



From C. P. Ellis to School Integration: The Social Psychology of Conflict Reduction

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Abstract

In this article, the authors review social psychological theories of intergroup conflict reduction. Emphasis is placed on three interrelated social conditions which facilitate conflict reduction: intergroup contact, superordinate goals, and shared identities. Bridging experimental research with real-world studies of schooling, these concepts are applied to understanding the process of school integration. Social contexts which present conflicting parties with a new shared goal and identity, as well as opportunities to become familiar with others beyond stereotypes and anxious reactions, dramatically increase the likelihood of diffusing conflict.

In 1980, Studs Terkel published the personal narrative of C. P. Ellis in *American Dreams: Lost and Found*. At the time of the interview, Ellis, a white man, was both a union organizer and manager of the predominantly black International Union of Operating Engineers in Durham, North Carolina. This position was worlds away from 10 years earlier, when Ellis served as the Exalted Cyclops (or president) of Durham's chapter of the Ku Klux Klan.

Ellis's transformation, from the leader of a racist hate group to a labor-activist who worked cooperatively with both whites and blacks to improve their lives, is a remarkable story that reveals the human capacity for change and enlightenment. In addition, much of Ellis's account exemplifies what social scientists believe to be the causes of, and solutions for, conflict between groups in society. In this article, we outline the body of this social science research. While we touch on potential causes of intergroup conflict, we focus on the three interrelated social conditions – *intergroup contact*, *superordinate goals*, and *shared identities* – which help alleviate conflict among social groups. After outlining these three concepts and their distinct theoretical emphases, we consider the overlap between them and highlight the mutually reinforcing nature of contact, goals, and identities in conflict reduction. Taking an ultimately sociological view, we end by considering how these processes occur within social structures by applying the research to a real-world situation: the process of school integration.

The genesis of conflict

Filled with bitterness and frustration over dire financial problems, Ellis was an easy recruit for the Klan. The Klan gave Ellis, who had recently lost his father, a sense of purpose and something tangible to blame his problems on: the black citizens of Durham. Ellis articulated the perceived conflict of interest between blacks and whites in his account. '[Blacks are] beginnin' to come up ... beginnin' to learn to read and start votin' and run for political office. Here are white people who are supposed to be superior to them, and we're shut out' (Terkel 1980, 203). Perceived competition for desired resources is an important source of conflict, but so is the assumption of divergent values. Beyond the threat of competition for valuable jobs and status with the lower-class whites, Ellis also cited fears of Communism as a driving force in his hatred for blacks. Ellis, like many others, acquired 'information' on other racial groups from stereotypes and hearsay. Such beliefs perpetuate myths of racially distinct values and attributes not only lead to conflict, but exacerbate it as well, fueling a vicious cycle.

Intergroup contact: A first step

Breaking down such stereotypes and associated anxiety are at the heart of the contact hypothesis (Williams 1947; see Jackson 1993 and Pettigrew 1998 for reviews). The premise is simple. Contact between members of two conflicting groups will lessen the ignorance the groups have of one another by contradicting stereotype-based expectations and giving individuals actual experiences to draw from rather than generalizations (Quattrone 1986; Stephan and Stephan 1984; Triandis 1995). Learning about the out-group was originally thought to be the primary mechanism through which the contact hypothesis improved intergroup relations, but subsequent research suggests that it is only one of many processes at work (Pettigrew 1998).

Intergroup contact also increases familiarity, lessening negative reactions like anxiety or discomfort that might surface even in individuals who are generally not prejudiced (Devine et al. 1996; Patchen 1995). The more familiar individuals of one group become with another and the more constructive interactions between them, the more positive the emotions evoked in encounters and the more empathy produced. Such affective responses are particularly important before cognitive responses – like increased knowledge about the group – can have a formidable impact (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). Therefore, friendships between group members, which offer numerous opportunities for anxiety reduction, empathy, and knowledge, are particularly beneficial (Pettigrew 1997; Wright et al. 1997).

Contact works, in part, because it forces interactive behavior between groups, and individuals tend to align their attitudes with behavior to reduce dissonance – the uncomfortable feeling that emerges when one's thoughts and actions contradict one another (Aronson and Patnoe 1997). As people experience positive interactions with others, their attitudes toward one another

must shift positively as well to experience consistency between thought and action.

Like superordinate goals and shared identities, contact also reduces the salience of group boundaries (Brewer 1979), the sense among members that there is a clear and important distinction between themselves and members of the other group (Mullen et al. 1992), increasing the likelihood that group members will realize possible similarities between themselves and members of the out-group. This was the certainly the case for C. P. Ellis. In the following excerpt from *American Dreams*, Ellis articulates how interaction with people of other races and religions was the starting point in his transformation, even while still active in the Klan:

I still didn't like blacks. I didn't want to associate with 'em. Black, Jews, or Catholics. My father said: 'Don't have anything to do with 'em.' I didn't until I met a black person and talked with him, eyeball to eyeball, and met a Jewish person and talked to him, eyeball to eyeball. I found out they're people just like me. They cried, they cussed, they prayed, they had desires. Just like myself. Thank God, I got to the point where I can look past labels (Terkel 1980, 205).

Such face-to-face interaction ('eyeball to eyeball' in Ellis's words) was at the heart of the contact hypothesis until recent research extended its scope. Lee et al. (2004) suggest that other types of intergroup exposure – even as slight as information about another group or observation of group members – may also have beneficial effects.

Superordinate goals

While interaction may begin to break down the barriers between groups and reduce conflict, this is only a first step. Research suggests that when groups share superordinate goals, goals held in common by members of conflicting groups that are best achieved through mutual cooperation, intergroup conflict dissipates. The Realistic Conflict Theory tradition posits that conflict (a) is generated by an underlying opposition of interest and (b) can be reduced by the introduction of superordinate goals. These hypotheses were investigated in a remarkable experiment (Fine 2004) by social psychologist Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues at Robbers Cave State Park in the San Bois mountains of southeastern Oklahoma in the summer of 1949 and again in 1954 (Sherif et al. 1961 [1988]). We briefly summarize the events of the 1954 summer camp, run by researchers from the University of Oklahoma, here.

Arriving at camp separately, two groups of fifth-grade boys were ensconced in separate areas of the camp, each with their own cabin and swimming hole. In the first stage of the experiment, *to enhance intergroup identity*, each group of boys spent approximately a week bonding with each other with no contact between groups. They engaged in camp activities such as preparing meals and pitching tents, canoeing, exploring caves, and hiking, and both formal (a treasure hunt) and informal games (impromptu feats of strength). Activities

such as baseball, which fostered competition within groups, were discouraged. As they interacted, social norms emerged within groups (such as being tough rather than homesick or a crybaby), and they acquired group identities: the 'Rattlers' and the 'Eagles'. Midway through the first week, the groups became aware of each others' presence, and they prepared enthusiastically for the possibility of competing against the other group in an activity such as baseball or swimming.

In the second stage of the experiment, *to enhance intergroup conflict*, the Rattlers and Eagles competed against each other in a tournament of camp activities including baseball, tug-of-war, tent-pitching, cabin inspections, skits and songs, and a treasure hunt. Although they were lectured on the importance of good sportsmanship, as the groups competed, tension and hostility between groups developed quickly. Initially, the groups engaged in name-calling and the singing of derogatory songs. Escalating the conflict, the Eagles burned the Rattler's camp flag. This action precipitated wrestling and fistfighting, which the staff quickly broke up. After a series of pranks between groups, the conflict had reached such a level that both groups prepared makeshift weapons to defend against or prepare for an assault. From that point on, the staff had to frequently intervene to avoid outright brawls. The competitive interaction of the two groups had led to negative attitudes, stereotyping, and a desire to avoid the other group entirely.

Following the escalation of conflict, the experimenters arranged a series of episodes that would require the Eagles and the Rattlers to work together to accomplish a task. In the first episode, the campers had to inspect and repair the water distribution system for the camp. The experimenters had purposefully sabotaged the water supply, telling the campers that local vandals had been known to mess with the camp. In the second episode, the two groups had to pool resources to secure a film reel of *Treasure Island*. In the third episode, on an overnight trip to a remote camping area, the experimenters faked a truck that wouldn't start (which was to go in to town to get lunch supplies). The tug-of-war rope had been placed near the truck, and the two groups of campers worked together to pull the truck so that it could be started from a roll. In a relatively short span of time, the series of superordinate goals introduced by the experimenters had a remarkable effect on the campers. During the competitive phase of the competition, almost none of the boys had listed an opposing group member as a friend. By the return home, 36 percent of Rattlers listed an Eagle as a friend, and 23 percent of the Eagles listed a Rattler as a friend (Sherif et al. 1988, 192).

The Robbers Cave experiment is a landmark study in the social psychology of group relations: both the level of hostility that was generated and the success of the experimenters in diffusing that conflict are remarkable. Such a study could not be conducted today; social norms governing the conduct of government sponsored research prohibit studies that carry even modest potential risks to participants. But a variety of less intrusive research methods confirm the utility of superordinate goals in the reduction of conflict (Aronson

and Patnoe 1997; Blake and Mouton 1961; Worchel et al. 1977; Worchel and Norvell 1980; Worchel 1986), and several conditions have emerged that enhance the effects.

First, the introduction of superordinate goals will be most successful when the duration or extent of cooperation is proportional to the level of conflict (Wilder and Thompson 1980; Worchel 1986). If the level of conflict is often minor, little is at stake and individuals' sentiments towards members of the out-group (the other group) if negative, are relatively mild. Under such conditions, a small amount of cooperation towards a relatively unimportant goal may be all it takes to reduce conflict. However, in most settings, hostilities and mistrust often run deep, as they did in the initial stages of the Robbers Cave summer camp. A sustained series of superordinate goals that are highly valued by group members is needed to reduce conflict in those cases. Indeed, among the Robbers Cave campers, friendship choices at the end of the camp were still substantially dependent on group membership.

Second, the origin of the superordinate goals themselves may influence the potential for conflict reduction. Johnson and Lewicki (1969) have called the activities engaged in by the Robbers Cave campers 'Act of God' type scenarios. By this, they mean that the superordinate goals stemmed from seemingly natural events, and the reduction of conflict was never explicitly linked to the task. If the specific tasks were proposed by one group, the other group may harbor suspicion about that group's motives. Likewise, if reduction of conflict is an explicit goal, this may just increase the salience of existing sentiments, which are hostile. In many real-world situations, it is possible for a powerful third party to supply the impetus for cooperative activities (as was the case for some of the Robbers Cave activities), but that is not always the case.

Third, superordinate goals will also be more successful when they increase the possibility that the unique traits of out-group members will be revealed; that they will come to be known as individuals (Cook 1985; Wilder 1978). In other words, the more that the superordinate goals promote familiarity and friendships between groups members as emphasized by research on the contact hypothesis, the more beneficial the goal.

For C. P. Ellis, such a superordinate goal came in the form of a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now divided into two departments: the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services) to solve racial problems in the Durham school system. Ellis was invited by the president of the state AFL-CIO to attend a meeting of people from 'all walks of life' to discuss the grant. After three nights of meetings, they formed a committee, and Ellis was elected as co-chairperson. The other co-chairperson was Ann Atwater, a prominent African-American activist who Ellis 'hated with a purple passion' (Terkel 1980, 206). As a member of the Durham Human Relations Council, Ellis realized that he would have to work with the community to formulate resolutions for the school board to address racism, sex education, educator training, and other

important topics and it would be impossible for him to do it alone. He called Atwater and said, '... there's something laid out before us, and if it's going to be a success, you and I are going to have to make it one' (Terkel 1980, 207). They worked together to improve the school system for all students – rich and poor, black and white, Catholic, Protestant, and Jew – and slowly learned all the commonalities they shared.

Ellis and the campers' experiences entailed a high degree of 'shared fate' (Campbell 1958; Rabbie and Horwitz 1969). Cooperation toward superordinate goals necessarily entails the generation of a certain amount of common experience – group members win or lose together. In experimental studies, shared success generally produces greater effects than shared failure (Worchel et al. 1977). But in real-life settings where a superordinate goal is maintained over some time, and group members repeatedly share the same fate, the outcome may be less important than the common experiences (Brewer 1979). Success was certainly not a factor for Ellis. Although his committee work to address problems in Durham's schools was entirely disregarded by the school board and he ultimately lost a subsequent bid for city council, the process of those two endeavors was still deeply rewarding and important for his transformation.

Another task condition that is not yet addressed in conflict research, yet may be related to outcomes and shared fate, is what educational psychologists refer to as a state of flow. 'Flow' is a state of deep absorption that is intrinsically enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Shernoff et al. 2003). Flow occurs when there is a good match between challenge and skills, when participants in an activity feel as if they are functioning at their highest capacity and meeting the challenges of the task. Perhaps superordinate goals that are *appropriately challenging*, and thus conducive to participants achieving a pleasurable state of flow, will result in the greatest amount of conflict reduction. In other words, 'success' or 'failure' per se may be less relevant than the experience of the task itself. The activities that occurred both at Robbers Cave and in Durham appear to have resulted in something like a flow state for the participants; they were deeply engaged in the tasks. Unfortunately though, there has not been research on intergroup conflict reduction that explicitly used a 'flow theory' perspective, measuring perceived challenges and skills, and participants' affective states.

Shared identities

Intergroup contact and superordinate goals are also related to a shared identity, an identity that stems from common experiences, perspectives, or sentiments that cut across group boundaries. C. P. Ellis shared a common identity with many of Durham's black citizens, that of an exploited unskilled laborer who felt as though his family's welfare was being sacrificed by those who had more, those who were in control. Such identities became the topic of research in the 1970s, partially in response to Sherif and others' emphasis on superordinate goals.

In experimental lab settings, Henri Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel 1970; Tajfel et al. 1971) explored the hypothesis that the mere classification of individuals into distinct groups leads to group bias. In order to test this hypothesis, Tajfel developed an experimental framework that could be used to measure an individual's response to group membership even in the absence of a particularly salient identity; the 'minimal group paradigm'.

The first step in a minimal group study was to induce an intergroup categorization (i.e., to establish a group identity among respondents). This identity would be based on the flimsiest of criteria, and minimal in the sense that it would have no prior meaning to the individual and would involve no interaction with other individuals. In an early experiment, Tajfel gave 64 participants aged 14–15 a task, asking them to estimate the number of dots projected onto a screen for a brief moment. The respondents were shown 40 clusters of dots, writing their successive estimates on a sheet of paper. The participants were then categorized randomly, but were told by the experimenters that people are known to be either over or under estimators on this contrived dot task. In another experiment, respondents were shown slides of paintings, that although they could not see the signatures, were supposedly by two modern artists, Klee and Kandinsky, and asked to express their preference between slides. Regardless of their choices, respondents were randomly told that they preferred one artist over the other.

The experimenters then told the subjects that as long as they were here, they would take advantage of the situation and ask them to participate in a completely different kind of judgment. The subjects were told that they would be giving rewards and penalties anonymously to each other. Each subject was taken to a private room and shown code numbers that presumably matched other subjects, but the only information they had was which group the code number belonged to (e.g. over or under estimator of dots). Subjects chose among matrices of awards carefully constructed to allow the subjects to choose a reward allocation that favored members of their own group, the other group, or where rewards were evenly allocated.

In these experiments, Tajfel et al. (1971) found that even though it was made clear that they would not benefit themselves from their choices, individuals unambiguously favored their own group. Moreover, they even found that individuals would allocate rewards that *maximized the difference* between groups, even when an option was available that gave their own group more rewards in the absolute sense. These basic findings were replicated in a number of studies using variations of the original minimal group studies (Brewer 1979).

Tajfel and Turner (1979 [1986]) developed a theory known as Social Identity Theory to explain their results. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity in order to maintain a positive self-concept (e.g. Cooley 1902; Covington and Berry 1976; Rosenberg 1979). Of course, for social identity theory to be relevant to an individual, he or she must identify with the group. For better or for worse, the individuals must feel they belong to the group. In the minimal group paradigm, even

the weakest group identity is accepted by individuals when presented by an authoritative experimenter. The minimal group paradigm forces us to ask ourselves the question, 'if something so arbitrary and seemingly meaningless can affect an individuals' behavior, just think how powerful of an effect a more robust identity such as race, gender, or social class might have?'

With respect to conflict reduction, the minimal group paradigm suggests that the introduction of an overarching shared identity will reduce bias and conflict (Gaertner et al. 1989; Turner 1981). If the basis of conflict and bias is the motive to maintain a positive social identity, then integrating the in and out-group into a single group will result in a reduction of bias; previous in-group members will extend the positive sentiments that exist toward the members of their new group. The potential benefits of shared identities on conflict reduction were illustrated in an experimental study by Gaertner et al. (1989). Gaertner and his colleagues used the 'winter survival problem' to establish meaningful groups. Subjects are asked to imagine that their plane has crash-landed in the woods of northern Minnesota in mid-January. They are then asked to rank-order the utility of ten items salvaged from the plane (a gun, newspapers, can of shortening, hand ax, compass, etc). The subjects have a brief time to perform the task individually, and then discuss the task and reach a group consensus. Groups thusly established, the researchers combined two separate groups together to discuss and re-evaluate their solutions to the winter survival problem.

The experimenters manipulated the setting of the second discussion such that in one condition the groups operated under a new unifying identity; the seating arrangements were integrated, they were given a new group name, and were told to reach a new consensus solution that would compete for an award with another group supposedly meeting elsewhere. In another condition, the groups maintained their distinct identities; they were seated separately, maintained their own group names, were told simply to explain their rationale for choosing each item to the other group, and were competing against that group for a reward. The subjects were then asked to evaluate the interaction that occurred. The level of in-group bias in the one-group condition was reduced compared to the two-group condition; the group interaction was regarded as more friendly, cooperative, trusting, and close. Those findings held in similar studies even when no goal and reward was specified; shared identities reduce conflict.

Overlap between contact, goals, and identities

As approaches to reducing conflict, intergroup contact, superordinate goals, and shared identities correspond with distinct theories that place different emphasis on what causes intergroup conflict in the first place – stereotypes, competition, and the motive to maintain a positive social identity – and offer clearly distinct solutions. Researchers can manipulate contact, superordinate goals, or shared identities individually or in tandem.

In practice, there seems to be substantial overlap between these three constructs. In a specification of intergroup contact theory, Allport (1954) specified four conditions for optimal conflict reduction. The first, that both groups should be given *equal status within the situation*, directly relates to shared identities. Even in situations where one group benefits from higher status in the larger society (for instance, white students in racially mixed high schools), being on equal footing in the salient situation will help lessen conflict. One way to do this is through shared identities. The second and third conditions, *common goals* and *necessity of cooperation or interdependence*, are directly related to Sherif's field study. The fourth and final condition is *the support of authorities, law, or custom* for the contact.

The Robber's Cave experiment, which focused on superordinate goals, also introduced shared identity. On the final bus ride home, nearing Oklahoma City, the boys began to sing 'Oklahoma' (Sherif et al. 1988, 187). That particular song draws on for its subject matter, and reiterates in the act of singing, their common identity as Oklahomans. In the minimal group paradigm, the outcome measure of bias was in essence, competition for points; bias and competition are not conceptually distinct. In other studies, shared identities and cooperation are both taken as evidence of reduced conflict (Gaertner et al. 1989). A close examination of research on intergroup conflict reduction reveals that while conceptually distinct, theories of contact, shared identities, and superordinate goals often overlap.

Throughout this article, we have referenced the narrative of C. P. Ellis to illustrate the impact of intergroup contact, shared identity, and superordinate goals on racially charged intergroup conflict. In the next section, we turn to a more contemporary issue; intergroup conflict in integrated schools. We focus particularly on the role of classroom motivational climates and extra-curricular activities in intergroup conflict reduction in the context of integrated schools. As with the case of C. P. Ellis, intergroup conflict, shared identities, and superordinate goals go hand in hand.

Conflict reduction in integrated schools

Gerald Grant (1988) described the results of the school desegregation process in one school in a rust-belt city in the late 1960s in his book, the *World We Created at Hamilton High*. The initial process of desegregation began in Hamilton High in 1966, but it did not go smoothly. Black students found the environment at Hamilton High hostile and interactions with teachers frustrating. The first major racial riot erupted in the school cafeteria in the fall of 1968. The principal, while attempting to intervene, was clubbed over the head and sent to the hospital. Despite major efforts to diffuse the tension, violence persisted. The following year, the school was closed ten times due to racial violence, including an instance where students rampaged through the school, destroying equipment, and smashing windows. Large-scale brawls were common, and the peak of violence saw helmeted riot guards stationed

outside of school. Grant concludes, 'The irony of desegregation for black students was that it brought them together with whites only to increase their sense of distance' (Grant 1988, 31).

One of the goals of school integration is to reduce intergroup conflict among members of society. Youth may have little opportunity to interact with members of other racial or ethnic groups in the family, church, or neighborhood; the experience of integrated schooling is intended to socialize youth to live in a diverse society. But as the excerpt from *The World We Created at Hamilton High* indicates, mere contact in schools does not ensure that students will develop positive attitudes towards members of a race/ethnic out-group. Thus, actively reducing conflict and bias in the context of desegregated schools itself is an important instrumental step if schools are to serve as effective agents of socialization. In documenting the potential for integrated schools to have a positive influence on race relations, researchers have emphasized two aspects of schools: (a) the motivational climate of schools and classrooms, in particular the nature of classroom evaluation, and (b) the role of extracurricular activities, in particular, athletic teams.

Motivational climates and evaluation

Schools have proven to be a difficult social setting in which to foster positive race relations. At Hamilton High, racial conflict was fueled by the within-school segregation of black students in low-track classrooms. Unfortunately, the disproportionate placement of minorities in low-track classrooms continues in America's schools (Clotfelter 2004; Kelly and Covay forthcoming 2008; Mickelson 2001), violating a principal tenet of Allport's contact theory. As racial and ethnic groups have differential status within the school, the likelihood of conflict increases as opportunities for cooperation decrease. The negative effects of tracking on race/ethnic relations are well supported by research on students' friendships. Being in the same track offers opportunity for interaction and creates shared experiences, reactions to school, and aspirations and ambitions. Students are more likely to be friends with other students in the same track (Hallinan and Williams 1989).

Analogous to status differentiation across tracked classrooms, it is possible for classroom instruction to create a context that increases the likelihood of conflict by highlighting student performance disparities. Traditional forms of schooling place a heavy emphasis on social comparison and constant evaluation (Ames 1992). In promoting the norm of achievement (Dreeben 1968), social comparison and evaluation ensure a competitive atmosphere in schools that is ill suited for reducing conflict among racial and ethnic groups. That many minority students enter school with lower levels of achievement makes matters worse, increasing the likelihood that schooling will actually enhance the salience of group differences.

How can classroom instruction be tailored to reduce the emphasis on social comparison and competition? A variety of approaches have been developed

that emphasize: expanding the criteria for, and reducing the visibility of, evaluation (Rosenholtz and Rosenholtz 1981), cultivating a multiple-ability orientation and assigning competence to low-status students (Cohen and Lotan 1997), moving away from recitation style instruction to a discussion-based model of instruction (Bossert 1979; Kelly 2007), providing individualized and small group rather than whole-class instruction (Eccles and Midgley 1989), and emphasizing individual growth rather than mastery relative to other students (Ames 1992; Dweck 1986). These bodies of research are discussed in detail elsewhere (Kelly and Turner forthcoming 2009). To illustrate the relationship between school context and integration here, we briefly summarize Metz's (2003) case study of an integrated middle school with a radically different evaluation structure: one that captures many of the approaches advocated by various scholars in a holistic approach.

In *Different by Design*, Metz (1986 [2003]) describes Adams Avenue Middle School, which offered a nontraditional curricula. Adams Avenue implemented a version of 'Individually Guided Education' or IGE, a whole-school reform popular in the 1970s and early 1980s (Popkewitz et al. 1982). IGE at Adams Avenue entailed several curricular innovations. First, the tasks students performed were diverse, and often specific to individuals or small groups of students. Whole-class instruction was not the dominant method of instruction. Second, evaluation was designed to stress student effort and improvement rather than point-in-time skill mastery. This was accomplished by carefully measuring student achievement growth and grading students according to their level of growth rather than absolute mastery. Finally, teacher evaluations were relatively private. Metz (1986) found that at Adams Avenue low-achieving students exhibited high levels of achievement motivation and engagement. Moreover, students were overwhelmingly positive about their school experience. An important part of their school contentment was the lack of racial conflict. Students had a relatively high proportion of cross-race friendships, and most desired to continue to attend an integrated school in the future. Adams Avenue helped promote an integrated student body by reducing the emphasis on social comparison, status differences, and the sense that school was primarily a competition to beat out other students for high marks.

Extracurricular activities

Whereas the traditional classroom setting often fosters competition, extracurricular activities provide both superordinate goals and shared identities that build solidarity amongst students from disparate racial and ethnic groups and backgrounds. Slavin and Madden (1979) investigated a number of strategies that schools might adopt to promote positive race relations in desegregated schools such as holding teacher workshops dealing with intergroup relations, using texts that adequately portray our multiethnic society, use of class discussions of race, existence of a biracial student committee to address

problems, and other approaches. Among students though, by far the most substantial predictor of whether they were friends with a student of another race, or held positive attitudes towards members of another race, was whether they participated on an athletic team with students of another race. Moreover, particularly among black students, participation on integrated sports teams had a more positive effect on race relations than did working with students in class and on academic projects. Crain (1981) reported similar findings but with respect to extracurricular activities more broadly. In desegregated schools where participation in extracurricular activities was high, more interracial contact occurred. In addition, students in high-participation schools reported a more positive schooling experience as a whole. Similarly, Patchen (1982) found that participation in extracurricular activities was the most important dimension of schooling (as opposed to individual background) associated with friendly interracial contact and cross-race friendships. Using more recent data, Moody (2001) confirmed the importance of extracurricular participation in fostering cross-race friendships; not only does extracurricular participation increase the likelihood that any individual student will have a friend of another race, it produces a school *climate* with positive race relations such that all students benefit.

Each of these four studies, using different samples of schools and their own measures of conflict reduction, reached the same conclusion; extracurricular activities serve a critical role in desegregated schools. Far from being a distraction from 'the real business of schooling', extracurricular activities make a substantial contribution to the social goals of schooling. Team sports have also been reported to reduce conflict among students in different academic tracks (Hargreaves 1967). Of course, the athletic field and the music studio are not completely immune from racial tension. In their case study of a recently desegregated suburban school district, Wells and Crain (1997) found that some whites came to resent black students who out-competed them for starting positions on teams.

In most cases, however, extracurricular activities provide an opportunity to reduce racial conflict because students engage in contact with members of other racial and ethnic groups in the context of both superordinate goals and shared identities. Extracurricular activities are associated with a clear superordinate goal. In the case of athletic teams, the goal is to compete against other schools, compiling a winning record, advance to the conference tournament, or even win a state championship. Competition within teams occurs within the larger context of the goal to win *as a team* and the coaching staff typically stresses teamwork throughout the season. For other extracurricular activities, the goal may be to produce a first-rate product that is applauded, where the 'competition' is the scope and difficulty of the project itself (e.g., yearbook club, drama, etc). Subsumed in the very definition of a team is a shared identity. This identity is associated with a particular school, but perhaps even more salient to participants, with a particular pursuit (Kinney 1993). Members of the cross-country team, for example, may come to see

themselves as unique from other athletes. Rituals, clothing, and respect for common heroic figures all contribute to a unique identity associated with a given pursuit. A shared identity is further enhanced by experience with the common ordeal that membership on a team requires (e.g., early morning practices, exhaustion, or even a disgruntled coach).

Unfortunately, participation in extracurricular activities within schools is not completely racially balanced. Examining a large sample of school yearbooks, Clotfelter (2004) found that white students participate at higher levels than non-white students. Activities within schools are also somewhat segregated; some clubs, sports, and activities are associated predominantly with a particular race/ethnic group. However, even given some degree of segregation, interracial contact in organized school activities occurs at rates much higher than that which occurs outside of school (Clotfelter 2004).

Unlike the family and other societal institutions, schools are places in which students spend an extended period of time with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Dreeben 1968). Naturally, our educational goals extend far beyond strict academic learning; we expect schools to socialize students to form productive and satisfying relationships with others (Goodlad 1984). Yet, schools are frequently highly stratified and competitive, which can undermine the social goals of schooling. Tracking systems in particular create a context in which students compete for spots in classrooms with the most highly qualified teachers (Kelly 2004), the most engaging instruction (Oakes 1985), and greatest achievement growth (Gamoran 1987). It is not surprising that conflict arises among disparate groups as individuals pursue the educational credentials needed to access higher education and succeed in the labor market. Even in the context of a status competition, however, it is possible for schools to have a positive effect on students' social development. Research on motivational climates and extracurricular activities illustrate the potential to maximize the benefits of desegregation, which should be seen as the simple first step in creating diverse schools, and achieve true *integration*, positive relations among in- and out-group members (Berry 1984; Williams and Ryan 1954).

Conclusion

Experimental studies in the social psychology of intergroup conflict are striking in portraying conflict as the default status of group interaction (Worchel 1986). Individuals are quick to hold biased attitudes towards members of other groups, and to engage in behaviors that favor their own groups. Such in-group bias is triggered by competing interests, but is also present even in groups where competition is absent; conflict arises almost spontaneously as the result of identification with a group.

Intergroup contact, superordinate goals, and shared identities are distinct social conditions that address the underlying sources of conflict among social groups and foster a reduction in intergroup conflict. While most of our attention here focuses on racial relations between blacks and whites, these social

psychological processes, and strategies, apply to other groups as well (e.g., children and the elderly [Caspi 1984], homeless and the domiciled [Lee et al. 2004], Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants [Ochoa 2000], and divisions within organizations [Matlz and Kohli 2000]). Social structures that simultaneously present conflicting parties with a new shared goal and identity, as well as opportunities to become familiar with others beyond stereotypes and anxious reactions, will be most successful in diffusing conflict.

C. P. Ellis, a union organizer when interviewed by Terkel, saw his work and community involvement as facilitators of such diffusion and instruments of larger social change:

I tell people there's a tremendous possibility in this country to stop wars, the battles, the struggles, the fights between people. People say: 'That's an impossible dream. You sound like Martin Luther King.' An ex-Klansman who sounds like Martin Luther King. (Laughs). I don't think it's an impossible dream. It's happened in my life. It's happened in other people's lives in America. (Terkel 1980, 211).

Research in schools suggests similar results. Alternative methods of instruction and evaluation, and an array of extracurricular activities available to students, can promote true integration. Furthermore, such integrative interactions within schools – through the changed ideas of those within and the examples set forth for the community – have the power to promote more widespread social change well beyond the classroom.

Short Biographies

Sean Kelly is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame and the Center for Research on Educational Opportunity. His research on student engagement received an Exemplary Dissertation Award from the Spencer Foundation and has appeared in *Social Psychology of Education*, *Social Science Research*, and *Sociology of Education*. He teaches coursework in the sociology of education and statistics for social scientists.

Jessica Collett is an assistant professor at the University of Notre Dame. Her research is largely social psychological and primarily focuses on group processes, self and identity, and emotion. Recent work exploring the relational outcomes of alternative dispute resolution, including perceptions of fairness disputants have of one another and their optimism about future interactions, appears in *Advances in Group Processes*. Other work examining other cognitive and affective outcomes of exchange relations is in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Psychology Quarterly*. Collett holds a BA in Sociology and History from Winthrop University and a MA and PhD in Sociology from the University of Arizona.

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