



How diversity training can change attitudes: Increasing perceived complexity of superordinate groups to improve intergroup relations [☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined diversity training with repeated measure designs and control groups.
- We conducted 2-hour and 1-day diversity training aiming to improve attitudes.
- Training increased perceived diversity of superordinate groups not mentioned.
- Intergroup attitudes were improved also for groups not discussed during training.
- We observed mediations of training on sexism via perceived diversity of adults.

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ABSTRACT

When conceiving diversity training—a popular strategy to manage prejudice within organizations and educational settings—there is little reliance on social-psychological theorizing and a lack of research on training effectiveness. In line with the ingroup projection model (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999), we postulate diversity training to improve intergroup attitudes by increasing perceived superordinate-group diversity. We tested this in two experiments with control-group designs and repeated measurement. In Experiment 1 ($N = 62$), a 2-hour diversity intervention (covered as get-to-know activities) increased perceived diversity of the superordinate group *students* and improved feelings towards the gender-outgroup. In Experiment 2 ($N = 51$), a 1-day diversity training increased perceived diversity of the superordinate groups *adults* and *Germans* and improved subgroup attitudes regarding gender, age, and nationality. Moreover, the training had positive long-term effects and reductions of ambivalent sexism were mediated by increased perceived diversity of the respective superordinate group *adults*. Our findings demonstrate that the ingroup-projection model provides a suitable theoretical foundation for real-world anti-prejudice interventions such as diversity training.

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Introduction

Diversity training is one of the most often used instruments of diversity management (Gieselmann & Krell, 2004). It is considered an essential first step to implement diversity management (Cox & Blake, 1991) and basically aims to reduce prejudice (Paluck, 2006). However, implementing training in an organization obviously involves high costs. Therefore, diversity training should be successful to justify these

costs. But research on diversity management in general and diversity training in particular is still in its infancy. In relation to the large number of organizations that practice diversity training, publications on diversity-training effectiveness are surprisingly scarce. Moreover, the few existing publications tend to be confined to evaluation studies and thus focus on the question whether diversity training is effective, instead of predicting, based on psychological theorizing, how diversity training should be designed, and then identifying when and why diversity training result in attitude change (cf. Bell & Kravitz, 2008).

Various social-psychological theories provide approaches to improve intergroup attitudes. However, social-psychological research often stops with laboratory-confirmed effects and neglects applying the gained knowledge in real-world interventions (Paluck, 2006). In the present research, we addressed this existing gap between social-psychological research and training practice. We aimed to test if improvements of intergroup attitudes confirmed in the laboratory can withstand in practice in the context of diversity training. We argue

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that one way diversity training can be successful is by provoking more diverse representations of superordinate groups. The current research is the first to test this prediction in a longitudinal study, overcoming a typical shortcoming of psychological laboratory experiments in which short-term activations of representations are often likened to long-term changes (cf. Paluck, 2006).

Diversity training

The notion that diversity of the workforce enhances organizational effectiveness and leads to competitive benefits is widely shared among diversity practitioners (Kochan et al., 2003). Proponents of this perspective argue with advantages of personnel recruitment and marketing, organizational flexibility as well as increased work group performance, creativity, and problem solving (Bagshaw, 2004; Cox & Blake, 1991). However, organizations have also understood that diversity alone is not a guarantee of success, but in need of a proactive diversity-management strategy (Cunningham, 2009). Unmanaged or even ignored, the resource “diversity” will not only be wasted, but negative outcomes can seriously harm the success of an organization. Incidents of communication problems and conflicts are more likely to occur within diverse workforces and heterogeneous teams (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, 1996). Conflicts based on diverse group memberships in general and discrimination in particular can inhibit the desired synergies and result in high costs (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Dietz & Petersen, 2005; Jackson et al., 1991; Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled, 1996; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). From this perspective, diversity management is seen as inevitable and an urgently needed strategic response to increasing diversity at the workplace (cf. Cady & Valentine, 1999; Cox & Blake, 1991).

Diversity training is a frequently used anti-prejudice intervention that aims to improve intergroup attitudes within diverse workforces (cf. Paluck, 2006). Pendry, Driscoll, and Field (2007) defined diversity training as “any discrete programme, or set of programmes, which aims to influence participants to increase their positive—or decrease their negative—intergroup behaviours, such that less prejudice or discrimination is displayed towards others perceived as different in their group affiliation(s)” (p. 29). But can diversity training indeed reduce prejudice and improve attitudes towards outgroups? There is evidence both in favor of and against positive changes caused by diversity training, and training can even have a negative impact on intergroup attitudes (Engberg, 2004; Hood, Muller, & Seitz, 2001; Krings, Bollmann, & Palazzo, 2009). These inconsistent results and the general lack of research on diversity-training effectiveness (cf. Pendry et al., 2007) is worsened by the fact that past research has been criticized as constrained by methodological shortcomings that reduce internal as well as external validity (Paluck & Green, 2009). These authors highly recommended the use of waiting groups to overcome the problem of missing or inadequate control groups. Moreover, Paluck (2006) requested theory-oriented training designs and pointed out that diversity training designed to improve intergroup relations could—unsurprisingly—benefit from intergroup research. Combining practice and research to overcome the gap between them (cf. Bell & Kravitz, 2008) may help to clarify the inconsistency of existing evidence on diversity-training effectiveness. Furthermore, existing theories and models could be used to trace the underlying processes that make diversity training successful in some settings but detrimental in others. Identifying how diversity training achieves attitude change may contribute to more efficient training designs and help to obtain the long-term, real-world tests that our theories need.

Social-psychological approaches on improving intergroup relations

Social-psychological research provides several theories and models that deal with the underlying processes of ingroup bias

and discrimination. Very influential among them are social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Turner et al. (1987) suggested different hierarchical levels of self-categorization on which individuals tend to pigeonhole themselves into groups they belong to (ingroups) and groups they do not belong to (outgroups). In line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such categorizations at the ingroup–outgroup-level define one's social identity and lead to a depersonalization process in which the individual views itself as interchangeable with other ingroup members. Turner et al. (1987) considered this depersonalization process as essential for stereotyping and ingroup favoritism. On this basis, many anti-discrimination approaches aim to alter the salience of ingroup–outgroup-categorizations and shift individuals' attention to a lower, more personal (de-categorization, Brewer & Miller, 1984) or a higher, more abstract level of categorization (re-categorization, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). A third model, the ingroup projection model, ascribes ingroups on a higher categorization level a completely different role and thus, implies a different strategy to reduce prejudice (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007). Before turning to this strategy, we review the model's basic assumptions.

Mummendey and Wenzel suggested a positive evaluated self-category that includes ingroup and outgroup on a higher level (i.e., superordinate group) as in fact promoting the development of intergroup bias by offering a relevant frame of reference with norms, values, and standards for comparisons of those groups. Basically, the perception of such an inclusive superordinate group is biased by the perception of the ingroup (“ingroup projection”). Thus, the outgroup deviates from the superordinate-group representation and thus from the evaluation standard. For instance, if West Germans consider Germans in general to be prosperous, then East Germans with their relatively lower socio-economic status deviate from that view (cf. Kessler & Mummendey, 2001). Consequently, compared to the ingroup (e.g., West Germans) the outgroup (e.g., East Germans) is evaluated worse (e.g., Bianchi, Mummendey, Steffens, & Yzerbyt, 2010; Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004; Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Weber, 2003; Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003).

Importantly, given the role of the inclusive superordinate category as evaluation standard, in order to reduce intergroup prejudice, the representation of the superordinate group should be changed (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Central to our purposes, deviations of the outgroup from the superordinate-group-evaluation standard can be reduced by increasing perceived diversity of superordinate groups.

Perceiving group diversity

According to previous research, groups in general and group stereotypes in particular depend upon perceiving low diversity within groups. Categorization itself (Turner et al., 1987) and stereotyping are based on the principle that differences between individuals of different groups are large while differences between individuals of the same group are small (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1999; Ford & Stangor, 1992). Also, judgments of heterogeneous (vs. homogeneous) groups are slower and less subjectively confident (Lambert, Barton, Lickel, & Wells, 1998). Consequently, the use of stereotypes may be less likely when making judgments about heterogeneous groups.

Up to now, research linking perceived group diversity with improving intergroup attitudes has primarily focused on the perception of outgroup variability (see Brauer & Er-afiy, 2011; Vanbeselaere, 1991). Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) were the first considering perceived diversity of superordinate (in-)groups to improve intergroup relations. They proposed tolerance and more positive intergroup attitudes to be associated with more complex superordinate-group representations. If a superordinate group is represented in a complex way, it is explicitly defined by its diversity (cf. Waldzus, 2010). Thus, diversity becomes a

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