our contributors. As a whole, they offer a highly accessible gateway to the field of group processes and intergroup relations and we invite both old-timers and newcomers to enjoy the landscape.

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Appendix: Special Issues of Group Processes and Intergroup Relations

- 2000, Volume 3, Number 2 (April)
The information processing approach as a perspective for groups research
 Elizabeth Brauner & Wolfgang Scholl
- 2001, Volume 4, Number 3 (July)
Social identity processes in organizations
 Daan van Knippenberg & Michael A. Hogg
- 2003, Volume 6, Number 1 (January)
Intergroup contact: The past, present, and the future
 John F. Dovidio, Samuel L. Gaertner, & Kerry Kawakami
- 2004, Volume 7, Number 4 (October)
Evolutionary/adaptive thinking as a meta-theory for systematic group research: An extended "fungus-eater" approach
 Tatsuya Kameda & R. Scott Tindale
- 2005, Volume 8, Number 2 (April)
Papers from the inaugural group and intergroup processes pre-conference at the 2004 meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology
 Lowell Gaertner, Michael A. Hogg, & R. Scott Tindale
- 2005, Volume 8, Number 3 (July)
Intergroup relations: Its linguistic and communicative parameters
 Scott A. Reid & Howard Giles
- 2006, Volume 9, Number 1 (January)
Lay theories and intergroup relations
 Sheri R. Levy, Chi-yue Chiu, & Ying-yi Hong
- 2006, Volume 9, Number 4 (October)
Diversity and intergroup relations within organizations
 Nurcan Ensari, Julie Christian, & Norman Miller
- 2007, Volume 10, Number 1 (January)
Intergroup emotions
 Roger Giner-Sorolla, Diane M. Mackie, & Eliot Smith
- 2008, Volume 11, Number 2 (April)
Social neuroscience and intergroup behavior
 Deborah Prentice & Jennifer Eberhardt
- 2009, Volume 12, Number 3 (July)
Harmony and discord: The music of intergroup relations
 Howard Giles, David Hamilton, & John Hajda
- 2009, Volume 12, Number 6 (November)
Dehumanization: Humanity and its denial
 Emanuele Castano & Miroslaw Kofta
- 2010, Volume 13, Number 2 (March)
Self-regulation within and between groups
 Kai J. Jonas, Kai Sassenberg, & Daan Scheepers
- 2010, Volume 13, Number 6 (November)
Negotiation in intergroup conflict
 Stéphanie Demoulin & Carsten K. W. De Dreu
- 2011, Volume 14, Number 2 (March)
Prejudice reduction through extended and other forms of indirect contact
 Anja Eller, Miles Hewstone, & John F. Dovidio
- 2011, Volume 14, Number 5 (September)
Social influence in action
 Joanne R. Smith, Winnifred R. Louis, & P. Wesley Schultz
- 2012, Volume 15, Number 5 (September)
How groups decide: A tribute to the works of James H. Davis
 R. Scott Tindale & Norbert L. Kerr
- 2013, Volume 16, Number 1 (January)
Leading groups: Leadership as a group process
 Robin Martin, Geoff Thomas, & Ronald E. Riggio
- 2013, Volume 16, Number 3 (May)
In the name of honor: On virtue, reputation and violence
 Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera
- 2014, Volume 17, Number 4 (July)
Ideology and system justification processes
 Jojanneke van der Toorn & John T. Jost
- 2014, Volume 17, Number 6 (November)
Gangs: Group and intergroup dimensions
 Jane Wood & Howard Giles
- 2015, Volume 18, Number 3 (May)
Enabling a science of groups: Statistical and methodological advances
 Lowell Gaertner & Dominic Packer
- 2015, Volume 18, Number 5 (September)
Antecedents and consequences of intergroup forgiveness
 Masi Noor, Miles Hewstone, & Nyla Branscombe
- 2016, Volume 19, Number 4 (July)
How groups influence, maintain, and overcome health disparities
 Jeff Stone & Virginia S. Y. Kwan
- 2016, Volume 19, Number 5 (September)
Deviance in groups: Current perspectives on enduring questions
 José Marques & John Levine
- 2017, Volume 20, Number 3 (May)
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