

**Effects of identifiability in the long run:
The impact of desegregation on identity salience and well-being**

The influence of contact between members of different racial, ethnic, and religious social groups for the intergroup relations has been a long-standing concern with social psychology and society at large. During the first half of this century alone, at least 18 investigations were conducted assessing the degree to which intergroup relations were affected by personal encounters in a variety of contexts (Williams, 1947). These pioneering studies laid the groundwork for what we now know as the 'contact hypothesis:' the idea that prejudice and hostility between members of segregated groups can be reduced by (specific forms of) direct interpersonal contact (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Baker, 1934; Brewer & Miller, 1984; Cook, 1985; Watson, 1947; Williams, 1947). Despite the fact that from its inception this idea has not been without empirical and theoretical opposition (e.g., Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Mac-Crone, 1937; Stephan, 1986; Young, 1932), desegregation continues to be (in theory if not in practice) one of the major policies to combat prejudice.

Research on the impact of desegregation has tended to examine specific aspects of intergroup relations. Thus, the majority of studies in this field have been concerned with desegregation's impact on the psychology of high status groups, in particular with desegregation's ability to improve racial attitudes, diminish prejudice, and change stereotypes. Another substantial literature has examined the impact of segregation on minority groups' outcomes, for example African American's economic situation or school performance. The psychological responses of devalued group members to intergroup contact, however, have less often been the subject of examination (cf. Allport et al., 1953). Moreover, many studies have focused on the impact of desegregation over relatively short periods of time or within restricted environments (such as evaluations of the impact of busing).

The present study is primarily concerned with the impact of desegregation on psychological well-being across the life-span. Moreover, we are primarily interested in the well-being of the victims of prejudice, and the various psychological processes involved in heightening and diminishing well-being. The processes which we examine do not only involve indicators of psychological well being (such as private and public self-esteem), but also possible factors which we know contribute to well-being and are related to intergroup contact. Thus we examine the roles of *social identification* and *self-categorization*, both of which have assumed importance as constructs which may account for some of the impact of intergroup contact (Brewer & Miller,

1984; Hewstone & Brown, 1986), and which have been associated with well-being and intergroup relations more generally (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). In addition, we believe acceptance and rejection by ingroup and outgroup members are important correlates of desegregation and well-being, on the one hand because of the impact of discrimination on well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989), and on the other hand because of desegregation's potentially powerful implications for feelings of rejection by the ingroup.

Models of desegregation's impact on well-being and its correlates

One way of conceiving African Americans' psychological responses to growing up in a racially desegregated environment (i.e., to living in a White world) is to consider the psychological impact of having solo status. The impact of solo status is classically seen as enhancing the psychological salience of group membership, and therefore the salience of the psychological constructs associated with intergroup differences such as stereotypes and prejudice (Taylor, 1981; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). Thus, this perspective would lead to the expectation that desegregation has its primary impact on the salience of group membership (self-categorization) and social identification with the ingroup (but see Oakes, 1987). Indeed it would seem plausible to assume that the long-term day-to-day interaction with outgroup members heightens one's awareness of the intergroup differences, and therefore may impact on one's subjective well-being and/or feelings of acceptance by ingroup and outgroup.

However, one might also argue that the exposure to individual members of the outgroup over longer periods of time might lead to recategorization. Thus, for an African American to grow up in a White environment a possible social category which makes no distinction between the self and proximate others would be to use the overarching categorization of 'American' or other cross-categories. Such a process could result from a need to 'fit in,' and from 'sheer contact norms' which would mean that contact leads to assimilation and thereby possibly to a loss of identification with one's ethnic group. Thus, consistent with the common group identity model, desegregation might lead to categorization in and identification with an identity which those who live in the desegregated environment share.

An alternative perspective on the impact of desegregation may be rooted in characteristics of segregated and desegregated environments. Already in the early research on desegregation it was noted that those contexts which achieved desegregation usually offered better economic and environmental conditions for the devalued group than segregated environments did (e.g., Star, Williams, & Stouffer, 1949). With regard to the present race-relations in the United States the same still applies: it tends to be the case that African Americans who live in desegregated environments have higher incomes, enjoy higher status, and have better living conditions compared with African Americans in segregated environments. For those who grew up under those conditions, and were therefore exposed to them for longer periods of time, it is plausible that well-being would be an immediate consequence of these conditions.

Thus, those who grew up in segregated environments might well have lower levels of well-being than others who lived in desegregated environments, simply because of the deprivation of many important predictors of well-being. However, it should be noted that feelings of deprivation arise because of the social comparisons made. Because African Americans living in segregated environments would be more likely to make intragroup comparisons, they may not suffer from their deprivation as much. In fact, it may be argued that desegregation has negative consequences for self-esteem if such a context leads to intergroup comparisons (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crosby, 1982).

Finally, feelings of rejection by the ingroup or the outgroup may be a direct outcome of the long-term racial environment. Especially if you grew up being an African American in a predominantly White environment, you are likely to have experienced many different reactions from members of the outgroup, many of which are not discriminatory in nature. Moreover, it has been argued that African Americans in desegregated environments face less blatant discrimination. However, the downside of desegregation is that support of one's ingroup is less immediate, and that one may feel isolated from and rejected by the ingroup. Conversely, African Americans living in segregated environments appear to encounter discrimination and prejudice that is more blatant and more universal. However, in this case the support of the ingroup is easy to obtain, and one is not likely to feel abandoned or rejected by one's group. The outcome of both forms of rejection might together influence feelings of group identification and self-categorization, both being stronger in segregated environments. Feelings of well-being, in turn, are influenced by group identification in different devalued groups (Branscombe, 1998; Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & Schmitt, 1999).

Overview

The impact of long-term racial desegregation on African American women's well-being was investigated. Our hypothesis was that desegregation's impact on well-being would be mediated by perceptions of both ingroup and outgroup acceptance, and their respective impact on identification with one's racial group. Specifically, we hypothesized that growing up in a desegregated environment, or growing up in a segregated environment, does not in itself have positive or negative consequences for self-esteem. Rather, the impact of segregation should be mediated by one's assessment of the acceptance or rejection of the ingroup and outgroup. Thus, desegregation — i.e., immersion in an outgroup environment over time — may reduce feelings of acceptance by the ingroup, and increase feelings of acceptance by the outgroup. Both of these factors could contribute to cognitive and affective dimensions of group membership: especially lower acceptance by the ingroup is expected to lead to a decreased propensity for self-categorization in the group, and to lower levels of identification with the ingroup. Identification, in turn, was hypothesized to be the strongest predictor of self-esteem consequences in terms of personal and collective self-esteem (see Branscombe et al., 1999).

We investigated this hypothesis by testing our model (a *rejection-identification model*) in a structural equation analysis, and comparing outcomes of this model to several alternatives. The first alternative model we call the '*deprivation*' model. This model hypothesizes that long-term exposure to a Black environment (due to factors such as living circumstances) decreases well-being, and therefore has a negative impact on personal and collective self-esteem. We test two versions of this model. One is a model in which lower well-being reduces group identification and self-categorization, which in turn results in feelings of rejection by in-group or out-group. The second model predicts that well-being has a negative impact on feelings of rejection by in-group and out-group, which in turn affects identification (this is the exact opposite of the rejection-identification model).

Another alternative model we test is the '*identification-rejection*' model. This model reverses the role of the two mediators, such that racial environment predicts identification and self-categorization, which in turn predicts feelings of rejection and well-being. All models are tested using the structural equation modeling program EQS version 5.7a for Windows, (Bentler, 1995).

Method

Participants were 126 African American women students at the University of Kansas, who participated in exchange for course credit. The experimenter who handed them a questionnaire for completion was an African American woman. The questionnaire they completed contained a measure of perceived outgroup rejection based on race consisting of seven items, e.g., 'I feel like I am personally a victim of society because of my race,' which has been employed in prior research (Branscombe et al., 1999). This was followed by a six-item measure of rejection by the ingroup, e.g., 'Sometimes I feel rejected by members of my own race'. Three questions were designed to measure self-categorization. These three questions asked, for example, to 'indicate which is more important to who you are' with the dichotomous options 'being American' or 'being Black'. In addition, a seven-item measure of ingroup identification (Phinney, 1990) was administered: 'I feel an attachment to other black people'. Three questions assessed the racial composition over the life-span, assessing the percentage of African Americans and Whites in past and current personal environments, e.g., 'The neighborhood that I grew up in was composed of what percentage of Blacks and Whites?'

Well-being was assessed with two measures: The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (1979), which is a well-validated measure of global personal self-esteem (PSE), and collective well-being, measured with two subscales from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem (CSE) scale. We included four items from the membership subscale (e.g., 'I am worthy of the group that I belong to') and the private esteem subscale (e.g., 'In general I'm glad to be a member of the social groups I belong to'). All answers, except for the percentages of Blacks and Whites in the environment (0-100%) and the dichotomous self-categorization responses, were recorded on 7-point Likert-type scales, 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. The order of scales was randomized across participants.

Results

Looking at the percentage of Blacks in the past and present environment, participants were on average in environments that were segregated (only 39% whites), although the standard deviation (26.51) indicated that there was substantial variation, and 30% of the sample found themselves in predominantly white (desegregated) environments (>50%). It should be noted that this distribution is not as skewed as the national averages. Thus, the predominant majority of African Americans live in environments which are more segregated than our sample. This is probably the result of a relatively large proportion of our sample being from middle-class African American families, a higher proportion of which are able to live in desegregated contexts. Methodologically this has the advantage that the racial composition of the environment was sufficiently varied to be examined meaningfully, and to be used as a predictor in the structural equation models.

We tested several models as part of our analyses. The structural equation program used, EQS version 5.7a, produces several fit indices. The conventional test of statistical significance is the chi-square goodness-of-fit index. For this index, better fit is represented by lower chi-squares, and higher chi-squares indicate worse fit. A non-significant chi-square test statistic indicates that the difference between the estimated and observed variance-covariance matrices is not reliable, hence that the model fits the data well. Other indices provide additional information about the fit of the model, and are designed to provide more stable estimates of fit. We report the Bentler-Bonnett Normed Fit Index (BBNFI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Both are indices of the degree to which the model in question is superior to a null model, which specifies no covariance between the variables. These indices may vary from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no fit, and 1 indicating a perfect fit. Values over 0.90 are generally considered to represent adequate fit of the model (see e.g., Bentler & Bonnett, 1980).

The rejection-identification model. This model tested the prediction that growing up in a desegregated environment, that is a predominately White (outgroup) environment, would contribute to feelings of ingroup rejection and outgroup acceptance (i.e., lower rejection). This impact on rejection should in turn predict identification with the ingroup, which is hypothesized to be related to well being. To test these predictions, we specified a model in which well being was operationalized by the measures of personal and collective self-esteem. Collective self-esteem was a factor in the model that was predicted by the latent variables of member and individual subscales of the CSE. Because the covariance between personal and collective self-esteem is unlikely to be accounted for only by variations in group identification, we allowed the disturbance of the latent factor of CSE and the error of PSE to be correlated in the model. This procedure ensures that the high correlations that are usually found between the two are taken into account. Also, we made the cognitive and affective dimension to group membership (self-categorization and group identification respectively) independent from each other by letting the errors of these constructs be correlated.

We began our analysis by testing an independence (or null) model, in which all of the parameters are set to zero. This model establishes a baseline against which we

may compare our theoretical model, as it is based on the hypothesis that the relations between our variables are zero. As expected, the null model did not fit the data well. In contrast, the hypothesized model displayed in Figure 1 fit the data well, and better than any other model we tested. Goodness-of-fit and other fit indices indicate a good match between the estimated and observed covariance matrices, BBNFI = .94, CFI = 1.00, and that the model fit the data reliably better than the null model, $p < .001$. All of the estimated parameters were reliable, and the direction of the effects was consistent with our hypotheses. The model's solution is consistent with the hypothesis that growing up in a White environment has no direct impact on Black women's well-being, but is mediated by feelings of rejection, which in turn impact on group identification. Consistent with previous findings, identification had a strong impact on well-being (Branscombe et al., 1999). This model was able to account for the covariation among the measured variables well. The hypothesized model accounts for 17% of the variance in CSE, and for 7% of the variance in PSE. This is comparable to the r^2 values associated with other predictors of personal self-esteem (e.g., satisfaction with friends, $r^2 = .10$; satisfaction with family, $r^2 = .08$; satisfaction with finances, $r^2 = .04$) found in cross-cultural research by Diener and Diener (1995).

Two deprivation models. The deprivation models that we test are based on the assumption that growing up in a White environment provides African Americans with objectively better chances to achieve positive outcomes, which in turn should lead to greater well-being. One hypothesis about the subsequent influence of well-being on the other variables that we tested could be that well being predicts social identification with and self-categorization in one's group, which in turn influences feelings of rejection by ingroup and outgroup. Because of the exploratory character of these latter paths, however, we also included direct paths between PSE as predictor of ingroup rejection, and CSE as predictor of outgroup rejection. Once more, the error of PSE and the disturbance of CSE were allowed to covary, as well as the errors of self-categorization and social identification. This model was then evaluated in EQS as a test of the alternative hypotheses. This alternative model did not account for the data well: The fit of this model was inadequate. All three indices spoke to the fact that this alternative model failed to account well for the pattern covariation among our variables, BBNFI = .85, CFI = .89. In addition, many of the paths specified failed to be reliable, most notably the direct effects of desegregation on self-esteem.

We should point out that this model specifies the exact opposite causal relations to that of the rejection-identification model (except for the exogenous variable of environment, of course). It is telling that this model does not fit the data well, because it supports the notion that causal relations assumed in the rejection-identification model are indeed in that direction, and not in the opposite one.

The alternative deprivation hypothesis was tested in our deprivation model B. This model is similar to the one presented above because it also assumes that the racial environment impacts directly on well-being. However, well being in this model is related first to feelings of rejection by the ingroup and outgroup, and only then to identification with the ingroup. Once more, this model did not fit the data well, BBNFI = .79, CFI = .83. Thus, both deprivation models did not account well for our data, and hence do not support the hypothesis that growing up in a Black environment deprives one

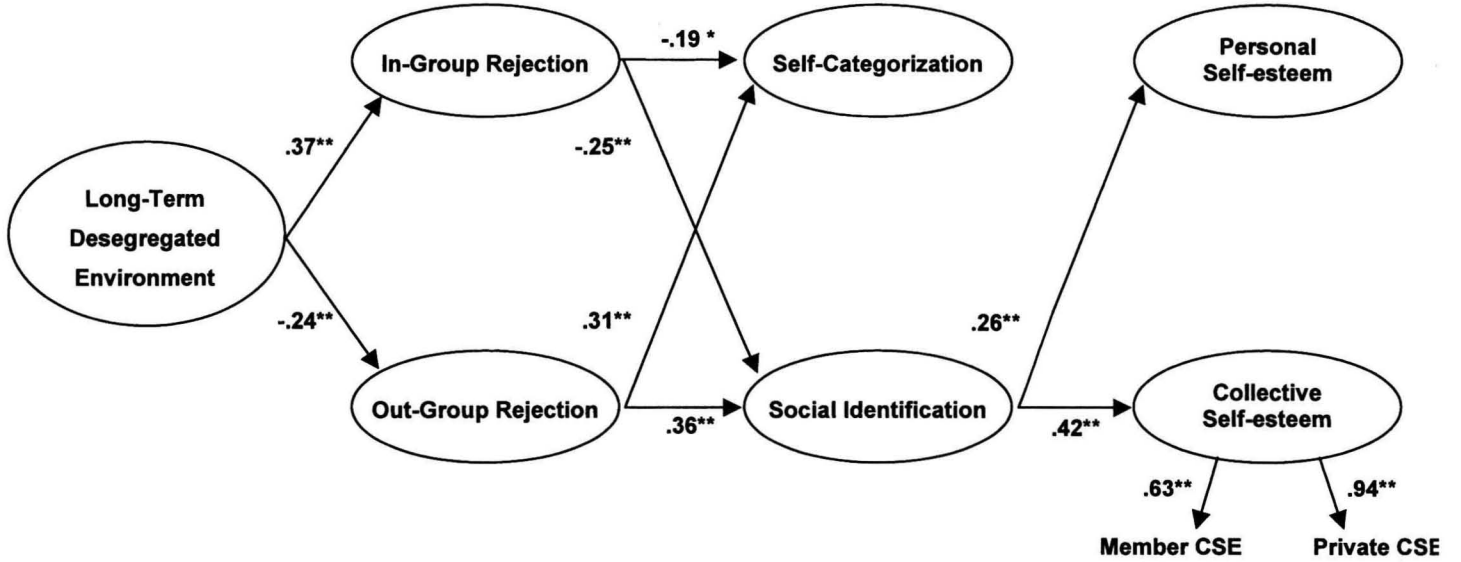


Figure 1: Structural equation solution for the rejection-identification model

from attaining a certain level of well-being that can be achieved in White environments. Moreover, none of the paths specifying the effect of racial environment on well-being was reliable, suggesting that the direct impact of environment is not on well-being.

The identification-rejection model. The final alternative theoretical model tested hypothesizes that growing up in a certain racial environment affects one's level of self-categorization and identification with the ingroup. Identification and categorization in turn may impact on feelings of rejection by the ingroup and outgroup, which predicts levels of self-esteem. When evaluated, the fit of this model was very poor, BBNFI = .80, CFI = .84. Moreover, many of the hypothesized relations were not reliable.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of a long-term racially desegregated environment on well-being. The immediate answer to that question is that, in the present sample of female African American college students, there is no reliable direct effect of desegregation on well-being. This may be seen as surprising. Sociological data informs us that the objective living conditions for African Americans are better in desegregated environments. Given the consistent links between well-being and similar living conditions (Diener & Diener, 1995), one might have expected that at least on the basis of these better circumstances there are beneficial aspects to living in a desegregated world. However, this appears not to be the case. Instead, there are other effects that are not neutral to well-being: Desegregation has an impact on some correlates of well-being, and it appears that these correlates in turn impact negatively on well-being.

There also does not appear to be a direct effect of desegregation on one's preference to categorize as a group member, or one's preference to identify strongly with one's group. Although much research on solo status and tokenism would suggest that solo status leads to salience of group membership especially for perceivers, there is no evidence of such a phenomenon in these data. Of course, one important difference between solo status as examined in the experimental literature and as examined in the present research is that we focus on *long-term* desegregation across the life span. This might be important because (analogous to the accommodation effects in visual stimuli) the perceptual salience resulting from visible intergroup distinctions might be something that people accommodate to relatively rapidly. In contrast, one's cognitive awareness of being discriminated against, being treated as different, and being rejected by members of a given social group, are social experiences which are especially likely to inferences of discrimination or rejection if they are perceived as general and pervasive, and if they are experienced over longer periods of time (Williams, Shore, & Grahe, 1998).

Another possible reason why solo status in the present data did not have a direct impact on social categorization may be that most of the literature demonstrates that solo status is especially salient for *perceivers*. For the targets themselves, group

membership might not be so prominent. It should be noted that some previous research has shown the opposite effect: That solo status in hostile environments can have profound effects on salience, as for example is the case with women in the military. However, our results with respect to perceived discrimination suggest that on the whole our sample did not believe Whites to be extremely hostile (only moderately so). The hostility of the environment is—we believe—important in explaining this discrepancy: whereas a consistently and explicitly hostile treatment in a specific culture would make salience of the group membership that triggers hostility almost inevitable, a moderately hostile environment offers plenty of opportunities to attribute individual acts of discrimination in a variety of ways, only one of which is tied to group membership (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Indeed, the results show that long-term desegregation has a particularly strong impact on perceptions of intra- and intergroup relations. Thus, desegregation had a moderately strong impact on feelings of rejection by one's own group (in terms of feeling a 'traitor' and feeling 'resented' by the ingroup). In this regard one might say that desegregation impacts on feeling welcome and at home with one's racial ingroup. Paradoxically, however, the African Americans in our sample reported feeling *more* acceptance by the outgroup—and society at large—if they had been living in a desegregated world for a longer period of time. Instead, they appear to lose the feeling that they are appreciated and accepted by their own group.

Both consequences of desegregation, feelings of ingroup rejection and outgroup acceptance, have a moderately strong impact on social identification with the ingroup, and on self-categorization as a group member (instead of as the broader category of American or an alternative categorization as a woman). Unsurprisingly, and in line with previous findings, it is especially social identification which has the strong impact on well-being, both in terms of personal and collective self-esteem.

A further noteworthy aspect of the present findings lies in the consequences of desegregation for African American's willingness to change existing race relations. Although this variable was unfortunately not among the variables included in our study, we believe that follow-up research should focus on it more extensively. What appears to be the case is that desegregation—through diminishing perceptions of discrimination and outgroup hostility—encourages individualistic responses (perhaps even a lack of responses) to racial inequality. In other words, our results suggest that desegregation would diminish a minority's capacity to strive for improvements. Such a diminished ability or willingness to strive for the improvement of one's racial group would occur despite the fact that the inequalities African Americans have to face are fundamentally similar in segregated and in desegregated environments. Such a behavioral outcome has troubling implications: It would contribute to maintaining the status quo, for example. However, we believe that this effect may depend on the nature of the intergroup behavior encountered. When instances of discrimination are isolated (as we believe they were for our sample), then individualistic responses are likely to prevail. When, however, discrimination is the rule—and desegregation is therefore hostile—collectivistic responses become more likely and may indeed be the only solution for improvement (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998).

This finding corresponds with the strategic consequences of identifiability towards the outgroup as proposed by Reicher and colleagues (Reicher & Levine, 1994a; Reicher & Levine, 1994b; Reicher, Levine, & Gordijn, 1998; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). As argued by Reicher, identifiability towards the outgroup evokes strategic considerations with regard to the ability to express particular aspects of one's identity, one's beliefs, and so forth. To the extent that our findings suggest that desegregation—one form of long-term identifiability towards a dominant outgroup—leads blacks to redefine intergroup relations in ways which are consistent with the dominant groups' perspective, our findings suggests that the strategic SIDE principles proposed by Reicher and colleagues do not merely apply to situational identifiability, but may be generalized to life-span identifiability. The novelty of our data in this regard is also in demonstrating the implications of identifiability and its strategic responses for well-being.

The previous discussion should have highlighted one aspect of our findings which has politically controversial consequences. As is apparent from the model which best explains the data (Figure 1), desegregation has—albeit through a number of mediating steps—some negative consequences for well-being, while segregation has positive implications. This is entirely consistent with Crocker and Major's suggestion that some aspects of stigma may have positive consequences for well-being, ostensibly because of the ability to attribute negative outcomes externally to prejudice, instead of making internal attributions. Although aspects of our data would seem to provide support for this suggestion, the process by which this takes place is rather different in our data. Consistent with previous findings, it appears that the impact of attributions to prejudice (measured indirectly in the present study by perceptions of being prejudiced) is only related to well-being through its impact on group identification. Thus, although the direction of effects is exactly as would predicted on the basis of Crocker and Major, the role of social identity appears to be crucial to understanding desegregation's impact on well-being.

Our findings point to the central role of group identification for maintaining well-being on both personal and collective dimensions. While this in itself is not a novel finding, this implies that racial segregation is not without its psychological benefits for the psychology of members of discriminated groups. Conversely, our findings point out potentially negative impacts of the politics of desegregation. The central role of group identification herein suggests that the confirmation of minority groups' identity (as espoused by 'black pride' and 'gay pride' movements for example) should form an integral part of policies to improve racial relations. Now that the formal institutional barriers promulgating racial inequality have been lowered or removed, there seems to be converging evidence that the 'melting pot' ideal is more ideal from the perspective of the dominant group than from the minorities which are at times forced to blend in. By implication, certain types of contact may reduce stereotypes of dominant group members, but despite this the psychological impact on lower status group members may not be positive. For these discriminated groups, there appears to be great value in maintaining a social identity (i.e., psychological segregation) even if physical segregation is the way this goal is achieved. On the basis of these results, it seems that the challenge is to foster racial equality, but to do so while maintaining cultural diversity.

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