Ingroups, outgroups, and the gateway groups between: The potential of dual identities to improve intergroup relations☆

Aharon Levy [a,b,*], Tamar Saguy [a], Martijn van Zomeren [b], Eran Halperin [a]

[a] The School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel
[b] Heymans Institute for Psychological Research, University of Groningen, Netherlands

A B S T R A C T

Research on dual identity focuses mainly on how dual identifiers feel and behave, and on the reactions they elicit from others. In this article we test an unexplored aspect of dual identity: the dual identity group's potential to act as a possible gateway between the groups that represent the respective sources of the dual identity (e.g., Israeli Arabs as a gateway between Israelis and Palestinians). We predicted that to the extent that a group is perceived to have a dual identity, intergroup attitudes and behavior of the groups comprising that dual identity will be improved. This idea was tested across four studies. Study 1a and b were real-world correlational studies which revealed positive correlations between the perception of a dual identity and attitudes towards the outgroup. In Studies 2 and 3 we demonstrated experimentally that the mere presence of a group with a dual identity leads to improved outgroup orientations. In Study 4 we demonstrated how the manipulation of perceived dual identity can help improve attitudes towards the outgroup, and also provided initial indications regarding the mechanisms underlying the process at hand. We discuss the implications of the findings for the improvement of intergroup relations, and offer an outline for future research.

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The modern era of globalization and increasing rates of immigration have been accompanied by a massive growth in interconnections between groups, and have led to the sharing of multiple identities by individuals. A highly relevant notion in this regard is that of dual identity, which reflects the simultaneous identification with a distinct subgroup and a common superordinate group (e.g., the Turkish minority in Germany that identifies simultaneously as Turkish and as German; Simon, Reichert, & Grabow, 2013). Research on dual identity has mainly focused on how individuals who hold these complex forms of categorization feel and behave (Gocłowska & Crisp, 2014; see also Baysu, Phalet, & Brown, 2011), and on the reactions they elicit from members of the dominant group (González & Brown, 2006; Rodeheffer, Hill, & Lord, 2012; Scheepers, Saguy, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2014). Dual identification is typically found to be positively related with well-being (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Sam & Berry, 2010). Furthermore, among majority group members endorsement of such forms of identification (as reflected in the notion of multiculturalism) have been found to promote more positive attitudes towards minority groups (Plaut, 2010; Scheepers et al., 2014; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000).

Moreover, when minority group members maintain a dual identification, they are still viewed as connected to their original sub-group, which can foster the generalization of positive attitudes towards that original sub-group (Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

Notwithstanding the impressive line of research on dual identity and related concepts (such as integration, Sam & Berry, 2010 and multiculturalism, Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko et al., 2000), existing research has yet to address an integral aspect of dual identity: its potential to act as a possible gateway between the groups that represent the respective sources of the dual identity. In other words, dual identity groups can potentially serve as a gateway between two, otherwise separate, groups. For example, Turkish immigrants in Germany can impact the relations between Turks and Germans, by virtue of being perceived as identifying with both these entities. In the same manner, biracials in the United States can bridge relations between Blacks and Whites, and Arab citizens of Israel can bridge relations between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. This prospect, of dual identity groups as potential gateways, can have far-reaching implications in terms of improving intergroup relations across domains including inter-racial, inter-national, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious relations. Additionally, while dual identity has primarily been linked with hierarchically-nested identities in the form of a superordinate (typically majority group) and the subgroup identity (typically minority group), the perspective offered above broadens the scope, and also incorporates situations in which there is no clear hierarchy between overlapping identities (or when identities are not nested).

The goal of the current research was therefore to investigate the potential role of dual identity groups as a gateway between the two groups they are associated with. Through this new perspective, we seek to complement existing research on dual identity by testing whether the presence of dual identity groups positively influences intergroup relations between the groups that represent the respective sources of the dual identity. We provide a theoretical framework to support our gateway proposition, and report six studies that test the gateway hypothesis, which predicts that the presence of a group which is perceived as having a dual identity will improve intergroup attitudes and behavior between the two groups it is identified with.

Existing theory and research already provide a reasonable basis for considering dual identity groups as possible gateways. According to research on cross-categorization, given that individuals are members of several groups simultaneously (e.g., both Black and female), members of an outgroup on one dimension may be evaluated more positively if they are also ingroup members on another dimension (e.g., a Black women evaluating a White woman). Under the right conditions, this crossing of categories was found to reduce intergroup prejudice and discrimination (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Crisp & Hewstone, 1999; Deschamps & Doise, 1978; Hutter & Crisp, 2005; Migdal, Hewstone, & Mullen, 1998). More importantly, such category combination was found to confront stereotypical and heuristic modes of thinking, and generalize positively to other outgroups as well (Vasiljevic & Crisp, 2013). Since dual identity groups can be seen as social groups in which different identities cross each other, the positive effects of cross-categorization may be expected to resonate in scenarios involving such groups. Similarly, social identity complexity theory which deals with the extent of overlap between different social identities, posits that raising awareness to the partiality of overlap between social identities decreases the salience of social categories, and in turn raises tolerance for outgroups in general (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). Having that dual identity groups in a way embody a partial overlap of social categories, their potential to raise such awareness may be substantial.

Additionally, the extended contact hypothesis contends that knowledge about cross-group friendships (i.e., knowing that an ingroup member has a positive relationship with an outgroup member) can improve outgroup attitudes (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Usually, in order for extended contact to have a positive effect, the process has to entail an ingroup exemplar having contact with an outgroup exemplar (Wright et al., 1997). Nonetheless, although dual identifiers are not classic ingroup exemplars, the frequency of their unmediated interaction with both counterparts holds the potential for effects similar to the ones observed in the extended contact literature. Along the same lines, following the logic of the common ingroup identity model (Gaetner & Dovidio, 2014), dual identities might signal to the respective communities that a superordinate identity, incorporating both groups, is possible. Again, this suggests that the perception of dual identity, in the eyes of others, can be quite positive and conducive to improving intergroup relations.

Taken together, it seems safe to assume that dual identity groups hold a unique potential when it comes to improving intergroup relations. Furthermore, the fleshing out of such dual identity groups may elicit several different processes, such as blurring intergroup categories, creating a more complex perception of group identities, or inducing a more inclusive and comprehensive social category that combines previously distinct social groups. Processes such as these can all be expected to positively impact intergroup relations. Additionally, on a more practical level, the interaction with a dual identity group can perhaps be seen as a form of continuous mediated contact with the outgroup if framed correctly, which can be very fruitful and far from trivial in the context of intergroup conflict.

So far we have made the theoretical case for the significant positive potential dual identity groups may have in improving intergroup relations. This of course raises the question as to why the potential of these groups, which are obviously present in many intergroup conflict scenarios worldwide, has not been realized yet. One possible explanation for this is that even though these groups have been present throughout history, they are often over looked, and simply annexed to one group or the other (Rodeheffer et al., 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Telles, 2002). Therefore based on the theory we have presented above, in order to realize the said potential, the dual identity attribute needs to be fleshed out and made present. Another possible explanation may be that although the discussion so far has presented the dual identity as being perceived as 'more positive' than the outgroup, in many cases, especially those of harsh conflict, these groups are actually perceived as 'less negative'. The distinction between 'more positive' and 'less negative' is an important distinction because a decrease of negativity towards the outgroup in the context of conflict may not be as noticeable as an extreme transformation into positive relations. In other words, such dual identity groups may already be partially inhibiting negativity in intergroup relations in cases where their presence is substantial, but this inhibition might be overlooked due to the severity of existing intergroup conflict dynamics.

One final and important reservation to make in this regard is the possible backlash the fleshing out of such a dual identity might have. On the one hand, based on the theories mentioned above, the positive potential of a dual identity in intergroup relations is evident. On the other hand however, it is clear that stressing the connection between a dual identity group and the outgroup can easily become detrimental, especially in the context of severe intergroup conflict. Other than the simple animosity that can arise from association with the outgroup, there has even been some work which has shown that people might react negatively to nonstandard 'hybrids' under certain circumstances (Wagner et al., 2010). Hence, the link between the dual identity group and the ingroup, which has so far been stressed as a positive attribute, might easily backfire and lead to having the dual identity group perceived as a fifth column, or raise issues of threat and betrayal. Accordingly, while we embarked on the studies at hand, it was clear that despite the fact that we were expecting to find a positive influence of the dual identity group, we had to be aware of this possible backlash. These studies would show if indeed such a process of fleshing out the dual identity actually had the accepted positive effect, and did not backfire.

1. Overview of current research

Based on all of the above, we hypothesized that the presence of groups who are perceived to have a dual identity in the eyes of others, will lead to improved intergroup orientations among the groups comprising the dual identity. To test this hypothesis, we first conducted a preliminary study in order to substantiate our premise that the dual identity group is indeed perceived more positively (or less negatively) than the outgroup. Next we conducted five studies to test our main hypothesis. Study 1a and b were correlational studies meant to test the predicted positive correlation between the perception of a group as having a dual identity and intergroup attitudes and behavior. These studies were performed using two distinct and unrelated dual identity groups in Israel, Arab citizens (who can be identified and thereby perceived as both Israeli and Palestinian), and the Liberal Religious Jewish community (who can be identified as both secular and religious). Studies 2 through 4 were designed to experimentally test our hypothesis. In Study 2 we tested the influence of the mere presence of a dual identity group on resource allocation towards the outgroup using artificial groups in an online paradigm. Study 3 employed artificial groups situated in a more intense setting of actual interpersonal interactions. Finally, in Study 4 we returned to the real world context of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, manipulated the perceived dual identity level of the Arab citizens of Israel, and tested the effect of the manipulation on behavior and attitudes towards the Palestinian outgroup. Additionally, Study 4 also examined several possible mediators in order to shed some light on the underlying mechanism at hand. Thus, all the different studies