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Lisa Droogendyk

Simon Fraser University, lisa.droogendyk@sheridancollege.ca

Winnifred R. Louis

The University of Queensland, Australia

Stephen C. Wright

Simon Fraser University

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Renewed Promise for Positive Cross-group Contact: The Role of Supportive Contact in
Empowering Collective Action

Lisa Droogendyk¹ (corresponding author)
ldroogen@sfu.ca

Winnifred R. Louis²
w.louis@uq.edu.au

Stephen C. Wright¹
scwright@sfu.ca

¹Department of Psychology
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Dr.
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6
Canada
Fax 778 782 3427
Phone 778 782 4760

²Department of Psychology
The University of Queensland
St Lucia, QLD 4072
Australia

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Abstract

Positive cross-group contact can undermine disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. However, we hypothesized that positive cross-group contact in which an advantaged group member explicitly communicates opposition to inequality between groups ("supportive contact") would not undermine collective action and would be empowering for disadvantaged group members. Study 1 focused on cross-group contact between international students and domestic students at an Australian university. Study 2 focused on immigrants to Canada, and provided an opportunity for a cross-group contact with a Canadian-born individual. The results revealed that supportive contact heightened collective action engagement relative to a number of comparison conditions involving other forms of positive cross-group contact. Increased perceptions of injustice emerged as the key mediator of the relationship between supportive contact and increased collective action engagement.

Keywords: Collective action; cross-group contact; intergroup contact; supportive contact; social change

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“The Just Society will be a united Canada, united because all of its citizens will be actively involved in the development of a country where equality of opportunity is ensured and individuals are permitted to fulfill themselves in the fashion they judge best.” – Pierre Trudeau (1968)

Although the essential features of positive cross-group contact have been debated (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998), an impressive literature now demonstrates that interactions between members of different groups that are pleasant, or even neutral, can result in meaningful reductions in prejudice and decrease reliance on stereotypes (Dovidio, Glick & Rudman, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wright, 2009a). Nevertheless, a number of social psychologists (e.g., Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Wright, 2001; Wright & Baray, 2012) have raised concerns that positive cross-group contact may interfere with another important route to achieving social equality: collective action by disadvantaged group members. Although promoting intergroup harmony through more positive intergroup attitudes and fighting for social equality through collective action may seem like complementary goals, the underlying psychology supporting these goals may not be complementary at all (e.g., Wright & Lubensky, 2009; Saguy, Tasuch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009).

The conflict between pleasant, friendly cross-group contact and disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement remains a dilemma in need of a solution. Deciding to discourage or attempt to eliminate friendly cross-group contact is clearly not a reasonable solution. This is particularly true in ethnically diverse countries like Canada. It is projected that by 2017, visible minorities will make up 20 percent of the Canadian population (Bélanger & Malenfant, 2005), and the percentage is already higher than this in Canada's largest cities. The implication is that cross-group contact is a daily experience, making harmonious cross-group interactions necessary for society to function effectively. At the same time, many would argue that diverse countries like Canada must strive for social justice. For example, former Prime Minister Pierre

Trudeau is remembered fondly by many for his vision of a “Just Society”. Thus, it seems essential that we find a solution that allows for both friendly interpersonal interactions and continued commitment to collective action. The current research focuses on one such potential solution. Specifically, we investigate positive cross-group contact in which advantaged group members are explicitly *supportive* of the disadvantaged group. We propose that this form of contact may not only erase the disempowering effects found to result from other forms of friendly cross-group contact, but may also have an empowering effect on disadvantaged group members.

The Prejudice Reduction-Collective Action Conundrum

Explanations for the conflict between positive cross-group contact and collective action are based on the contention that the underlying psychologies required for participation in these two activities are incompatible (Wright & Baray, 2012). The goal of positive cross-group contact is a harmonious society, but collective action requires at least some intergroup conflict. Perhaps not surprisingly, “getting along” and “taking action” require very different psychological states.

In particular, collective action engagement relies on several psychological factors that can be undermined by positive cross-group contact. As one example, collective action engagement depends on strong perceptions of injustice (see Wright, 2010). When disadvantaged group members perceive their group’s lower status as unjust, resistance seems legitimate and appropriate. Maintaining a negative or at least adversarial view of the advantaged outgroup (Dixon et al., 2010; Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000; Simon & Klandermans, 2001) can support perceptions of injustice. Thus, negative stereotypes that depict the advantaged group as an oppressor strengthen the perceived legitimacy of collective action. However, positive cross-group contact may undermine disadvantaged group members’ perceptions of injustice, by breaking down negative stereotypes of the outgroup (Allport, 1954). Indeed, the primary intended outcome of positive cross-group contact is the generation of positive attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole.

In addition, strong collective identification (seeing one's group membership as an important part of one's self-concept) is a critical precursor to collective action (e.g., Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright, 2010). However, Wright and colleagues (Wright & Baray, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009) point out that many models of successful positive cross-group contact explicitly suggest structuring contact to focus attention away from group identities – for example, by suggesting a focus on personal identities or superordinate group identities. Even models that suggest a need to maintain the salience of collective identities focus on ensuring that the individual is aware of her/his interaction partner's collective identity, so that positive attitudes towards the partner can be generalized to the entire outgroup. To our knowledge, none of these models propose that contact participants should focus on *their own* collective identity or that contact should be structured to bolster feelings of connection and commitment to one's ingroup (for a discussion of these ideas, see also Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2009; Tausch, Saguy & Bryson, 2015). Thus, these models offer useful suggestions for structuring cross-group interactions to reduce prejudice, but these same suggestions may weaken identification with the ingroup, making it difficult for disadvantaged group members to remain psychologically prepared to engage in collective action.

Supportive Cross-Group Contact

Becker, Wright, Lubensky and Zhou (2013) demonstrated experimentally that positive cross-group contact can undermine disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. However, they also showed that not all friendly contact does so: when the advantaged group member clearly stated that the intergroup inequality was illegitimate, the undermining effect of contact on collective action was erased. Our research replicates some of Becker and colleagues' (2013) findings, by demonstrating again that contact does not always harm collective action engagement. We also take this line of reasoning a step further, by proposing that contact can actually *increase* collective action engagement when advantaged group members engage in what

we call *supportive contact*: friendly cross-group contact in which the advantaged group member demonstrates personal engagement in opposing inequality and/or supporting social change.

This form of contact could strengthen (rather than reduce) disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement, by impacting key psychological mechanisms critical to that engagement. First, recognition of inequality by an advantaged group member should strengthen perceptions of injustice – if the injustice is apparent even to someone who directly benefits from it, that provides strong evidence of the reality of that injustice (e.g., Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). Second, openly discussing inequality makes group memberships explicitly salient and represents the disadvantaged group positively, which may strengthen identification with the group.

The notion of supportive contact is consistent with recent work on outgroup “allies” (e.g., Conley, Calhoun, Evett, Devine, 2002). Indeed, some advantaged group members question the legitimacy of their group privilege and are willing to form alliances with disadvantaged group members (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Subašić et al., 2008). This commitment to helping the outgroup may become the source of new important social identities, such as that of an activist (see Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2010). However, this kind of personal supportiveness has not been directly described as critical to optimal cross-group contact. We propose this as a somewhat obvious (although, as we discuss later, not necessarily easy) yet effective solution to the ironic negative effects of cross-group contact and disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement.

The Range of Positive Cross-group Contact Experiences

More generally, the ongoing dialogue about potential downsides of positive cross-group contact might be strengthened by explicitly considering a broader range of types of positive cross-group contact. The kind of supportive contact we are proposing is potentially quite rare and can be contrasted with a range of other friendly, “positive” cross-group contact experiences, each of which may exert unique effects on collective action engagement.

Contact that is friendly, but *ambiguous* in terms of the advantaged group member's support and/or degree of opposition to intergroup inequality may be the most frequent cross-group contact experience. Advantaged group members are often reluctant to discuss intergroup inequality for a variety of reasons (see Johnson, 2001), including legitimate concerns about appearing biased (e.g., Tropp, Stout, Boatswain, Wright, & Pettigrew, 2006). There is also ample evidence that cross-group interactions can be difficult and anxiety-provoking (e.g., Shelton, 2003; Vorauer, 2006). Thus, raising the salience of group-based differences may be unappealing. The resulting lack of communication regarding intergroup inequality may leave disadvantaged group members with a sense of ambiguity regarding their interaction partner's support for their group, which may harm collective action engagement. Wright (2001) argues that experiences with cross-group friends who are "ambiguous" in terms of their position about group-based inequality will raise doubts about whether action against the seemingly friendly advantaged group is really justified, and whether this action would be supported by others. Consistent with this, Becker and colleagues (2013) demonstrated that contact with an advantaged group partner who said nothing about inequality reduced disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement.

Disadvantaged group members may also experience cross-group contact in which the advantaged group member is *low* in support and and/or only somewhat opposed to intergroup inequality. Some advantaged group members may express mild but equivocal support for the disadvantaged group's goals. They might simultaneously acknowledge inequality but refuse to endorse action aimed at correcting it, such as affirmative action (e.g., Bobo, 1988; Lowery, Unzeta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006), or a variety of other programs designed to level the playing field. LGBT individuals might interact with heterosexual acquaintances who make statements like, "I believe in equal rights, but I also believe in a traditional definition of marriage." Like cross-group contact that is silent in terms of beliefs about inequality, low or equivocal support should

also create uncertainty about whether collective action is justified and/or likely to receive support.

Finally, some positive cross-group contact may occur with individuals who are openly *unsupportive* of the disadvantaged group and/or supportive of intergroup inequality.

Disadvantaged group members may have pleasant contact with advantaged group members who openly express beliefs that legitimize inequality. This could have one of two (opposite) effects on collective action engagement. On the one hand, clearly unsupportive contact may empower collective action, as it removes ambiguity and makes salient the adversarial nature of the intergroup relationship (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). On the other hand, Becker and colleagues (2013) showed that thinking about a close other who was openly unsupportive of same-sex marriage undermined LGBT individuals' collective action engagement. Thus, unsupportive positive cross-group contact can sometimes be disempowering. The length and intimacy of the relationship may in part account for these possible divergent effects of unsupportiveness.

Unsupportive comments from a stranger or new acquaintance might seem provocative, even rude, and might heighten ingroup identification and perceptions of injustice. However, a long-term relationship (e.g., old friend or family member) with someone who is unsupportive might lead the disadvantaged group member to perceive a lack of support as the norm (e.g., women who accept benevolent sexism from male friends, or LGBT individuals in homophobic/transphobic homes). Spending time with such friends or relatives might decrease collective action engagement.

Current Research

We investigate cross-group contact that is explicitly supportive (“supportive contact”), and contrast this with contact that is friendly but lacks this kind of direct support. We expected that only supportive contact would be empowering for disadvantaged group members. In Study 1, we tested the effects of recalling past supportive contact on disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. In Study 2, we used the laboratory to create a cross-group interaction.

Study 1

International students studying in Western countries often face prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Australia Human Rights Commission, 2009). Because these students also have frequent opportunities to interact with advantaged group members (domestic students), these interactions provide an appropriate context to examine the impact of supportive contact. In this study, international students at a large Australian university were asked to recall and think about a domestic student with whom they had a friendly relationship. Participants were randomly assigned to think of a domestic student who was a) clearly supportive of international students, b) a little supportive, c) ambiguous in terms of support, or d) clearly unsupportive of international students. Participants then reported their willingness to engage in collective action, their identification with international students, and their perceptions of the injustice faced by their group.

Our hypotheses suggest three specific a-priori comparisons. First, our focal hypothesis was that recalling contact with an advantaged group member who is clearly supportive of the disadvantaged group would lead to greater willingness to engage in collective action, compared to recalling low support, ambiguous, or unsupportive cross-group contact (Contrast 1). We expected that higher willingness to engage in collective action in the supportive contact condition would be mediated by one or both of ingroup identification and/or perceptions of injustice. To investigate the similarity of ambiguous supportiveness, low supportiveness, and unsupportive contact (which is assumed in the focal hypothesis), we planned two other a-priori comparisons. First, we planned to compare the low supportiveness condition to the ambiguous supportiveness condition (Contrast 2). Second, we planned to combine the ambiguous supportiveness condition and the low supportiveness condition and compare them to the unsupportive contact condition (Contrast 3).

Methods

Participants. International students ($N = 138$; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.86$; $SD = 3.13$) at a large

Australian university participated in exchange for a candy bar¹. Participants' ethnicity was Asian (77.5%), White/European (7.2%), mixed ethnicity (3.6%), other (5.8%), or no ethnicity indicated (5.8%).

The majority of participants were female (69.6%).

Procedure. Participants first read a short paragraph making salient the disadvantage faced by international students. This information provided the context for the manipulation of the supportiveness of the advantaged group member. Supportiveness was manipulated by asking participants to recall one of four different types of native Australian students. In the Supportive condition, participants were instructed to, "Please think of a native Australian student who you believe is **supportive of international students.**" In the Ambiguous condition, participants were instructed to, "Please think of a native Australian student **whose views on international students are unclear to you** – you are not sure whether this person is supportive or unsupportive of international students". In the Low Support condition participants were instructed to, "Please think of a native Australian student who you believe is **only a little supportive of international students.**" In the Unsupportive condition, participants were instructed to, "Please think of a native Australian student who you believe is **not supportive of international students.**" In all conditions, participants were instructed, "If you can, try to think of someone who you know and like, such as a friend you have made at university." Participants then provided a brief description of the last activity they had done with this person, and completed measures of ingroup identification, perceptions of injustice, and willingness to engage in collective action.

Measures

All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 =

¹ Our sample excludes 15 participants who did not nominate a domestic Australian student (1 from the Supportive condition, 5 from the Low Support condition, 1 from the Ambiguous condition, and 8 from the Unsupportive Condition) were excluded from the analyses. One additional participant was excluded for failing to follow directions.

completely agree), unless otherwise indicated.

Mediators. *Ingroup identification* was measured using a 4-item scale with items adapted from Cameron (2004; $\alpha = .73$), e.g., “Being an international student is a central part of who I am.” A principal axis factor analysis indicated that all items loaded on a single factor, with loadings ranging from .50 to .80.

Perceptions of injustice was measured using a 4-item scale we designed for use with this population ($\alpha = .82$), e.g., “It is unfair that international students have a lower status in Australian society than native Australian students.” A principal axis factor analysis indicated that all items loaded on a single factor with loadings ranging from .53 to .84.

Dependent variable. *Willingness to engage in collective action* was measured using a 6-item scale ($\alpha = .84$) modeled on previous measures (e.g., Becker et al, 2013), e.g. “At this moment, I am willing to distribute information on international student issues around campus.” A principal axis factor analysis indicated that all items loaded on a single factor with loadings ranging from .50 to .87.

Manipulation check. Perceptions of support was measured by instructing participants to think about the native Australian student they had nominated and indicate their response to the question, “Generally, how supportive is this native Australian student of international students?” (1 = not supportive at all, 7 = very supportive).

Results

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations across the four conditions.

Planned comparisons.

We used planned comparisons in our analyses, as recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA) for situations where specific a priori hypotheses can be made (Wilkinson, 1999). The use of planned comparisons allowed us to partition the variability from the

planned contrast between the experimental and control means (Contrast 1), independently from the planned contrasts evaluating differences within the control conditions (Contrasts 2 and 3). The use of planned contrasts is appropriate given our theoretical focus, as this strategy guards against the risk of Type 2 error that pooling of the treatment variance associated with all three effects (e.g., in a MANOVA) might have generated. On the other hand, as in all inferential statistics, there is some risk of Type 1 error. By limiting ourselves to $k-1$ theory driven comparisons, our approach offers some protection against Type 1 error (e.g., see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). As further protection, as we have noted, our work here offers a partial replication of earlier work by Becker and colleagues (2013). Additional replication would further reduce concerns around Type 1 error.

Thus, three a priori contrasts were conducted for the manipulation check, the dependent variable and the potential mediators. Contrast 1 tested the focal hypothesis that recalling a cross-group interaction with a supportive partner would lead to higher willingness to engage in collective action than any of the other conditions. Thus, this first contrast compared the Supportive Contact condition to the other three conditions (combined for this analysis). Participants in the Supportive condition reported higher perceptions of support, $t(134) = 4.27, p < .001, d = .74$, higher willingness to engage in collective action, $t(134) = 2.44, p = .016, d = .42$, stronger perceptions of injustice, $t(134) = 2.06, p = .041, d = .36$, and higher ingroup identification, $t(134) = 2.12, p = .036, d = .37$, compared to participants in the other three conditions. These three medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988) are consistent with previous research. For example, Becker and colleagues (2012) report $d = .35$ and $.54$ for willingness to engage in collective action, with a larger effect size ($d = .73$) for their behavioural measure of collective action.

Contrast 2 compared the Low Supportiveness condition to the Ambiguous Supportiveness condition. Participants in these two conditions did not differ in terms of perceptions of support, $t(134) = -1.79, p = .076, d = -.31$, willingness to engage in collective action, $t(134) = -.56, p =$

.566, $d = -.096$, perceptions of injustice, $t(134) = -1.76$, $p = .081$, $d = -.30$, or ingroup identification, $t(134) = .56$, $p = .577$, $d = .097$.

Contrast 3 compared the Unsupportive condition to the Ambiguous Supportiveness and the Low Supportiveness conditions (combined for this analysis). Participants in these conditions did not differ in terms of perceptions of support, $t(134) = 0.22$, $p = .826$, $d = .04$, willingness to engage in collective action, $t(134) = -.54$, $p = .592$, $d = -.09$, or perceptions of injustice, $t(134) = 1.41$, $p = .162$, $d = .24$. Participants in the Unsupportive condition reported lower ingroup identification, compared to participants in the other two conditions, $t(134) = 2.52$, $p = .013$, $d = .44$.

Mediation.

In order to determine whether the significantly greater willingness to engage in collective action in the Supportive condition could be explained by changes in the proposed mediators, we used the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (Dearing & Hamilton, 2006; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2013). Bootstrapping involves the repeated extraction of samples from the data set (in this case, 5000 samples were taken), and the estimation of the indirect effect (or effects, if multiple mediation is being conducted, as here in Study 1) in each resampled data set. Considering all the estimated indirect effects in the 5000 samples permits the construction of a 95% confidence interval for the effect size of each indirect effect. If the values of the estimated effect sizes within the confidence interval include zero, this indicates a non-significant effect. This approach is recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to increase power in small samples and also offers several other advantages: (a) multiple mediators (as in the present study) can be tested simultaneously, while controlling for the effects of other variables in the model (b) it does not rely on the assumption of a normal sampling distribution and (c) the number of inferential tests is minimized, thus reducing the likelihood of Type 1 error.

Our independent variable was Contrast 1 (the focal contrast), which compared the

Supportive condition with the other three conditions. Contrasts 2 and 3 were entered as control variables (or “covariates) in this same analysis, as recommended by Aiken and West (1991). This is beneficial because it ensures the treatment variance associated with Contrasts 2 and 3 is not included in the error term, increasing the power of our focal test. We report the indirect effect (IE), as well as the completely standardized effect (CSE) to provide a measure of effect size (Hayes, 2013). In models with covariates, this measure provides an estimate of the indirect effect, relative to the amount of variation in the both IV and DV (including only the variation that is not accounted for by the covariates). This analysis revealed that the indirect effect of the supportiveness of the advantaged group member on willingness to engage in collective action via perceptions of injustice was significant (IE = .023, SE = .02, 95% [CI] = [0.002, 0.064], CSE = 0.36, SE = .02 [CI] = [.003, .100]) The indirect effect of the supportiveness of the advantaged group member on willingness to engage in collective action via ingroup identification was not significant (IE = .016, SE = .017, 95% [CI] = [-0.006, 0.063], CSE = .03, SE = .03 [CI] = [-.012, .095]).²

Discussion

Recalling *supportive contact* with an advantaged group member led disadvantaged group members to be more willing to engage in collective action, compared to recalling other forms of positive cross-group contact. International students who recalled a supportive domestic Australian student reported higher willingness to engage in collective action, compared to international students who recalled a domestic Australian student who was low in support, unclear in their level of support, or unsupportive. In addition, mediation analyses revealed that this effect was mediated by heightened perceptions of injustice - recalling supportive contact may have been empowering

² Excluding the unsupportive condition (where participants appeared to report the lowest perceptions of injustice) does not change the pattern of results.

because it drove home the reality of the injustice faced by international students.

One limitation of this study is that it measured willingness to engage in collective action, which might not directly predict actual engagement in collective action. Also, the study involved recalled cross-group contact, which could differ from the immediate experience of supportive contact. The empowering effects of supportive contact might arise after time for reflection, or after repeated interactions, meaning that recalled supportive contact might have a stronger impact on collective action engagement than the immediate experience of supportive contact. Conversely, the immediate experience of supportive contact could be more empowering than recalled contact, especially if the disadvantaged group member finds the expression of support surprising or unusual. In this case, the disadvantaged group member might be particularly likely to attend to the message of support.

Thus, in Study 2, we further investigated the potential of supportive contact to empower collective action engagement using a procedure in which participants' willingness to engage in collective action was measured immediately following an incident of supportive contact. We also added a behavioural measure assessing actual participation in collective action.

Study 2

In Study 1, participants were instructed to think of a friendly cross-group relationship in which the advantaged group member varied in terms of supportiveness. However, the level of supportiveness in this relationship may also have influenced other aspects of the cross-group contact itself. Thus, Study 2 involved a new procedure which allowed us to control other attributes of the cross-group contact experience while altering only the level of supportiveness.

In addition, this study used a manipulation of supportiveness that included the expression of group-based emotions (i.e., anger and guilt regarding intergroup inequality). In cross-group interactions, concerns about the genuineness of support are a very real issue - advantaged group

members have a variety of reasons to *appear* supportive, such as to alleviate feelings of responsibility (e.g., Iyer, Schmader & Lickel, 2007; Schmitt, Miller, Branscombe, & Brehm, 2008), or to maintain a positive image of the ingroup (e.g., Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000), and support interpreted to be insincere is unlikely to be empowering. However, expressions of appropriate group-based emotions may help genuine support to be interpreted as such. Research suggests that emotionally expressive people are perceived as more trustworthy, perhaps because they are less likely (or less able) to hide their underlying motivations (Boone & Buck, 2003).

Expressions of group-based anger might be uniquely effective in boosting collective action among disadvantaged group members. Anger is an action-oriented emotion (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989) and is associated with collective action participation (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009). Anger regarding intergroup inequality expressed by an advantaged group member (as part of supportive contact) could validate similar emotions felt by a disadvantaged group member, or could inspire anger among those not yet experiencing strong emotions regarding intergroup inequality, through the spread of emotional cues (e.g., Schacter & Singer, 1962). Thus, although expressions of both guilt and anger may signal genuine support for the disadvantaged group, an expression of anger might be particularly likely to lead to collective action engagement among disadvantaged group members.

In this study, first generation Canadian students at a Canadian university engaged in a friendship-building interaction with an ostensible Canadian-born student, and then overheard their interaction partner make a comment regarding inequality faced by first-generation Canadians. Two conditions in which the comment was explicitly supportive were contrasted with three conditions in which the comment was not supportive. Thus, the experiment included five conditions. Two groups of participants interacted with a Canadian-born student who made an explicitly supportive statement that either included a) an expression of guilt over intergroup inequality, or b) an

expression of anger over intergroup inequality. These were contrasted with three groups of participants who: c) interacted with a Canadian-born student who made an unsupportive statement dismissing the issue of intergroup inequality; d) interacted with a Canadian-born student who made an ambiguous statement that provided no information about their feelings regarding the issue of intergroup inequality; or e) had no interaction with a Canadian-born student (no interaction control condition). We then assessed willingness to engage in collective action, actual participation in collective action, and perceptions of injustice (as a potential mediator).

Our hypotheses led us to four specific a-priori comparisons. The focal hypothesis was that supportive contact (including either an expression of anger or guilt) would lead to higher collective action engagement, compared to ambiguous supportiveness, unsupportive contact, or no contact (Contrast 1). We expected that higher willingness to engage in collective action in the supportive contact conditions would be accounted for by stronger perceptions of injustice. We also predicted that supportive contact involving anger would lead to higher levels of collective action than supportive contact involving guilt (Contrast 2). To investigate the similarity of ambiguous supportiveness, unsupportive contact, and no contact (which is assumed in the focal hypothesis), two additional a-priori comparisons were used. First, the ambiguous condition was contrasted with the no-interaction control (Contrast 3). The tentative prediction was that ambiguous supportiveness would lead to lower collective action, relative to the no-interaction control. This prediction was based on the findings of Becker and colleagues (2013) who used a similar procedure and found that cross-group contact involving ambiguous support by an advantaged group member lead to lower collective action than a control condition. However, the control condition used by Becker and colleagues involved an interaction with an ingroup member, whereas the current control involves no interaction. Second, unsupportive contact was contrasted with ambiguous supportiveness (Contrast 4).

Methods

Participants. First-generation Canadians at a large Canadian university participated in exchange for course credit ($N = 203$; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.22$, $SD = 3.83$)³. Participants' ethnicity was Chinese (24.6%), Korean (11.3%), South Asian (10.3%), Caucasian (9.4%), or other (21.2%). The majority of participants were female (71.2%).

Procedure. Participants took part in two ostensibly unrelated lab studies. They arrived at the lab for a "Social Issues in the Media" study, where they were met by a research assistant (Experimenter 1), and a confederate posing as another research participant. They then read a media reports describing disadvantages faced by first-generation Canadians. To distract from the true purpose of the study, they also read two other reports on various other social issues (e.g., overfishing of oceans). Each media report was followed by filler questions.

Next, participants in all conditions except the No-Interaction condition were invited to participate in an ostensibly unrelated study on "Friendship Formation" run by a different research assistant (Experimenter 2), in a laboratory down the hall. To begin this second study, the participant and confederate completed the "Fast Friends" exercise (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997), a task designed to facilitate interpersonal closeness and friendship. The participant and confederate sat facing each other, and took turns answering pre-determined questions that became increasingly personal and required increasing levels of self-disclosure. We added an additional item ("Describe the story of your birth") to allow the confederate to clearly describe herself as "Canadian-born" and for participants to reveal that they were born outside of Canada.

Following the Fast Friends exercise, participants were seated at separate tables and began completing a questionnaire containing a variety of filler items. At this point, Experimenter 1 (the

³ By researcher error, no demographic information was collected for approximately 23% of participants; the error appeared to be randomly distributed.

research assistant from the “first” study) arrived and indicated to Experimenter 2 that he had forgotten to administer one of his questionnaires and asked if he could administer it to the participants now. This “forgotten” questionnaire contained the measures of willingness to engage in collective action and perceptions of injustice. Upon receiving her questionnaire from Experimenter 1, the confederate made one of four comments loud enough for the participant to hear. The content of these comments introduced the experimental manipulation of supportiveness.

Supportive (Anger): “Oh, right, the immigration article. I’m glad that we get to fill these ones out, I actually felt really **angry** when I was reading about those discriminatory policies. It just makes me so **mad!**”

Supportive (Guilt): “Oh, right, the immigration article. I’m glad that we get to fill these ones out, I actually felt really **guilty** about being a Canadian born person when I was reading about those discriminatory policies. It just makes me feel so **bad!**”

Ambiguous: “Oh, right, the immigration article.”

Unsupportive: “Oh, right, the immigration article. I don’t really feel like filling this one out, when I was reading it I didn’t think those discriminatory policies sounded like that big of a deal. First-generation Canadians seem like they’re doing fine to me!”

Participants then completed the questionnaire, and Experimenter 1 administered the behavioural measure. Participants were shown samples of buttons that promoted awareness of the social issues they had read about earlier, and then completed a form on which they could request buttons to keep or distribute to others. One of the sample button that read “All Canadians Are Equal; accompanying text indicated that it could be used to “raise awareness of inequality faced by first-generation Canadians.” The behavioural measure of collective action was the number of this button requested. Finally, participants completed a questionnaire including demographic items.

Participants in the No-Interaction condition also participated in a second, ostensibly

unrelated study (on “Cognitive Formation”), in which they worked alone to complete math problems and a jigsaw puzzle. Thus, participants in this condition did not complete the Fast Friends task and were not exposed to a statement by the confederate. However, they completed the “forgotten” questionnaire and the behavioural measure of collective action.

Measures

All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not true at all*, 7 = *very true* unless otherwise indicated.

Potential mediator. *Perceptions of injustice* was measured using a 4-item scale we designed for use with this population, e.g. “I think that it is unfair that first generation Canadians face discriminatory policies.” A principal axis factor analysis indicated that 3 of the items loaded on a single component with factor loadings ranging from .75 to .82 ($\alpha = .82$). We retained these three items in the final scale used for analysis.

Dependent variables. *Willingness to engage in collective action* was measured using a 9-item scale, e.g., “I am willing to do something together with fellow students to fight policies that discriminate against first-generation Canadians.” A principal axis factor analysis indicated that all items loaded on a single component with factor loadings ranging from .54 to .91 ($\alpha = .91$).

The behavioural measure of collective action involved participants completing an order form on which they could request 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 buttons. Participants selecting none of these options were given a score of “0”. This variable was moderately positively skewed (1.3), with 23.9% choosing 0, 37.3% choosing 2 (the mode) and 37.3% requesting 3 or more buttons.⁴

Results

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations across the five conditions.

Planned comparisons.

⁴ As using the square root transformation yields the same results, analyses are reported for the untransformed variable.

We again used planned comparisons (Wilkinson & APA Task Force on Statistical Inference, 1999), allowing us to partition variance from a contrast between the experimental and control conditions (Contrast 1), independently from contrasts evaluating differences between the two experimental conditions (Contrast 2) and within the control conditions (Contrast 3 and 4).

Thus, four a priori contrasts were conducted for each dependent variable and the mediator. Contrast 1 tested the focal hypothesis that cross-group interactions with a supportive partner (expressing either anger or guilt) would lead to higher levels of collective action engagement than the other three conditions. Thus, this first contrast compared the combined Supportive Anger and Supportive Guilt conditions to the Unsupportive, Ambiguous and No-Interaction conditions (combined for this analysis). Participants in the supportive contact conditions reported higher willingness to engage in collective action, $t(195) = 2.43, p = .016, d = .35$, ordered more buttons on the behavioural measure of collective action, $t(196) = 3.93, p < .001, d = .56$, and higher perceptions of injustice, $t(194) = 4.42, p < .001, d = .63$, compared to participants in the other three conditions (see Study 1 for a discussion of effect sizes). As noted in Study 1, these medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988) are consistent with previous research (e.g., Becker et al., 2013).

Contrast 2 compared the Supportive Guilt to the Supportive Anger condition. Participants in these conditions did not differ on willingness to engage in collective action, $t(195) = -.162, p = .871, d = -.02$, the behavioural measure of collective action, $t(196) = -.122, p = .903, d = -.02$, or perceptions of injustice, $t(194) = 1.84, p = .068, d = .026$.

Contrast 3 compared the No-Interaction Control to the Ambiguous condition. Participants in these two conditions did not differ on willingness to engage in collective action, $t(195) = .548, p = .585; d = .08$, the behavioural measure of collective action, $t(196) = .956, p = .340, d = .14$, or perceptions of injustice, $t(194) = -0.14, p = .892, d = -.02$.

Contrast 4 compared the Ambiguous condition to the Unsupportive condition. Participants

in these conditions did not differ on willingness to engage in collective action, $t(195) = .117, p = .907, d = .02$, or the behavioural measure of collective action, $t(196) = -.604, p = .546, d = -.09$. However, participants in the Unsupportive condition reported lower perceptions of injustice, $t(194) = -2.12, p = .030, d = -.30$.

Mediation

We again used the bootstrapping method to evaluate the indirect effects of supportiveness the collective action measures, through perceptions of injustice. Our independent variable was Contrast 1 (the focal contrast), which compared the two supportive contact conditions with the other three conditions. Contrasts 2, 3, and 4 were again entered as covariates in the analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). These analyses revealed that for collective action willingness, the indirect effect of supportiveness via perceptions of injustice was significant (IE = .031, SE = .02, 95% [CI] = [0.007, 0.069], CSE = .61, SE .03, [CI] = [.014, .135]).⁵ For the behavioural measure of collective action, the indirect effect of supportiveness via perceptions of injustice was not significant (IE = .022, SE = .03, 95% [CI] = [-0.022, 0.0843], CSE = .02, SE = .02, [CI] = [-.019, .058]).

Discussion

These findings provide further evidence that *supportive contact* can increase disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement, compared to other forms of friendly cross-group contact. First-generation Canadians who interacted with a supportive Canadian-born partner (one who expressed anger or guilt regarding intergroup inequality) reported higher willingness to engage in collective action, compared those who did not interact with a partner, or who interacted with a Canadian-born partner who was unsupportive or ambiguous in their support. This effect of supportive contact was also shown on a behavioural measure – requesting more campaign buttons

⁵ Excluding the unsupportive condition (where participants appeared to report the lowest perceptions of injustice) does not change the pattern of results.

– providing particularly exciting evidence of the empowering impact of supportive contact.

The results of this study are particularly compelling because our procedure ensured that the cross-group contact quality was identical across conditions. Other than the single comment at the end of the interaction used to manipulate supportiveness, the cross-group contact experience in all four contact conditions was identical. This similarity across conditions offers two benefits. First, it ensures that supportiveness is not confounded with other attributes of the contact experience. Second, it ensures that the contact experience in all four contact conditions was meaningful and friendly – consistent with other experimental research on cross-group friendships (e.g., Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Davies et al., 2011), making these findings relevant to the debate about prejudice reduction and collective action, which centers around the potential deleterious effects of *positive* cross-group contact and cross-group friendships in particular.

The results provide some support for the idea that expressions of group-based emotions represent one way in which advantaged group members can effectively communicate support. However, contrary to our hypotheses, an expression of anger was not uniquely effective at increasing collective action engagement, compared to an expression of guilt. Future research could build on this work by directly comparing supportive contact including the expression of emotions with supportive contact demonstrated through other means.

Consistent with Study 1, mediation analyses revealed that supportive contact increased disadvantaged group members' willingness to engage in collective action by heightening perceptions of injustice. However, this mediational effect was not significant for the behavioural measure (requesting buttons). It is possible that although willingness to engage in collective action can be driven by perceptions of injustice, the decision to actually participate may require a combination of mediators, including (for example) heightened perceptions of injustice, and a cognitive assessment of costs and benefits of participation (e.g., Stürmer & Simon, 2004). Future

research should consider a broader combination of mediators in an effort to determine the psychological processes that translate supportive contact into actual collective behaviour.

General Discussion

These two studies represent the first empirical demonstrations of the empowering impact of *supportive contact* on disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. They demonstrate this effect across two very different intergroup contexts, using two different manipulations of supportive contact, and including both willingness to engage in collective action and a behavioural measure. Recent research and theorizing have sounded an alarm about the potential deleterious effects of positive cross-group contact on disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement (e.g., Dixon, et al., 2012; Wright, 2001; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). More optimistically, the present work suggests that when contact is structured to include explicit support, it can actually empower disadvantaged group members.

Mechanisms

We tested two plausible mediators of the relationship between positive cross-group contact and collective action: ingroup identification (Study 1), and perceptions of injustice (Study 1 and 2). Across both studies, the greater willingness to engage in collective action that occurred as a result of supportive contact was in part accounted for by stronger perceptions of injustice. This supports the idea that supportive contact serves as a signal that the unfairness of the intergroup inequality is apparent even to some who benefit from it (e.g., Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2003). This apparent legitimization may help motivate disadvantaged group members toward action.

Previous theorizing supports the claim that ingroup identification should also be a potent motivator of collective action (e.g., Sturmer & Simon, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright, 2010). However, in the current research, identification was not found to be a significant mediator of the relationship between supportive contact and collective action engagement. Although

unexpected, this finding is not unprecedented - depending on the intergroup context and the form of collective action being measured it is not uncommon for one particular mediator to emerge as the primary motivator of collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2004; Wright, 2009b). Thus, future research could further examine the role of ingroup identification.

Future research would also benefit from considering a broader array of mediators that may explain the benefits of supportive contact. Wright and Lubensky (2009) have described perceptions of collective control (or *efficacy*) as another motivator of collective action engagement that may be undermined by positive cross-group contact. Again, supportive contact may facilitate, rather than undermine, these perceptions. For example, support from an advantaged group member could indicate the availability of additional resources (e.g., financial support) held by the outgroup, strengthening perceptions that the ingroup has the means to work toward its collective goals.

The Range of Positive Cross-group Contact Experiences

We investigated a range of friendly cross-group contact experiences. We contrasted supportive contact with contact that involved low support, ambiguous support, and explicitly unsupportive contact. In Study 1, we found that recalling contact with an advantaged group member who was ambiguous or low in their level of support led to similar outcomes for willingness to engage in collective action. These findings support the claim that advantaged group members need to be explicitly supportive to ensure that disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement is enhanced by cross-group contact. This is consistent with more general theorizing describing feelings of uncertainty (ambiguity) as deleterious for collective action engagement (Becker et al., 2013; Wright, 2001). The domestic students nominated by international students in the ambiguous and low support conditions were perceived to be similarly supportive, suggesting that ambiguity may have been *assumed to be* low support. It is possible that this may reflect a general lack of awareness regarding the disadvantages that international students face, and

thus few established norms regarding “support” for their group. Thus, when faced with ambiguity regarding support, international students may assume that their interaction partner is not likely to be supportive. This may differ from other “classic” intergroup contexts studied by social psychologists (e.g., cross-race relationships), where there may be greater awareness of existing intergroup inequality, and some established norms about the degree to which advantaged group members should express support. As a result, the interpretation of ambiguity could be quite different in these contexts. Future research could consider whether ambiguity regarding support is particularly deleterious in contexts where there are few norms regarding support.

Study 1 also examined how willingness to engage in collective action is affected by positive interactions with advantaged group members who are clearly *unsupportive*. Although this type of contact may not immediately come to mind when we think of “positive” contact, participants in this study seemed able to generate examples of friendly, but unsupportive contact, suggesting that this is a relevant experience for members of some disadvantaged groups.

Replication

This research provides a replication of work by Becker and colleagues (2013), who demonstrated that positive cross-group contact does not always *reduce* collective action engagement. Our findings also offer support for the stronger claim that supportive contact can *increase* collective action engagement. Both of our studies included a focal contrast comparing supportive contact to a number of other contact conditions (including a no-contact control, ambiguous contact, and openly unsupportive contact). The results show medium to large effect sizes, indicating greater collective action engagement as a result of supportive contact. Given our theoretical focus on supportive contact, the specific contrasts we have made are not directly comparable to most of the comparisons made by Becker and colleagues (2013). However, among their many comparisons, Study 2 includes a single post-hoc test comparing a condition in which an

advantaged group member made a statement indicating that intergroup inequality is illegitimate (their *illegitimate* condition) to a condition in which the advantaged group member remained ambiguous regarding their feelings about the inequality. This comparison yielded a large effect ($d = .86$) showing that participants reported greater intentions to engage in collective action in the illegitimate condition, compared to the ambiguous condition. While not identical to our focal comparisons, this finding provides additional evidence in support of our claim that supportive contact may not simply prevent the undermining of collective action, but may even empower disadvantaged group members.

Additional Implications

Earlier, we suggested that supportiveness be incorporated as part of positive cross-group contact (a potential solution to the problem of positive cross-group contact undermining disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement). However, this solution also comes with challenges: finding supportive advantaged group members is not always easy for disadvantaged group members, nor is offering appropriate support always easy for advantaged group members. To address these challenges, researchers could turn to the small but growing literature on allies in the fight for social justice (e.g., Conley et al., 2002; Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016; Rattan & Ambady, 2014), which highlights the characteristics of good allies, and how disadvantaged group members prefer them to behave during interactions.

Conclusion

Although there is growing evidence that positive cross-group contact can undermine collective action by disadvantaged group members, the current work suggests reason for optimism. We provide initial evidence that friendly cross-group contact that is also explicitly *supportive* – what we have called “supportive contact” – can actually empower disadvantaged group members.

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Table 1: Means and standard deviations by condition for dependent variable and potential mediators in Study 1.

Condition	Dependent Variable	Potential Mediators	
	Willingness to engage in collective action	Ingroup identification	Perceptions of injustice
Supportive	4.9 (1.1)	5.4 (1.2)	5.70 (0.9)
Ambiguous	4.4 (1.1)	5.1 (1.0)	5.60 (0.9)
Low Support	4.3 (1.1)	5.3 (1.1)	5.16 (1.3)
Unsupportive	4.5 (1.2)	4.7 (1.2)	5.06 (1.1)

Table 2: Means and standard deviations by condition for dependent variables and potential mediator in Study 2.

Condition	Dependent Variables		Potential Mediator
	Willingness to engage in collective action	Behavioural measure of collective action	Perceptions of injustice
Support (Angry)	4.2 (1.3)	4.3 (4.4)	6.4 (0.8)
Support (Guilty)	4.3 (1.4)	4.4 (4.1)	6.0 (1.2)
Ambiguous	3.8 (1.4)	2.9 (2.7)	5.8 (.9)
No Interaction	3.7 (0.9)	2.3 (1.8)	5.8 (1.0)
Unsupportive	3.7 (1.2)	2.5 (2.3)	5.3 (1.0)