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Seeking and avoiding intergroup contact: Future frontiers of research on building social integration

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Abstract

Over 60 years of research and comprehensive reviews now support Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis that face-to-face interactions between members of opposing groups should be promoted to lessen prejudice and improve intergroup relations. Society however does not yet enjoy the full prejudice-reducing benefits of intergroup contact because opportunities for contact are often not taken up, and segregation persists in the face of diversity. In this article, we review recent investigations on the social psychology of individuals' seeking and avoiding intergroup contact and set the stage for new research in this area. We call for a new generation of research on intergroup contact that addresses a novel and critical research question: What personal, situational, and wider social factors move individuals towards or away from engaging in intergroup contact? This research can help us design intervention strategies to ensure that opportunities for, and benefits of, intergroup contact are fully enjoyed by individuals and groups in increasingly diverse societies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Society does not yet fully enjoy intergroup contact's ability to reduce intergroup prejudice and increase social cohesion. Over 60 years of research and a comprehensive meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) support Gordon Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis: Face-to-face interactions between members of opposing groups—like European

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Americans and Muslim Americans, people with disabilities or mental illnesses and those without, gay and straight people, and young and old—typically lessen prejudice, while increasing social inclusion and integration (Hewstone et al., 2005). Intergroup contact therefore contributes to health and productivity (Bécares, Stafford, & Nazroo, 2009; Hewstone, 2009). Yet there is widespread evidence that opportunities for contact are not always taken up, and micro-level segregation persists in the face of diversity (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003: McKeown & Dixon, 2017).

Recent political history in allegedly liberal Western democracies however suggests that intergroup contact is undesirable for many. The election of Donald Trump in the United States, Brexit in the United Kingdom, and similar projected shifts across Europe and Australia are marked by discourse that ranges from veiled ethnocentrism and open populism, to outright racism. Growing socio-psychological evidence suggests that fear and anxiety about "the other" make dominant group members avoid intergroup contact, hence perpetuating informal group segregation, and impeding the benefits of contact (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016, for a review).

In this article, we review recent investigations on the social psychological basis of individuals' seeking and avoiding intergroup contact and set the stage for new research in this area. We call for a new generation of research on intergroup contact that addresses novel and critical research questions: Why are opportunities for intergroup contact so often missed in increasingly diverse and multicultural societies? What personal, situational, and wider social factors move individuals towards or away from engaging with diversity and intergroup contact? What psychological mechanisms do these factors instigate exactly? Answering these novel questions is essential to design intervention strategies that bring individuals and groups—especially those whose attitudes are most in need of change—to fully exploit opportunities for, and enjoy benefits of, intergroup contact.

2 | INTERGROUP CONTACT IS TYPICALLY POSITIVE, BENEFICIAL, BUT OFTEN AVOIDED

Gordon Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis has inspired desegregation policies around the world. Research on intergroup contact has included some mixed findings and scholarly controversies (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1998). In the last 15 years, however, many vexing problem areas have seen a positive resolution and in the process generated significant advances, which overall increase confidence in intergroup contact's benefits and potentials.

A fundamental, and until recently underappreciated, issue is that ordinary contact in naturalistic (vs. intervention) settings varies widely in valence, formality, structure, and intimacy-building potential (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2018; Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). Positive contact is far more prevalent than negative contact, in both peaceful and post-conflict societies (Barlow et al., 2012; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009; Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2017; Pettigrew, 2008). Yet negative contact can still exacerbate intergroup bias and erode social cohesion—at the same time, but not necessarily by the same route—as positive and intimate contact reduces it (Hayward et al., 2017; Laurence, Schmid, & Hewstone, 2017). Old contact data showed these contrasting outcomes and led to early reviews with divergent conclusions (Cook, 1985; cf. Rothbart & John, 1985). Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of over 500 contact studies however conclusively demonstrated that—on average—intergroup contact produces positive outcomes: It improves attitudes towards the contact partners and generalizes its effects to the whole out-group and novel situations—especially when contact combines positivity with salient intergroup categorizations (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; McIntyre, Paolini, & Hewstone, 2016). These generalization effects can extend beyond the out-group directly implicated in contact and affect responses to merely associated, unimplicated out-groups (the so-called secondary transfer effect; Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2011; Pettigrew, 2009).

Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) comprehensive review also clarified that intergroup contact improves intergroup attitudes even when it takes place under less-than-ideal conditions. Intimate contact, like direct experiences of intergroup friendship, is particularly effective (see also Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Their benefits and some of their psychological underpinnings are shared with indirect intergroup friendships (or "extended contact"; Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; for reviews, Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, & Christ, 2007; Zhou,

Page-Gould, Aron, Moyer, & Hewstone, 2018). Novel social network analyses now provide structural maps (Wölfer et al., 2017), and diary methods offer temporal analyses (Page-Gould, 2012) of the positive downstream consequences of intergroup intimacy.

The proliferation of social media and mass media exposure to out-groups in this globalized world also contributes to intergroup contact's conceptual and empirical elasticity (McIntyre et al., 2016). Intergroup contact has progressively become a generative umbrella term for the investigation of a broad "contact continuum" (Crisp & Turner, 2012) and "contact space" (Harwood, 2010), where direct and indirect contact experiences (e.g., observational or vicarious contact, Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011; parasocial or contact through the media, Harwood, Qadar, & Chen, 2016; Joyce & Harwood, 2017; intergroup storytelling, Vezzali, Hewstone, Capozza, Giovannini, & Wölfer, 2014; and imagined contact, Crisp & Turner, 2012) coexist and interact in a complex way (e.g., Christ et al., 2010; Paolini, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2007) to shape intergroup responses for individuals and groups. The effects of direct and indirect contact on group-level outcomes can occur at multiple levels of analysis; contemporary research (e.g., Christ et al., 2014) now shows that contact at the societal level (e.g., aggregate levels of contact within a school class, a whole school, a neighborhood, or an organization) has effects over and above those of individuals' own direct experiences of contact. These "contextual" effects of contact most likely reflect normative influences of socially mediated contact (Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007; Turner & Cameron, 2016). They do not discount effects of direct contact; even in diverse settings, there are additional and perhaps stronger effects of directly interacting with members of out-groups. Research on intergroup contact is undoubtedly prospering.

This theoretical, methodological, and empirical progress has reinvigorated optimism among contact experts and policy makers about contact's applicability (Bergmann, 2016; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013). This optimism is however at odds with global trends of xenophobic and divisive rhetoric and discourse: Divisive language about the threats posed by "the other" (along race, sexuality, gender, and social class lines) has not disappeared. In many contexts, it has worsened since September 11, after a Wall Street-triggered economic crisis, around the large flux of refugees fleeing Middle East's war zones, Trump's controversial presidential election, and Britain's acrimonious Brexit (e.g., Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Sheridan, 2006). Why are intergroup friction and prejudiced attitudes so prominent at a time when intergroup contact can be an everyday experience for most global citizens? Why are rich opportunities for contact in our diverse world not producing the widespread, enduring, and desirable integration outcomes predicted by intergroup contact research?

These are complex questions that call for sophisticated answers (see McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Paolini et al., 2010; Paolini & McIntyre, 2018). In this article, we focus on individuals' lack of *volitional contact seeking*, against a backdrop of significant structural and psychological barriers to engaging with diversity, as a key social psychological factor contributing to the apparent disconnect between intergroup contact research and public discourse about diversity. People's limited interest in contact is, we believe, a key reason for diversity at the macro-level only weakly predicting actual intergroup contact at the individual-level (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2010) and society missing out on the full benefits of direct contact.

Out-groups and in-groups are *not* equal in the ecology of daily interactions: Out-group members are less available than in-group members for contact because of structural (i.e., *objective*) and psychological (*subjective*) barriers (Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Trawalter, Adam, Chase-Lansdale, & Richeson, 2012). A host of often invisible obstacles to meaningful intergroup contact exist even in liberal, progressive, and multicultural societies (e.g., segregated urban spaces and neighborhoods; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). Children learn to express a preference to play with in-group over out-group members at a young age (Aboud, 2005; Turner & Cameron, 2016, for an overview). Ecological analyses of everyday intergroup interactions demonstrate that individuals engage in widespread patterns of *informal* segregation: Individuals and groups (unwittingly and implicitly) learn to structure spaces and times for social interactions in ways that establish and maintain separation between groups (e.g., spatial and temporal entering and exiting of public spaces like beaches, lecture theaters and cafeterias, and seating patterns within those and other spaces: Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Al Ramiah, Schmid, Hewstone, & Floe, 2015; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; for a broad discussion, McKeown & Dixon, 2017).

These structural barriers extend to our mediated communication environments: Growing evidence shows that people selectively seek media featuring in-group members and avoid content featuring out-group members (Harwood, 1997; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006). These findings are largely interpreted in terms of in-group (vs. out-group) media consumption supporting in-group identity needs (Abrams & Giles, 2009; Joyce & Harwood, 2017), although the actual motivations might be more complex (Ron, Solomon, Halperin, & Saguy, 2017; Stürmer & Benbow, 2017).

Overall, while our globalized and increasingly accessible and diverse world offers growing opportunities for intergroup contact, laypeople rarely choose contact spontaneously or engage in it in meaningful ways (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013). Intergroup contact scholars and policy makers therefore face new practical and theoretical challenges. Practically, we need to find ways to "lead the horse to the good waters of contact" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013), boosting individuals' ability (i.e., structural) and willingness (i.e., psychological) to engage in intergroup contact. Theoretically, we need to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that propel individuals towards fully engaging with diversity in real settings and a greater appreciation of the psychological factors that mute these responses. These are the new and big challenges for the next generation of intergroup contact research.

In the remainder of this article, we review social psychological research on the psychological barriers to intergroup contact and bases of contact avoidance; we then provide an overview of more nascent research on positive drivers of interest in contact. We do this highlighting experimental lab-based research on intergroup interactions and their behavioral and psychophysiological consequences, thus furthering our earlier efforts (see Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016) at integrating this literature with intergroup contact theory (see also MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015). Through these two major sections, we also advance some basic recommendations for future research paradigms, thus laying the foundation for new research in this area.

3 | UNDERSTANDING CONTACT AVOIDANCE BY DISSECTING NEGATIVE CONTACT, INTERGROUP THREATS, AND ANXIETY

Research on the factors that *undermine* people's willingness to engage in contact is relatively well established. A large body of evidence indicates that perceived intergroup threats and intergroup anxiety act as key deterrents to intergroup contact. Early correlational evidence on the link between contact and anxiety (e.g., Stephan & Stephan, 2000; see table 11.1 in Paolini, Hewstone, Voci, Harwood, & Cairns, 2006) is now complemented by strong experimental and longitudinal evidence that intergroup anxiety—as fueled by varied threat appraisals—*causes* people to avoid intergroup contact (Greenland & Brown, 1999; Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996; Levin, Van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; Page-Gould, 2012; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Plant & Butz, 2006). But why would that be the case?

Based on functional analyses of emotions (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005: Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Öhman & Mineka, 2001), anxiety and other negative emotions signal threats to the safety, integrity, and goals of the organism. These affective states trigger physiological and behavioral responses limiting further damage and threat, and aimed at removing obstacles to goal-directed efforts. One common outcome of these processes is to avoid more (aversive and threatening) experiences; in intergroup settings, this often translates into avoidance of contact with out-group members. However, what does make intergroup contact possibly aversive and something to be avoided in the first place? And what are the psychological triggers responsible for the contact-avoiding effects of intergroup anxiety?

Recent findings from intergroup interaction experiments suggest that, compared with interactions with in-group members, intergroup exchanges are experienced as more resource depleting, as well as more uncertainty and threat inducing (for a review, Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016. For instance, nonstigmatized individuals interacting with a visibly stigmatized stranger show poorer performance during challenging cooperative tasks and display psychophysiological reactions indicative of threat responses, relative to interactions with a nonstigmatized individual (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001). These adverse behavioral and physiological responses are characteristic of

situations in which perceived task demands outweigh resources, and avoidance responses are thus most likely. They have been documented in several controlled experiments (e.g., Olsson, Ebert, Banaji, & Phelps, 2005; Trawalter et al., 2012; see table 1 of Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016, for an overview).

While negative contact might be relatively infrequent (Graf et al., 2014), there is some evidence that its adverse effects on intergroup attitudes and cognitions may be of greater magnitude than the beneficial effects produced by positive contact (Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini et al., 2010; for an overview of research, Graf & Paolini, 2017; for a meta-analysis, Paolini & McIntyre, 2018). These asymmetries in the net impact and effect of negative (vs. positive) contact are likely rooted in basic human motivations (see Paolini & McIntyre, 2018). At the strictly intergroup level, they might be reinforced by negative contact's associations with salient intergroup categorizations (or high category salience; Paolini et al., 2010), ultimately giving negative contact a generalization advantage over positive contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2016). We do not expect these negativity biases in contact effects to be uniform across individuals or intergroup contexts; hence if research in this area is to contribute to our understanding of dynamics of contact avoidance, it will need to investigate the mechanisms and factors that exacerbate (or attenuate) these biases.

Experimental findings from intergroup interaction studies tell us that intergroup contact does *not invariably* place higher demands on the individual's cognitive resources. Thus, *not everybody* responds with stress when interacting with intergroup others. These acute stress responses have relatively small effect sizes; they are fluid and subject to many moderating conditions (e.g., Page-Gould et al., 2008; Townsend, Major, Sawyer, & Mendes, 2010; see table 2 in Paolini, Harris et al., 2016). As such, contact's undesirable effects are most likely short-lived and situationally variable (MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015; Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016). Nonetheless, these adverse experiences may still influence *expectations* about future contact in ways that make their detrimental effects far-reaching and enduring.

The mere *prospect* of an intergroup exchange often triggers debilitating cognitions (Plant, Butz, & Tartakovsky, 2008) and expectations of adverse outcomes (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008), including expectations of communication uncertainty (Plant & Devine, 2003), interpersonal rejection (Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak, & Downey, 2008), or indifference (Al Ramiah et al., 2015; Shelton & Richeson, 2005), impending threats to cherished values (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) or even physical threats (Mallan, Sax, & Lipp, 2009; for discussions of this literature's complexities, see Greenland, Xenias, & Maio, 2012; Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016; Stephan, 2014). As long as these anxieties and negative expectations readily come to mind when faced with realistic opportunities for contact, most people will opt to avoid contact.

Intergroup contact should be particularly threatening and resource depleting for individuals high in prejudice or harboring intolerant ideologies (e.g., SDO or RWA). These individuals have been found to report less positive contact and more negative contact (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009), relative to their more egalitarian counterparts. With less intergroup experiences, these individuals might have less overall intergroup self-efficacy (i.e., the skillset needed to effectively navigate intergroup exchanges; Mazziotta et al., 2011), making their intergroup encounters objectively less fluid and pleasant.

These processes would explain why prejudiced and intolerant individuals show overall low interest in intergroup contact (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012) and display residential choices that further set them apart from out-group residents (Pettigrew, 2008). Prejudiced members of dominant groups may be especially concerned about intergroup contact "exposing" and challenging their in-group's privileges (e.g., if group inequalities and power differences are discussed; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006); minority members with polarized intergroup views might avoid contact because they see friendly relationships with the out-group as a threat to in-group distinctiveness (Ron et al., 2017). Future research should check for majority–minority asymmetries in avoidance (and approach) themes and motivators (e.g., Saguy & Kteily, 2014), and ascertain whether prejudiced views, intolerant ideologies, and in-group identification are implicated.

Reflecting on these dynamics, it clear that avoidance of out-groups does not need to reflect "pure" out-group-related processes; it can be the byproduct of in-group-centered processes (e.g., driven by perceived in-group members' homophily, in-group identity support, or interest in learning in-group norms: Harwood, 1997;

Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Ron et al., 2017; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Contact avoidance might thus present against relatively muted, neutral or apathetic responses to out-groups. This invites a more careful consideration of the conceptual, and empirical distinction between avoiding the out-group and seeking the in-group.

Finding effective ways to mitigate the negative emotional, psychophysiological, or behavioral correlates of intergroup contact is a worthwhile focus for research because it would inform *ways to reduce contact avoidance* and limit group segregation. Individuals' past history of contact—operationalized as self-reports of more contact or more high quality/intimate contact—is proving to be one of the most robust and reliable antidotes against short-term deleterious effects of intergroup contact and thus contact avoidance. Blascovich et al. (2001, Study 3) found that nonstigmatized participants' past intimate contact with the out-group significantly reduced or completely removed the acute physiological stress displayed by those with limited past intimate contact during intergroup interactions. Similar buffering effects of past contact have been documented on other important contact-related outcomes and processes. More (or more intimate) past contact results in muted learning of conditioned out-group anxiety (Paolini, Harris, et al. 2016), faster extinction of learned intergroup anxiety (Navarrete et al., 2009; Olsson et al., 2005), faster physiological and endocrinal recovery after intergroup stressors (Page-Gould, Mendes, & Major, 2010), and reduced attentional biases for intergroup differences after negative contact (Paolini et al., 2014; for additional moderators, see table 2 in Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016). Having broader networks of close intergroup friends also protects against the avoidance-enhancing effects of experiencing interpersonal conflict with out-group members (Page-Gould, 2012). Hence, ensuring that people accrue a broad and healthy repertoire of contact experiences with out-group members can eliminate the aversive responses that fuel prejudice and contact avoidance in the first place.

Although fighting contact avoidance with *more* intergroup contact sounds like a practical and reasonable way of breaking the vicious cycle of contact avoidance and group segregation, it is logically circular as it adds little to our understanding of how to instigate *more* contact in the first place. For advancements in this area, we need research into factors that *encourage contact approach* to complement the more established focus on factors that limit contact avoidance.

4 | A DYNAMIC, MULTIVARIATE, AND MULTILEVEL LENS TO APPROACH MOTIVATORS IN THE FIELD

Why should individuals be motivated to seek out intergroup contact? Who is more likely to actively engage with diversity? And under what conditions? According to biological and cultural anthropology, groups and their members should strive for intergroup contact in order to capitalize on genetic variability, and acquire more and more diverse resources and knowledge (e.g., Bar-Yosef, 2002; Stringer, 2001; see Stürmer et al., 2013). The survival of genes may provide a mechanism that explains why individuals seek intergroup contact. However, how these evolutionary adaptive mechanisms translate to observable behavioral and psychological processes remains to be determined.

Experiments on intergroup interactions under acute task demands demonstrate that *some* people show *positive*, not negative, changes in physiology and behavior when interacting with out-group members (see Epel, McEwen, & Ickovics, 1998; Mendes, Gray, Mendoza-Denton, Major, & Epel, 2007; Page-Gould, 2012; Page-Gould et al., 2008). Salutary stress is associated with short-term preparatory and challenge responses often predictive of positive health outcomes and task-related productivity; Mendes et al. (2007) found that individuals low in implicit prejudice displayed a pattern of salutary stress (i.e., increased levels of anabolic hormones) when engaging in stressful tasks in front of out-group (vs. in-group) evaluators. In assessing the long-term effects of intergroup contact over an academic year, Trawalter et al. (2012) discovered that those who were low in external motivation to appear nonprejudiced displayed healthier physiological responses to interethnic contact presumably because of the "concerns-free" way they approached, engaged with ethnic others, and navigated the complexities of these exchanges. In line with this reasoning, Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, and Aron (2015) found that individuals encouraged by a high self-expansion prime to consider the benefits of being open to new challenges, seeking novelty, and

expanding their sense of self, prior to intense (and potentially stressful) friendship-building activities with an ethnic out-group partner, reported greater feelings of pleasure and intimacy during the exchange, as well as increased feelings of self-growth and social efficacy later in time.

These findings indicate that mindsets open to positive challenges or equipped with egalitarian attitudes are capable of *subjectively* transforming contact experiences into *positive and energizing* stressors. These individuals can recruit the heightened activation associated with intergroup contact and harness it towards greater task engagement, better performance, greater general and social self-efficacy, with possibly long-term benefits for well-being and productivity. Based on this dynamic outlook, positive physiological responses and short-term benefits of contact may function as *reward* systems for seeking *further* contact and generally serve to reinforce intergroup contact behaviors.

This view of dynamic, self-reinforcing consequences of positive contact, fueling individuals' further contact seeking, is consistent with the notion of "contact readiness" and "confidence in contact" recently advanced by Turner and Cameron (2016; see also Paolini, Harris, et al., 2016; Stürmer & Benbow, 2017). In their analysis of individual-level and institutional-level mechanisms supporting the development of intergroup friendships in school settings, these scholars posit that a mix of key situational factors (e.g., pro-diversity school climate, and peer norms) and personal factors (e.g., empathy and perspective taking) offer the ideal basis for the development of young people's positive orientation to out-group members and contact experiences—aka contact readiness/confidence. Especially when reinforced by targeted and systematic school-based interventions (e.g., using imagined contact, storytelling, and e-contact, some with a proven track record for positively influencing contact willingness; see Table 1), these factors would be the catalysts for virtuous cycles of contact and further contact seeking, within and possibly outside the school.

A growing body of lab-based experiments and intervention work in institutional settings confirms that people's willingness to engage in out-group contact can be increased under specific task instructions and priming conditions. For example, several experiments show that people's contact readiness is increased, as compared with control/no intervention conditions, with instructions to mentally visualize positive intergroup contact experiences, or by priming individuals to consider identities shared by the self and contact partners. Table 1 provides an overview of some these experiments, as well as of studies using other research designs, to investigate factors that act as approach motivators. This experimental evidence has the indisputable merit of resolving any ambiguity about direction of causality. It showcases new and promising determinants of contact seeking.

Yet these controlled studies are ill-suited to evaluate whether positive changes in physiology, behavior, and subjective experience achieved in contrived and controlled settings (e.g., lab or school) translate into increased interest in further contact in more naturalistic settings. In other words, finding that carefully crafted methods do boost intergroup approach in the laboratory or in schools, does not guarantee that these processes, and their attendant benefits spontaneously occur outside these settings, under less structured and sanctioned conditions.

In contexts where people have control over the behaviors and mental activities they engage in, those with whom they interact, and the modes of learning they use to interact with others (e.g., face-to-face vs. social media), individuals may simply not engage in the processes that underpin effective experimental manipulations and interventions (Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010). This is where diary methods, experience sampling technologies (e.g., Keil, 2017; Page-Gould, 2012; Page-Gould et al., 2008), and new GPS-tracking systems (e.g., Dixon et al., 2017) become exciting new options for the contact researchers' toolkit. These methods can gauge individuals' naturalistic approach and avoidance behaviors within ordinary, daily settings of contact in the field—when these behaviors occur or soon after they have occurred. The methods can track delayed and long-term effects of experimental manipulations/interventions (see,e.g., Graf et al., 2018), or just capture varied psychological consequences of naturalistic variations in contact experiences with (or away from) diversity (see,e.g., Page-Gould, 2012). Of course, more traditional methods such as field experiments and careful observation of naturally occurring behavior can also yield insights on these important questions.

It is essential that research goes "back" to the field, to analyze individuals' natural contact choices in unstructured and unmonitored contexts. Intergroup contact researchers have recently started to do this: Next to entries for

TABLE 1 Selection of published research that has identified positive predictors of contact approach

Publication/Study	Design/Sett	Participants' sample	Target out-group	Levels of analysis	Predictors of contact approach[a]
Burns, Isbell, & Tyler, 2008	Exp/L	Heterosexual males	Gay couples	Micro-intrapersonal	Instructions to suppress emotions among highly prejudiced
Esses & Dovidio, 2002	Exp/L	White Americans	Black individuals	Micro-intrapersonal	Instructions to focus on emotion (vs. cognition)
Paolini, Wright, et al., 2016, Study 2	Exp/L	White and ethnic Canadian students	Ethnic and white Canadian students	Micro-intrapersonal	Prime to consider their frustrated need for self-expansion
Wang, Kenneth, Ku, & Galinsky, 2014, Study 1	Exp/L	Singaporean undergraduates	Asian hooligans	Micro-interpersonal	Instructions to engage in perspective taking
Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008, Study 3	Exp/L	White undergraduates	Black individual	Micro-interpersonal	Prime to consider opportunities to learn from others
Paolini, Wright, et al., 2016, Study 1	Corr/L	Australian and Thai City and Rural young adults	Rural and City (same nationality) young adults	Micro-interpersonal	Expectancies of self-expansion through social relationships
Stürmer et al. (2013), Study 1	Corr/F	German undergraduates	Immigrants	Micro-intrapersonal Micro-interpersonal	openness, conscientiousness extraversion
Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000	Corr/F	Dutch undergraduates	International engagement	Micro-intrapersonal Micro-interpersonal	Openness, flexibility extraversion, agreeableness, social initiative, and extraversion
Boccato, Capozza, Trifiletti, & Di Bernardo, 2015, Study 2	Corr/L	Italian undergraduates	Immigrants	Micro-interpersonal	Adult attachment
Wang et al., 2014, Study 2	Corr/L	Singaporean undergraduates	Asian hooligans	Micro-interpersonal	Perspective taking (vs. empathic concerns)
Asbrock, Gutenbrunner, & Wagner, 2013	Exp/L	German undergraduates	Romas	Meso-interaction	Positive contact visualization among high RWA, but irrespective of SDO
Turner, West, & Christie, 2013, Study 1	Exp/F	British high school students	Asylum seekers	Meso-interaction Meso-groups	Positive contact visualization Out-group trust, out-group attitudes
Turner et al., 2013, Study 2	Exp/L	Heterosexual undergraduates	Gay people	Meso-interaction Meso-groups	Positive contact visualization Out-group trust, out-group attitudes
Al Ramiah et al., 2015, Study 3	Long/F	White and Asian British high school students	Asian and White British students	Meso-groups Macro-environment	intergroup friendships in-group and out-group positive norms towards contact

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Publication/Study	Design/Sett	Participants' sample	Target out-group	Levels of analysis	Predictors of contact approach[a]
Binder et al., 2009	Long/F	Ethnic majority and minority secondary school children in Germany, Belgium, and England	Ethnic minorities and majority group.	Meso-interaction	quality of interactions with intergroup friends
Gómez, Dovidio, Huici, Gaertner, & Cuadrado, 2008	Exp/F	Spanish high-school students	Students of another school	Meso-groups	Prime to consider common (vs. dual identities)
Glasford & Dovidio, 2011	Exp/L	Ethnic minority undergraduate students at US university	White majority	Meso-groups	Prime to consider dual (vs. common) identities
Dunne, 2013	Qual	Irish undergraduate students	International students	Meso-groups	Perceived out-group utility, shared future
Migacheva & Tropp, 2012, Study 1	Corr/F	White and African American middle-school students	African and White American kids	Meso-groups	Interest in learning about (vs. performing around) out-groups
Migacheva & Tropp, 2012, Study 2	Long/F	European American high school children attending summer camp	Ethnic minority individuals	Meso-groups	Interest in learning about (vs. performing around) out-groups
Tropp & Bianchi, 2006				Meso-interaction Macro-environment	self and out-group's valuing diversity

Note: Sett, Setting of the research. Exp/L, experiment in a laboratory setting; Exp/F, intervention study in the field or institutional setting (e.g., school) Corr/F, correlational field study; Corr/L, correlational lab study; Long/F, longitudinal field study; Qual, qualitative study. Micro-intrapersonal = factors associated with the individual's relationship to nonsocial stimuli; Micro-interpersonal, factors associated with the individual's relationship to social stimuli; Meso-interaction, factors relating to the individual as member of a social group, including cognitions concerning past or future intergroup contact; Meso-groups, factors relating to the individual as member of a social group, including group-based categorizations of self and others; Macro-environment, variables that reflect the internationalization of structural and normative characteristics of one's social context. This table provides a selection of studies in this fast-growing area.

[a]Only significant positive predictors of contact approach are reported.

experimental studies, Table 1 lists some of the correlational and longitudinal research that has isolated a number of contact approach motivators (see "predictors of contact approach" column). In our own work (Paolini, Wright, Dys-Steenbergen, & Favara, 2016), for instance, we found that self-expansion expectancies—defined and operationalized as self-reported expectations that social relationships afford expanding the knowledge, skills, and resources of the self—predicted interest in intergroup contact across the rural-city divide among both Australian and Thai young adults transitioning to university (see also Dunne, 2013). This, in turn, predicted increases in actual intergroup contact, quality contact, intergroup friends, and diverse friendship networks.

As correlational field research on approach motivators grows, there should be a parallel push towards systematizing and integrating research findings. Early intergroup contact research was criticized for yielding a-systematic and a-theoretical "laundry lists" of conditions for optimal intergroup contact. It took over 50 years of research and comprehensive reviews of the expansive literature to consolidate our understanding of key effects that underlie such complexities. It is imperative that the next generation of contact research focusing on the most pressing issues ahead—i.e., how to get people to engage fully with diversity and reject informal group segregation—does *not* embark on a similarly expansive, undisciplined, and lengthy journey. One antidote against unproductive research trends is in mantras from introductory methodology and stats classes: Whenever possible, we should ensure that field studies are carried out in a multivariate environment and results are interpreted with a multivariate lens (see Pettigrew & Hewstone, 2017, for a related point).

Cross-sectional research by Stürmer et al. (2013) helps elucidate the merit of multivariate methods in this area (see also Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). In their research, Stürmer and colleagues showed that openness and extraversion and (to a lesser extent) conscientiousness, *uniquely* predicted interest in contact with immigrants and habitual engagement in cross-cultural exploration. These effects emerged with some consistency across three studies, and when the influence of well-established correlates of out-group prejudice (e.g., SDO, national identification) was controlled. By accounting for intergroup attitudinal/ideological predictors of contact avoidance, Stürmer et al.'s multivariate design ensured that their research did not simply "rebottle" established effects of prejudice and intolerant ideologies. Testing simultaneously for contact approach and contact avoidance motivators guaranteed that their focal relationships gauged *net* variations in contact approach (vs. variations in contact avoidance; see also Barbarino & Stürmer, 2016). Using a multivariate approach to investigate contact seeking also minimizes the risks of detecting spurious and artefactually inflated relationships due to critical variables failing to enter the analyses (Pettigrew & Hewstone, 2017), thus effectively and efficiently isolating the unique and shared variance of related approach motivators (Ponterotto, 2010).

There are also important theoretical gains to be enjoyed from a multivariate approach: A multivariate perspective is desirable also because it naturally lends itself to a multilevel understanding of complex psychological phenomena (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). In Stürmer et al.'s (2013) research, for example, their multivariate lens allowed close consideration and a careful handling of variables from three qualitatively different levels of analysis within the individual: openness, an "intrapersonal" variable; extraversion, an "interpersonal" variable; and SDO, an "intragroup/intergroup" variable (see also Ponterotto, 2010; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

We used this multilevel lens to thematically organize key findings from the emerging (but still disconnected) literature on positive predictors of contact seeking (see Table 1's "predictors of contact approach" column). We classified individual predictors (as manipulated in experiments and intervention studies, or measured by self-report in correlational and longitudinal research: see "design" column), along three broad levels of analysis: a micro-level, a meso-level, and a macro-level (see "levels of analysis" column). These three broad organizing concepts, borrowed from Lewin's (1939) and Pettigrew's (1997) multilevel approach to analyzing social phenomena, have already proved fruitful in the contact literature to distinguish between effects that belong to arguably distinct spheres of reality—ranging from most internal to the individual, to most outer spheres (Christ et al., 2014; Ron et al., 2017). In our work, we articulate this multilevel lens further, by identifying lower levels of analysis that map onto distinct psychological traditions.

At the *micro*-level, we place factors associated with the individual's personal self; these are factors concerning the individual's relationship to nonsocial (intrapersonal:e.g., emotion suppression) and social stimuli (interpersonal; e.g., perspective taking). At the *meso*-level, we consider factors relating to the individual as member of a social group. These include individuals' group-based categorizations of self and other (groups;e.g., intergroup friendships), as well as cognitions concerning past or future intergroup contact (interactions;e.g., anticipation of contact partner's similarities). At the macro-level, we place variables that reflect the internalization of structural and normative characteristics of one's social context (macro: environment;e.g., perceived in-group and out-group's interest in contact). Table 1's footer note reports a definition for each of the levels of analysis.

Armed with this multilevel taxonomy of predictors of contact approach (and a parallel set of avoidance predictors), we have recently started to profile majority individuals' behavioral responses to realistic opportunities for intergroup contact with minority members in naturalistic settings. In one of our studies (Paolini, Azam, Harwood, & Hewstone, 2017), we invited non-Muslim Australian women to a Muslim women's public educational stall about Muslim head-coverings. Based on their expressed interest (vs. disinterest) and apprehension (vs. lack of apprehension) about attending the stall, the non-Muslims were classified in discrete natural groupings—as "intergroup fearless," "brave," "indifferent" or "fearful." We then surveyed all the non-Muslims using our expansive battery of self-reported approach and avoidance motivators, including variables from all sublevels of the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

We then use discriminant function analysis to establish whether inter-individual differences in responses to the realistic intergroup contact opportunity are underpinned by distinct profiles of micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors. This analytical approach tells us how much each individual predictor and predictor grouping uniquely explains distinct behavioral types; it establishes which one has a more (vs. less) prominent role to play. For instance, the analyses might show that communication apprehension (micro-level interpersonal) powerfully predict fear of contact but that the fear is overcome for people who experience this interpersonal apprehension in combination with high levels of self-expansion expectancies (micro-level interpersonal), significant past contact (meso-level interaction), and supportive norms for contact by family and peers (macro-level interaction).

Recently, we adapted this labor-intensive field paradigm into a blended online-plus-field analogue tool (Mackiewicz, Paolini, Harwood, Neumann, & Hewstone, 2018), which we are using to profile responses to opportunities of contact with a range of stigmatized out-groups (e.g., older adults, gay and lesbians, etc.).

These investigations demonstrate significant inter-individual variability in responses to realistic intergroup contact opportunities (see,e.g., Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000). They also prove that this variability is typically multi-determined (Al Ramiah et al., 2015; Barbarino & Stürmer, 2016; Ponterotto, 2010; Ron et al., 2017; Stürmer et al., 2013; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Through this groundwork around the factors promoting or hindering people's interest in intergroup exploration, we aspire to contribute to an integrated, empirically determined and ecologically valid understanding of the conditions and processes that are at work in realistic social settings.

From this enlarged stance that cuts across multiple factors and levels of analysis, it is not difficult to imagine what the future of research can look like: Such work promises to reveal that several person and situational underpinnings not only coexist but create a space where variables from distinct levels can interact (Ron et al., 2017; Stürmer & Benbow, 2017; Turner & Cameron, 2016). This research can result in a sophisticated and integrated understanding of intergroup contact that clarifies why certain individuals *naturally* seek out intergroup contact and others do not and why certain contexts elicit explorations of out-groups and others do not.

5 | RESEARCH-READY FOR THE COMPLEX CHALLENGES OF THIS TROUBLED GLOBAL CONTEXT

This review began from an optimistic view of intergroup contact, emphasizing its promise in reducing prejudice and intergroup friction, and its ability to increase individuals' belonging and social integration. But we acknowledged a key challenge: getting people to engage in contact in the first place.

With this impasse in mind, we provided an overview of the relatively solid knowledge base for the contact avoidance effects of anticipated intergroup threats and anxiety, with an emphasis on recent behavioral and psychophysiological findings. We also considered the fast accumulating knowledge of contact approach motivators and identified some desirable parameters for future research methods in this area. By prioritizing individual-level factors and dynamics among adults from peaceful democratic Western settings, this article complements, with minimal overlap, other contributions that emphasize meso- and macro-level factors relevant to developmental samples in institutional settings (i.e., schools; Turner & Cameron, 2016), or minority–majority power relationships in conflict-ridden societies (Ron et al., 2017).

Our enthusiasm for intergroup contact as a way to improve troubled intergroup dynamics is kept in check by the difficult global context we live in. Contact is not a panacea, and research in this area faces a set of interrelated challenges. We touched earlier on the psychological and social reality of negative contact and its effects (see Graf & Paolini, 2017). We noted how positive contact acts as a rewards system and fuels interest in further contact; unsuccessful, negative interactions similarly dampen interest in cross-group exploration and, by feeding unhelpful expectations, compromise future engagement with diversity (Turner & Cameron, 2016). The contact literature has also explicated certain ironic or counter-intuitive effects of both positive (e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009) and negative contact (Reimer et al., 2017; see Graf & Paolini, 2017; McKeown & Dixon, 2017, for overviews): Positive contact can deflate, and negative contact ignite minority members' efforts at redressing their disadvantage. We see positive contact as a marker of tolerance and harmonious intergroup relations in society; as we discuss elsewhere (Graf & Paolini, 2017), these desirable societal states might not be the preferred or most important ones to pursue in some contexts for individuals (e.g., individuals' mobility) or groups (e.g., minorities' pushes for empowerment and self-determination). In a similar vein, we must refrain from exaggerating contact's potential for directly affecting the most egregious manifestations of intergroup dynamics (e.g., genocide, acts of terror, and hate crimes). While contact has demonstrated positive effects among the highly prejudiced (Hodson, 2011, for a review), it has yet to show that it is effective among people committed to intergroup violence.

Fully understanding and influencing these complex and, at times, extreme behaviors requires interdisciplinary collaborations with sociologists, political scientists, communication researchers and social workers, among others, and communication across disciplinary group boundaries that challenge a tendency to reside in our own personal and professional "echo-chambers" (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015; Garrett, 2009).

Finally, and as noted early in this article, we live in a time where the voices advocating for group segregation appear to be growing louder. If we are to make any progress, researchers interested in encouraging intergroup contact must consider how to generate persuasive and engaging messages that counter the voices of segregation in politics, traditional media, and social media.

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