



When Going Along Gets You Nowhere and the Upside of Conflict Behaviors

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Abstract

The capacity for coordinated action is the foundation of much of humanity's greatest social and cultural achievements. Yet there are conditions under which cooperative behaviors do more harm than good, within and between groups. We review current research from a variety of social science disciplines exploring the oft-unquestioned ironic effects of cooperative behavior and conversely, the value of social conflict for positive outcomes – e.g., increased creativity and moral behavior, and concrete social change and equity. Recent reviews of prejudice reduction interventions have shed light on the hazards of exclusively promoting positive attitudes and emotions within and between groups. In complement, we focus on cooperative and conflictual *behavior* and the consequences thereof. To highlight issues researchers and practitioners should consider when developing social interventions, we summarize some of the common ironic effects of cooperative and conflict behaviors. Cooperative behaviors are socially and economically beneficial across a large variety of contexts; however, universal prescriptions for such behaviors may have unintended negative effects, whereas conflict is often requisite for promoting progress.

Social psychology has a long and rich history of cautioning people against the ills of going along to get along. When people in groups coordinate their behavior, individuals often end up doing and saying things that violate their personal beliefs, desires, and moral standards. In the service of being a good group member or facilitating the group's goals, people will misrepresent their opinions and perceptions (Asch, 1951), drink more alcohol than they want to (pluralistic ignorance; Prentice & Miller, 1993), suppress dissenting ideas (Janis, 1972), and in some cases, harm another person (Milgram, 1963). Said another way, cooperating in the short-term can have long-term negative consequences for individuals and the groups of which they are a part.

In the last couple of decades, however, psychological research seems to have eschewed this history, using “cooperation” not only as a description of how groups and individuals can work well together but also as a prescription for how they *should* work together. Cooperation can and often does facilitate prosocial behavior – behavior that benefits others. Psychologists describe cooperative behavior among nonkin as one of the desirable faculties that set humans apart from most other animals, allowing for the development of norms and practices that sustain our most cherished social institutions (e.g., Keltner, 2009; Tomasello, 2009). As such, the contemporary literature frequently recommends cooperation among individuals and groups as a means of promoting just, equitable, productive, and peaceful social relationships (e.g., Deutsch, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The strength of psychologists' priors regarding the benefits of cooperative behavior may cause our theoretical perspectives to overlook cooperation's potential for negative consequences. This paper addresses this blind spot. In short, cooperation is not universally tantamount

to prosociality: a number of recent investigations in the psychological and social sciences suggest new reasons why researchers ought to temper their enthusiasm for cooperative behavior, particularly as an instrument of social intervention. We review several circumstances under which cooperative behaviors increase antisocial behavior and inequitable outcomes; likewise, we review circumstances under which conflict dissent, and deviant behaviors facilitate prosocial acts and more equitable outcomes for all involved parties.

Defining terms and the scope of this review

We define cooperative behavior as coordinated action that serves a shared *immediate* goal (Argyle, 1991) and examine some of the negative *long-term* consequences of that behavior for the cooperating parties. For example, in some contexts, cooperative behaviors serving the immediate shared goal of belongingness or just “getting along” may subsequently lead cooperating parties to behave more extremely than they would if they were isolated.

In contrast, we define conflict behavior as behavior that breaks coordination or that works against the achievement of a shared immediate goal and examine some of the positive long-term consequences of that behavior. Different research paradigms more specifically define dissent and deviance as specific acts of conflict with group goals, norms, or other coordinated ideas or behavior; we define these terms according to the empirical findings we review. Though conflict, dissent, and deviance create tensions in the immediate context, the evidence we review points to certain conditions under which they beget positive social outcomes in the longer term.

When considering the pitfalls of cooperative behavior or the promises of conflict, social scientists must account for the nested nature of agents’ actions and the consequences of these actions. Cooperation and conflict may occur within a dyad, within a group, or between two or more groups. The outcomes of those cooperative or conflict behaviors within the immediate dyadic or group context may be assessed at the same dyadic or group level, or they may be assessed at a more aggregate level. A common example of the downside of cooperation points to outcomes on a more aggregate level, such as when cooperation within a group produces positive outcomes for that group (same level outcome) and negative outcomes for society more broadly (aggregate level outcome). These zero-sum scenarios, in which cooperation on one level detracts from the greater good, have been studied more regularly and do not exemplify the *ironic effects* of cooperative and conflict behaviors we review here. We highlight the more surprising and less frequently studied consequences of “negative” cooperation and “positive” conflict on the same level of analysis – specifically, when cooperative behavior within a group produces negative long-term outcomes for that group. We note, however, when behaviors simultaneously have negative or positive long-term consequences at more aggregate levels of analysis.

To identify examples of the counterintuitive effects of cooperative and conflict behaviors, we draw from the intra and intergroup literatures. Although researchers have identified circumstances under which cooperation and conflict within and between groups perversely affect long-term outcomes, historically these literatures have developed without much cross fertilization. Some separation stands to reason. An individual’s psychological motivations, self-awareness, and sensitivity to threat in intergroup interactions are often different than in intragroup interactions, given that individuals acting on behalf of their group behave in a more prejudiced and aggressive manner (e.g., Cohen et al., 2006; Meier & Heinz, 2004; Wildschut et al., 2003). Nonetheless, we believe that examining cooperation and conflict at both levels of analysis can help advance social scientists’ understanding of the common

conditions under which cooperation may be counterproductive and controlled conflict can promote positive outcomes in the long-term (see also Ellemers, 2012 and Giner-Sorolla, 2012).

Overview

The first goal of this review is to illustrate by example why social scientists ought to adjust their expectations regarding the benefits of cooperation and the costs of conflict. The second goal is to highlight some common ironic consequences of cooperative and conflict behaviors across intra and intergroup contexts. In the sections that follow, we review current interdisciplinary research from a variety of fields – social psychology, experimental economics, organizational behavior, sociology, anthropology – examining the costs of cooperation and benefits of conflict for valued outcomes like peace, welfare, and productivity within and between groups. Recent excellent reviews (Dixon, Levine, & Reicher, 2012; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2008) have contributed to a renewed interest in this topic. These reviews have focused on the negative consequences of making common identity salient and fostering positive intergroup contact on individuals' and group members' intergroup attitudes and emotions. We seek to build on this work by focusing on cooperative and conflict *behavior* as predictors and on a broad range of outcomes (including, where available, behavioral outcomes). Behavior has been relatively overlooked in favor of attitudinal and emotional predictors and outcomes, yet it represents a consequential predictor and, arguably, a higher stakes target for intervention compared to self-reported attitudes and emotions (Paluck & Green, 2009). We conclude by synthesizing our review of the unintended consequences of cooperative behaviors and conflict, of which social scientists and practitioners should be wary when developing theories of change and social interventions.

Cooperative Behaviors

When within-group cooperative behaviors are harmful

The classic social psychological literature is suffused with examples of how cooperative behaviors (e.g., via conformity, pluralistic ignorance) give rise to undesirable outcomes. Contemporary social science research has continued and updated this tradition. Here, we review examples of recent, related research using a range of methods: agent-based simulations, behavioral experiments, surveys, and social network and qualitative studies. These studies highlight the conditions under which cooperative behaviors within groups lower overall group welfare.

Recent social psychology experiments demonstrate that even proto-cooperative acts can increase group members' willingness to follow harmful in-group orders. By this, we mean that participants need not engage in coordinated behaviors toward a *meaningful* shared goal to generate antisocial outcomes; it appears behavioral synchrony is sufficient. For example, participants who moved in synchrony (i.e., who walked in step) with an experimenter were more willing than those in an asynchronous condition to kill insects at that experimenter's request (Wiltermuth, 2012a). This is harmful to the cooperating parties because it violates their individual moral principles. It is also harmful in the aggregate because it leads people to violate broader social norms prescribing the avoidance of harm. In another experiment, "synchronized" participants (i.e., who moved plastic cups in time with one another) were more likely to comply with a confederate's suggestion to administer painful noise blasts to participants in another group (Wiltermuth, 2012b). Even when there is no benefit to the participant, synchronizing behavior with a destructive authority or group members makes people more likely to violate their own

principles and broader social norms. While these experimental manipulations are highly artificial, behavioral mimicry is a very common behavioral coordination pattern that emerges when individuals have a goal of affiliation (i.e., “getting along”) with an interaction partner (Bourgeois & Hess, 2008; Lakin & Chartrand, 2003). In the real world, more deliberate cooperative behaviors often arise as a result of individuals’ motivation to demonstrate that they are getting along with others or are “good” group members.

Survey, social network, and qualitative work suggest that publically demonstrated cooperation within a group, particularly if it is effortful or costly, can act as a commitment device (e.g., Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008). This commitment can engender loyalty to, and escalation of destructive or extreme group-based goals, since group members are judged positively when they conform to group norms, facilitate achievement of the group’s goals, and put the group’s interests before their own (Cohen & Zhou, 1991). Thus, when groups, such as criminal associations, are highly structured and harbor explicit norms dictating antisocial and even violent behavior, within-group cooperation can push individual members to engage in more violence than they would if they acted on their own behalf (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Posner, 2002). Several psychological factors converge to maximize this commitment: we observe our own cooperative behavior and justify the associated effort (Bem, 1972; effort justification; Aronson & Mills, 1959); others also observe our behaviors, making it difficult for us to act incongruently in subsequent situations (consistency, Cialdini, 2001).

Surveys and experiments indicate that even in the absence of explicit norms dictating antisocial behavior, engagement in public, coordinated behavior with one’s group with the shared goal of religious worship, is related to increased support for violent forms of self-sacrifice, whereas private, individual behavior is not. Specifically, across numerous religions and cultures (i.e., Palestinian Muslims, Indonesian Muslims, Mexican Catholics, Russian Orthodox in Russia, Israeli Jews, and Indian Hindus), religious service attendance, but not prayer frequency, was associated with support for suicide attacks, willing martyrdom, and out-group hostility. In an experimental study, merely priming the concept, “attending synagogue” (as compared to “praying to God”) increased the number of Jewish participants who agreed that an Israeli Jew’s suicide attack against Palestinians was heroic (Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009). Taken together, these findings suggest that increased commitment to the group via public cooperative behaviors (rather than religious devotion or any particular belief system) predicts endorsement of extreme displays of violent self-sacrifice, and more: self-sacrifice in the interest of harming the out-group (i.e., parochial altruism). This has long-term negative consequences for the group (e.g., promoting within-group extremism, escalation of conflict), but also for the individual who sacrifices him or herself and society more broadly.

In sum, emerging work reinforces and extends a classic theme in social psychology – that acts of behavioral coordination in services of an immediate goal (such as dyadic “getting along”, religious worship, and cooperative decision-making) can have deleterious long-term consequences for the individuals who are cooperating within the dyads or groups. In the extreme, cooperative behaviors may promote radicalization of the group’s norms and an escalation in subsequent antisocial behavior. It merits mentioning again that these studies also demonstrate the predictive validity of measuring cooperative *behaviors* for consequential outcomes like group welfare and violence.

When between-group cooperative behaviors are harmful

An increasingly common question in the psychological literature asks when cooperation between groups can lead to harmful outcomes for the groups in question. The emerging

answers to this question draw important boundaries around the prediction of mutual benefits from intergroup cooperation,¹ boundaries that trace the lines of power and status differentials between the groups. In this section, we review examples of recent research, with special attention to simulation, experimental, and survey studies, which demonstrate the stakes of these paradoxical effects of cooperative behavior.

By one account, two of the faculties that make humans unique – the capacities for altruism and cooperation within our own groups – result from our long history of intergroup conflict, because between-group conflict increased within-group solidarity (e.g., Campbell, 1965; Tooby & Cosmides, 1988). One consequence of humans' preference for the in-group is that members of one's own group are more likely to survive and thrive; another common, but not requisite, consequence is that we readily discriminate against and harm out-group members (e.g., when resources are scarce; Goette, Huffman, Meier, & Sutter, 2012). According to agent-based simulations of evolutionary theory, in-group survival is more likely when many members are willing to fight in intergroup wars and sacrifice themselves to protect others in their group (Choi & Bowles, 2007). Thus, from an evolutionary perspective, the downside of cooperation between groups in the face of scarce resources is the decreased probability of any one individual group's survival. This point highlights a downside of cooperation, but one of the less surprising zero-sum instances, in which cooperation with another group undermines within-group welfare.

However, there are also instances in which coordination between groups yields suboptimal outcomes for *all* involved parties. For example, behavioral games research suggests that coordination in the form of communication (versus no communication) within groups increases payoffs for players because they can agree ahead of time to cooperate with one another. By contrast, communication *between* teams in intergroup games reduces payoffs within *both* teams, because communication with out-group members disrupts players' ability to minimize free-riders within groups (Bornstein, Rapoport, Kerpel, & Katz, 1989).² Bornstein (2003) observes that this may be why “groups tend to restrict contact with the out-group in times of conflict”.

The pitfalls of intergroup contact are not limited to interactions that take place in strategic games. Psychological lab experiments and surveys have recently demonstrated that intergroup relations interventions can lead to positive intergroup attitudes and emotions but negative behavioral outcomes. Specifically, these intergroup interventions seek to foster positive contact and common identities – emphasizing a superordinate “we” category – between members of different groups (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Sherif, 1966). Contrary to the researchers' intentions, results demonstrate that when groups are of unequal status, contact and common identity can have the unexpected negative consequence of inhibiting willingness to engage in collective action for social equality among members of the disadvantaged group. Put differently, these approaches reduce bad feelings and attitudes between groups without achieving any concrete social change (Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010; Dixon et al., 2012; Dovidio et al., 2009; Dovidio, Saguy, Gaertner, & Thomas, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2008).

Helping behaviors are one common behavioral manifestation of cooperation – they involve coordinated acts (giving and receiving) with others in the pursuit of a shared goal of better welfare for one or both parties in the coordinated transaction. Psychological surveys and experiments have found, however, that even well intentioned helping behaviors between groups of asymmetric status or power can further handicap the disadvantaged group. For example, both men and women who are relegated to devalued (as compared to valued) positions respond with anger to a high-status person's praise; however, men subsequently perform better, whereas women perform worse (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005).

Likewise, in unstable social hierarchies, unsolicited assistance from high-status groups may reinforce status differences between groups (Nadler, 2002). Disadvantaged group members are extremely sensitive to this proposition; for example, highly identified Israeli Arab high-school students experienced more negative affect after being given the correct answers to a difficult problem set by a person who introduced himself as an Israeli Jew (compared to as a fellow Israeli Arab; Nadler & Halabi, 2006). The introduction of a common identity can make matters worse when help is driven by a relatively benign but self-interested motivation (e.g., a desire to make one's in-group appear benevolent; Hopkins et al., 2007; van Leeuwen & Tauber, 2010).

In summary, there are many circumstances under which cooperative behaviors, both within and between groups, reduce group members' resources, promote antisocial behavior, and draw attention away from inequality among all involved parties. We turn now to a discussion of the conditions under which conflict behaviors can foster group development and creative problem-solving, reduce moral hypocrisy in organizations, and promote behavioral efforts (not just discussion) toward social change.

Conflict Behaviors

When within-group conflict behaviors are beneficial

A range of studies suggest that conflict within groups can foster deeper understanding among group members, positively redirect a group's goals, and lead to better group decisions.

More and more, teams as opposed to individuals represent the "building blocks" of modern organizations (e.g., Passos & Caetano, 2005). Social and organizational progress requires change, which often arises as a consequence of conflict; strict adherence to existing norms rarely spurs development (Morton, 2011). Not surprisingly then, many models of group development in the organizational behavior literature share the observation that experiencing and overcoming intragroup conflict (as opposed to avoiding conflict altogether) is required for arriving at a more cohesive, mature stage of team development (Chang, Bordia, & Duck, 2003). By some accounts, task-oriented conflict deepens group members' understanding of the issues at hand. Greater disagreement means that many more perspectives will emerge for the group's consideration (Jehn, 1995; Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999). These claims warrant some qualification; recent meta-analyses in the organizational behavior literature document mixed results (e.g., DeDreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2011). The key appears to be proper conflict management. Task conflict is only beneficial when it does not turn into relationship conflict, which can severely undermine group cohesion and productivity (e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). This qualification emphasizes the importance of considering within-group conflict as participation in a process that includes dissent, rather than destructive in-fighting that ends in the dissolution of the group.

As diversity across a wide variety of organizations increases (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006) so too does research focused on attempts to maximize the resulting benefits. Work continuing in the classic tradition of minority influence research (e.g., Moscovici, 1976) examines the advantages minority and lower-status individuals bring to problem-solving in groups. Part of what makes minority participation so generative is that it often represents a dissenting viewpoint that conflicts with the position or direction of the majority. When minority group members successfully criticize an idea without criticizing the group member who contributed the idea, their feedback result in greater problem-solving creativity (Troyer & Younggreen, 2009). Note, however, that this is not universally true; minority dissent's positive association with innovation requires high levels of team participation from all group

members (De Dreu & West, 2001), highlighting again that group members must actively monitor and contribute to the conflict process. For example, disagreement only increases the probability of uncovering a problem's solution (relative to agreement) if it is "polite" (Chiu, 2008).

In the cooperative behaviors section, we explored how cooperation with and commitment to a group can lead individuals to engage in destructive behaviors in an effort to adhere to group norms. In some cases, however, it is a violation of group norms and of group coordination in the short-term that results in long-term positive outcomes. Individuals sometimes recognize that dissent, which undermines the achievement of the group's immediate goals, is necessary when they are invested in the group's long-term outcomes. The more highly committed a person is to their group, the more they will dissent when they perceive that a current norm is harmful to group well being; in contrast, less strongly identified or committed members will keep silent or disengage (Packer, 2008; 2009). In fact, group members who deviate from traditionally held beliefs of the group are rewarded when their actions benefit the group (e.g., give the group some strategic advantage) and are judged to be better suited for leadership (Morton, Postmes, & Jetten, 2007).

Peace-building interventions often recognize the necessity of promoting dissent within groups for creating positive social outcomes in the long-term. In Rwanda, as a response to mass participation in the 1994 genocide, a radio soap opera broadcast the message to listeners that it is admirable and typical among Rwandans to dissent with peers who are advocating violence. A large-scale field experiment compared Rwandans who were randomly exposed to this soap opera to Rwandans exposed to a soap opera that did not focus on conflict or peace. Participants who had listened to the soap opera about dissent were more likely to believe that dissent was socially appropriate, and critically, they were more likely to dissent with neighbors regarding the division of a communal resource. Perhaps equally important, their dissent with one another did not result in within-group anarchy, but rather it fostered a resource sharing solution that benefited all members of their group. This finding held for both ethnically homogenous and mixed groups. In this case, individuals' dissent broke with the groups' more immediate social goals (strongly influenced by broader Rwandan social and political norms), which included avoiding open dissent and coordinating group actions in a hierarchically-determined manner. This study suggests that breaking with this more immediate goal of preserving within-group peace was optimal for the goal of peace-building following violence (Paluck & Green, 2009).

An ultimate manifestation of individual deviance against group norms comes in the form of whistleblowing behavior. Rooting out negative practices goes against the "team player" model favoring cooperation. Since whistleblower actions often lead to severe punishments or even the dissolution of a group (e.g., Enron and other corporate cases), whistleblowing is not a variant of altruistic punishment, in which the whistleblower simply brings a deviant group member back into line with the group. Moreover, most whistleblowers go against their group by labeling a practice as immoral when it is not labeled as such by other members of the group; this is why whistleblowers are considered uncooperative (Near & Miceli, 2011). Take the case of sexual harassment – observers of sexual harassment in an organization who choose to go along with the behavior and who do not report the harasser face no costs, whereas those who report harassers often face high costs in status, popularity, and even credibility in the organization. Still, not blowing the whistle on sexual harassment can simply license more of the behavior (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). This is why whistleblowers, who create conflict within their groups in the name of a higher norm that sometimes exists only outside of the group (benefiting both the group as well as the greater community), have been noted for "positive deviant behavior" (Near & Miceli, 2011, p. 304).

To sum up, we note several conditions under which conflict behaviors that violate a group's immediate goals and norms can contribute to the group's productivity, creativity, welfare, and even morality in the long-term. Perhaps the most counterintuitive cases demonstrating the value of conflict, however, are those that examine between-group conflict. We next discuss the value of conflict in the context of gender inequality and of international political divisions and competitions.

When between-group conflict behaviors are beneficial

A rarely visited but important question in the psychological literature asks when conflict between groups can be beneficial. In this final section, we review between-groups conflict research illustrating long-term positive outcomes at the same level of analysis. In particular, and in parallel to a condition of destructive cooperation discussed earlier, disparate power and status between groups magnifies the value of between-group conflict. Because the dominant group has little incentive to recognize or change any aspect of the status quo, disadvantaged groups are forced to voice their dissatisfaction to affect change: that is, they are forced to incite intergroup conflict.

Breaking from the goal of preserving between-group relations and instead drawing attention to between-group inequities and injustices engenders bad blood between groups, such as feelings of unfairness and anger among the disadvantaged and feelings of threat and defensiveness among the advantaged (Liviatan & Jost, 2011). However, as is the case within organizations, this type of conflict represents a necessary step in the process of achieving more equitable and just outcomes between groups (Wright & Lubensky, 2008). Collective action originating from the disadvantaged group aimed at the advantaged group requires the right preconditions, in addition to an enormous amount of coordination and energy (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Disadvantaged-group members must feel that existing conditions are not benefiting them, and that they can and are obligated to bring about change. In one example, women's behavioral engagement in collective action decreased after exposure to paternalistic sexist attitudes (e.g., the belief that women and men should collude in the interest of the safety and adulation of women who conform to traditional female stereotypes) but increased after exposure to overtly hostile sexist attitudes (e.g., the belief that gender relations are antagonistic and that women just want to control men; Becker & Wright, 2011). Where benevolent sexism may undermine women's perceptions of gender inequity as illegitimate, hostile sexism underscores the disadvantages of being a woman: it made study participants angry, increasing their motivation to engage in collective action (i.e., signing petitions, distributing flyers) to bring about change.

Thus, it seems that some degree of conflict is required for social progress in inequitable group situations (Dovidio et al., 2009), including among groups in protracted conflict. For example, an intervention, in which low-power groups (i.e., Mexican immigrants, Palestinians) were able to voice their grievances to the high-power group (i.e., White Americans, Israelis), and in which the high-power group had to take their low-power perspective, resulted in more positive regard between the groups compared to when grievances were not voiced or heard (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Other opportunities may arise in contexts of "safe" conflict. While this theory has not been empirically investigated to our knowledge, we draw attention to a proposal from the communications literature: conflict in safe spaces can promote more global cooperation (Rivenburgh, 2009). For example, international athletic competitions (e.g., the Olympics) constitute safe spaces because all participants agree to the rules of engagement prior to the competition and participate willingly. All groups are theoretically on equal standing and legitimately present (i.e., they belong there; Bar-Tal, 1989). While the sports are competitive, the nature of the enterprise (e.g., Olympics, the World Cup) as a whole is cooperative.

To summarize, there are circumstances under which conflict behaviors, both within and between groups, may be necessary for positive change or prosocial outcomes, although the literature cautions us that conflict is not necessarily sufficient for achieving these outcomes. Some oversight of conflict has been identified as important for working teams, social groups, and intergroup dynamics. Still, the recognition of conflict as productive under many commonly-observed circumstances, within and between groups, seems important for psychologists to acknowledge and to study further.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this relatively brief review of recent research, we have identified a variety of circumstances and individual or group characteristics that promote “negative” cooperation and “positive” conflict. Violent communities’ within-group cooperative behaviors often facilitate greater harm to in-group and out-group members; this violation is precisely what signals group members’ commitment to their community. Public, behavioral displays of within-group cooperation also increase group members’ commitment to their groups and link to support for more extreme manifestations of out-group hostility. On the other hand, conflict within groups and organizations can promote divergent thinking, group morality, and better decision-making. Low status members are a key source of dissent that can spur innovation, though dissent must be constructive and group members must be committed to the group.

In intergroup contexts, cooperative behaviors often advantage dominant or higher status groups, reinforcing their position in social hierarchies, and undermine disadvantaged group members’ identification with their group as well as their motivation to engage in collective action. Helping behaviors from high-status to low-status group members can be particularly handicapping. Conflict between groups, on the other hand, can energize disadvantaged groups to act to achieve equality; furthermore, conflict properly managed can provide opportunities for intergroup contact and more positive between-group regard that promotes cooperative behavior while maintaining respect of group differences.

Common preconditions and consequences of “negative” cooperation and “positive” conflict

We conclude by highlighting some preconditions and ironic consequences of “negative” cooperative behavior and “positive” conflict, which researchers and practitioners should consider when developing social interventions. Common *preconditions* of these effects highlight the status of a group, either within society or vis-à-vis the group with which it is interacting. Specifically, within-group cooperative behaviors may be more likely to have negative long-term consequences if individuals feel threatened or if their group is a statistical minority in its cultural context. For example, university students who were primed to feel uncertain (compared to those who were not) were not only more likely to identify with a radical campus group, but also to report that they would engage in coordinated behaviors on behalf of the group (e.g., attend demonstrations, participate in a blockade); identification with the group mediated the relationship between the uncertainty manipulation and cooperative behavioral intentions (Hogg, Mehan, Farquharson, 2010). Between-group cooperative behaviors are more likely to have negative long-term consequences if groups have discrepant status. In these contexts, cooperative behaviors patronize low-status groups and draw attention away from inequality between groups, as described in recent reviews of the intergroup contact and common identity reviews.

With respect to some of the common *consequences*, researchers and practitioners would do well to be wary of the effect of cooperative behavior and conflict on groups’ perceived norms and self-perceptions. Observing others’ behaviors within a group can change group members’

perceptions of what is appropriate or possible for that group. Specifically, cooperative behaviors within groups may radicalize or polarize group norms (e.g., via pluralistic ignorance); they may also diminish the likelihood of necessary conflict taking place (as observed in the conformity and groupthink literatures). Cooperative behavior between groups can backfire by promoting unrealistic expectations among disadvantaged group members that advantaged group members cannot or do not want to meet. For example, after a mix of (experimentally manipulated) high- and low-status participants discussed what their groups had in common (versus how they differed), low-status participants expressed heightened expectations of egalitarian behavior from the high-status group members; the high-status participants failed to meet those expectations, allocating as few credits to their low-status counterparts as high-status participants who had taken part in the differences-focused discussion (Saguy et al., 2008).

General conclusion

There is no question that cooperative behaviors are socially and economically beneficial across a large variety of contexts; however, our review shows that universal prescriptions (or perceived norms) of such behaviors may have unintended negative effects, in particular for disadvantaged persons and groups. Similarly, there are many paths to progress. It is not obvious that conflict is one of them (particularly between groups), and yet well-regulated active conflict within a group can promote a variety of desirable outcomes without annihilating the group in the process. In some cases, conflict may be a superior strategy to coordination. Developing a more sophisticated understanding of the social structures, group characteristics, and psychological factors that promote cooperative behaviors with negative consequences and conflict behaviors with positive consequences, as well as the mechanisms by which these behaviors are augmented or inhibited, will not only hone existing theories of intra and intergroup dynamics, but will also foster a healthy skepticism regarding cooperation-based strategies for achieving advantageous or equitable outcomes of various kinds.

Short Biographies

Mina Cikara is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences and the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition at Carnegie Mellon University. She received her PhD in Social Psychology and Social Policy from Princeton University and completed a National Institutes of Health Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at Massachusetts Institute of Technology before moving to Carnegie Mellon University. Professor Cikara's primary line of research examines the conditions under which social groups and individuals are denied social value, agency, and empathy. She uses social psychological and cognitive neuroscience approaches – standard laboratory experiments, implicit and explicit behavioral measures, functional magnetic resonance imaging, and psychophysiology – to study how misunderstanding, failures of empathy, and pleasure at others' misfortune (*Schadenfreude*) unfold in the mind and brain. She is equally interested in the behavioral consequences of these processes: discrimination, conflict, and harm. Most recently, the Society for Experimental Social Psychology selected her as a Dissertation Award Finalist. She has published articles in *Psychological Science*, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, and the *Journal of Social Issues*.

Elizabeth Levy Paluck is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Before arriving at Princeton, she was an Academy Fellow at Harvard University. She received her PhD from Yale University in Social Psychology. Her research is concerned with the reduction of prejudice

and conflict across various types of settings, including ethnic conflict, youth conflict in schools, and violence against women. In particular, she is interested in the idea that individuals' conflict behaviors and prosocial behaviors are driven not by their personal values and attitudes, but by their perceptions of the kinds of behaviors that their peers consider to be desirable and typical (i.e., their perceptions of social norms). She uses large-scale field experiments to test interventions that target individuals' perceived norms about conflict and tolerance, including mass media and peer-to-peer interventions. Her field sites include Rwanda, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Nigeria, and domestically, in US middle and high schools. She has received grants from Henry Frank Guggenheim, the Spencer Foundation, and the WT Grant Foundation to pursue this work. Prof. Levy Paluck has published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the *American Political Science Review*, the *Journal of Social Issues*, and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and she tweets about psychology and policy at @betsylevyp.

Endnotes

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¹ Multiple groups are typically not studied.

² In the Intergroup Public Goods game, it is possible for players to make *even more* money if they all withhold their contributions (i.e., the Pareto optimal solution for the game) rather than all contribute to their respective groups. Bornstein et al. (1989) report that intergroup communication decreases within-group contributions in line with this strategy, yielding a higher level between groups' collaboration and a higher payout for each individual player. This is, however, *only* the case when groups talk to each other without the opportunity for within-group discussions. When groups have the opportunity for both within and between-group discussion, almost all between-group discussions result in a collective agreement to withhold contributions, but only 30% of these agreements are kept by all players. Said another way, if there is any within-group communication at all (a more realistic model of intra and intergroup dynamics), it is best to eliminate between-group communication altogether.

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