

Can music bring people together? Effects of shared musical preference on intergroup bias in adolescence

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Recent research has successfully applied social identity theory to demonstrate how individuals use music as a basis for intergroup differentiation. The current study investigated how music might also be used to encourage the development of positive intergroup attitudes. Participants ($N = 97$) were allocated to one of two experimentally created social groups and then led to believe that the groups had similar or different musical preferences. They then evaluated each group and reported their perceptions concerning how they expected their own group to be evaluated by the other group. Participants who believed the groups had similar musical preferences reported more positive intergroup attitudes relative to a control group; they also expected to be evaluated more positively by members of the other group. However, positive intergroup perceptions were also reported by those who believed the two groups had different musical preferences. The implications of these findings for theory and practice are discussed.

Key words: Common ingroup identity, musical preference.

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INTRODUCTION

As we go about our everyday business – traveling to work, shopping, exercising at the gym – we are routinely exposed to musical “behavior” in one form or another. Often, this behavior might take the form of deliberate listening acts (e.g., listening to music on a personal stereo), but it is also frequently observed more indirectly through our social interactions with others (e.g., talking to a friend who is wearing a t-shirt displaying the image of her favorite artist). In 2004, a staggering 174 million albums were purchased in the UK alone (British Phonographic Industry, 2005), and such a figure is a reflection of the importance of music to the lives of many people (see Fitzgerald, Joseph, Hayes & O’Regan, 1995). To what kinds of psychological processes might musical behavior contribute?

A small body of research has recently started to elaborate how people draw on music to negotiate various personal challenges, including those which are experienced primarily at an individual level (e.g., mood regulation) and those which are more socially oriented in nature (including, for example, concerns about impression management: North, Hargreaves & O’Neill, 2000; Hargreaves & North, 1999; Zillmann & Bhatia, 1989). With regard to the latter, several studies have established that musical preference makes an important contribution to the formation and maintenance of social identity by providing individuals with a basis for social comparison and self-evaluation. While not necessarily restricted to any one age group, the ability of music to act in this way has thus far been demonstrated primarily in adolescent samples (see Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2002). This work

has drawn heavily on research reported in the mainstream social psychological literature, in particular that which has been conducted in the tradition of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity theory holds that when faced with evaluative situations, people have a tendency to favor members of their own social groups (or “ingroups”) at the expense of non-members (members of “outgroups”). This occurs even when such groups are created experimentally for the purposes of the research (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). The motivation to discriminate between ingroups and outgroups in this way has been shown to reflect a need for positive social identity and self-esteem (Hunter, Platow, Howard & Stringer, 1996). Moreover, social identity needs have been shown to underlie other group-based phenomena, including personal motivation to adopt group norms (Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995) and beliefs about group variability (Doosje, Ellemers & Spears, 1995). Given research showing that musical behavior (including interests and participation) is often group-based (Frith, 1981; Larson, 1995), social identity theory is intuitively appealing as a theoretical tool with which people’s uses of music can be understood.

Research which has drawn on social identity theory to examine people’s musical behavior has broadly supported the predictions of the theory. For example, adolescents in Tarrant, Hargreaves, and North’s (2001) study were asked to rate the extent to which pupils at their own school (the ingroup) and a rival school (an outgroup) enjoyed each of six styles of music. Consistent with social identity theory, participants associated the ingroup with music that was valued positively by the ingroup (e.g., popular music, dance

music) to a greater extent than they associated the outgroup with that same music. At the same time, they associated the outgroup with music that was valued negatively (e.g., classical music, country music) to a greater extent than they associated the ingroup with that music. Furthermore, stated differences between the preferences of the two groups were related to adolescents' levels of self-esteem. At lower levels of self-esteem, adolescents sought to distance the ingroup more from the outgroup in terms of its stated degree of liking for negatively valued music; that is, they claimed that the outgroup liked that music *more* and the ingroup liked it *less* (see also Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2004).

On the basis of such research, Tarrant *et al.* (2002) concluded that an adolescent's statements about their musical preferences convey information to perceivers about *non-musical* qualities which assist in the impression formation processes (i.e., they convey *meta-information* to perceivers: see Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, and Rocher, 1994). Thus, Tarrant *et al.* suggested, by affiliating their groups with certain styles of music adolescents also associate those groups with the meta-information that such affiliation activates. Ultimately, the exaggeration of this affiliation in intergroup situations seems to be one means by which social identity and self-esteem needs can be met.

A question which arises naturally out of previous research concerns whether music might also be used to promote a *reduction* in intergroup discrimination. One way in which this question can be addressed is by drawing on a prominent approach to the study of prejudice reduction that has been developed in the social identity literature. The "common ingroup identity" model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993) outlines a process by which relations between social groups can be improved by changing group members' cognitive representations of the intergroup context. The model advocates superimposing a common ingroup identity over existing group boundaries. This serves to transform the intergroup context from an exclusive "us" and "them" distinction to a more inclusive "we" social category. In its most simple terms, the introduction of a superordinate identity in this way is believed to encourage the development of positive feelings towards the outgroup by bringing that group psychologically closer to the ingroup.

In an early test of the model, Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio (1989) reported lower levels of intergroup discrimination among ingroup members who collaborated with outgroup members on a problem-solving task as a single group. Moreover, the more group members defined the intergroup context in terms of a superordinate identity, the less discrimination they displayed. Similarly, Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, and Anastasio (1994) showed that pupils at a multicultural school who perceived the student body as a unitary whole rather than as a collection of separate ethnic groups tended to rate pupils across the school most positively. More recently, Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Gordijn (2003) reported that encouraging Dutch and Belgian students

to categorize American victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks into a common ingroup (Westerners) yielded stronger emotional reactions to those attacks than when the victims were portrayed as an outgroup (Americans). Together, these studies demonstrate the effectiveness of introducing a common ingroup identity on intergroup relations; however, to our knowledge no such studies have been conducted in a musical context.

In terms of the current contribution, one relevant feature of previous common ingroup identity research is that group members are often directed explicitly to self-categorize at the superordinate level (e.g., Dumont *et al.*, 2003). Thus, at the outset of the study, participants are typically informed that the researchers are interested in their responses as members of a specified superordinate group (e.g., "Westerners"). The effects of this information on subsequent intergroup perceptions are then assessed. What is less frequently investigated, and what the current study sought to elaborate, is how changes in intergroup perceptions might be brought about without such direct reference to the superordinate group. We were interested in investigating whether a description of an ingroup and outgroup which emphasizes an issue of common ground between the groups will itself lead to increased perceptions of intergroup similarity. In essence, we wished to examine whether group members would adopt a common ingroup identity without being overtly instructed to do so. We tested directly the proposal that information about shared musical preferences between an ingroup and outgroup might serve this function for adolescents. On the basis of research showing that negative attitudes towards outgroups emerge when ingroup and outgroup musical preferences are believed to be distinct (Tarrant *et al.*, 2001), we hypothesized that such attitudes would become more positive when musical preferences are believed to be similar.

A second aim of the current research was to investigate how musical preference information might influence perceptions that group members have about how the ingroup itself is perceived by an outgroup. Such perceptions, or stereotypes, have been referred to in the literature as "meta-stereotypes" (Vorauer, Main & O'Connell, 1998, p. 917). Largely negative in content, meta-stereotypes have been shown to be activated relatively spontaneously in intergroup contexts, particularly when the context presents an opportunity for evaluation by the outgroup (i.e., in contexts where individuals expect to interact with outgroup members: Vorauer, Hunter, Main & Roy, 2000; also Klein & Azzi, 2001; Krueger, 1996). Such is the salience and ready activation of meta-stereotypes, researchers have suggested that they actually precipitate activation of outgroup stereotypes. In other words, ingroup members are believed to express a negative attitude towards an outgroup *because* they believe that the outgroup itself has a negative attitude towards the ingroup (Vorauer *et al.*, 2000).

The idea that metastereotypes precipitate the activation of outgroup stereotypes has not yet been tested formally, and while we did not seek to establish the direction of the

relationship between these two forms of stereotype, we did aim to test empirically the proposal that they are related. On the basis of Vorauer *et al.*'s (2000) theorizing, we expected that improvements in perceptions of an outgroup following the introduction of a common ingroup identity would be accompanied by an improvement in group members' meta-stereotypes.

Study overview

Following an initial task in which participants were allocated to one of two experimental groups, adolescents in the current study were provided with information intended to modify their perceptions of the intergroup context. We manipulated statements about the ostensible musical preferences of the two groups in order to achieve this. In order to test the prediction that meta-stereotypes are affected most when there is potential for intergroup interaction (Vorauer *et al.*, 2000), we also included a condition in which participants were told they would discuss their responses with members of the outgroup. On the basis of the research reviewed above, it was hypothesized that adolescents encouraged to believe the ingroup and outgroup had similar musical preferences would demonstrate most positive intergroup perceptions. Beliefs that the ingroup and outgroup had similar musical preferences was also hypothesized to lead to most positive perceptions concerning how the ingroup is viewed by the outgroup (meta-stereotypes). Finally, on the basis of research showing that intergroup perceptions are sensitive to the anticipation of intergroup contact (Vorauer *et al.*, 2000), intergroup evaluations and meta-stereotypes were expected to be most affected when group members expected to interact with members of the outgroup.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 97 Year 10 pupils (50 males, 47 females; mean age = 14.79 years, *SD* = 0.42) attending a high school in Manchester, UK. Testing took place during timetabled classes. Participants were allocated randomly to one of six conditions.

Design

The study employed a 3 (ingroup identity: common vs. uncommon vs. control) \times 2 (intergroup interaction: expected vs. non-interaction) factorial design. Participants were told that their ingroup either had very similar or very different musical preferences to the outgroup, or were not told anything about the group's musical preferences (the control condition). Within this, participants assigned to the expected interaction condition were told that they would later have the opportunity to discuss their responses to the questionnaire with members of the outgroup. The effects of these manipulations on two primary dependent measures were assessed. First, participants evaluated the ingroup and the outgroup along a series of trait adjectives (intergroup discrimination measure); second, they reported their perceptions concerning how their group was perceived by the out-

group (meta-stereotyping measure). We describe these measures in the following section.

Materials and procedure

Pupils who agreed to participate were informed that the purpose of the research was to assess how people their age thought about social information. A categorization task was then presented which served to assign participants to one of two experimental groups. This task was based on the so-called minimal group paradigm procedure (see Tajfel *et al.*, 1971), and consisted of a one-page questionnaire ostensibly designed to assess participants' thinking style. Participants were told that previous research had identified two different types of thinkers, "convergent" and "divergent". To equate the social status of these thinking styles participants were told that each had approximately the same number of valuable characteristics (the nature of such characteristics was not specified). Participants were asked to respond to four closed-ended questions about their thinking style (e.g., "I prefer a problem to have only one right answer"; "I think that factual information matters more than personal opinion") and a single open-ended item which asked them to list as many different uses for a specified object as possible. Participants were given 5 minutes to complete this task.

The participants then took part in a filler task while their responses to the thinking styles questionnaire were being "scored". After this, participants were presented with the main questionnaire. This was described as a survey of thinking styles and began with a report of "results" from the thinking styles questionnaire. Participants were privately informed which type of thinking style, convergent or divergent, they possessed. In fact, allocation to groups was random. The first independent variable, ingroup identity, was then introduced. Participants in the common ingroup identity condition were informed that:

Although convergent and divergent thinkers have different thinking styles, previous research has shown that the two groups have very similar musical preferences. In fact, in a recent survey of convergent and divergent thinkers your age, more than 80% had similar interests in music.

Participants in the uncommon ingroup identity condition were informed that:

Not only do convergent and divergent thinkers have different thinking styles, previous research has shown that the two groups have very different musical preferences. In fact, in a recent survey of convergent and divergent thinkers your age, less than 20% had similar interests in music.

Participants in the control condition were not told anything about the musical preferences of the two groups. The second independent variable, intergroup interaction, was then introduced. Participants in the expected interaction condition were told that a school-wide meeting would be held at the end of the study during which the members of the two groups would openly discuss their responses to the questionnaire. Participants in the non-interaction condition did not receive this information.

Participants were then presented with the dependent measures. For the intergroup discrimination measure, participants evaluated the two groups using a set of 10 trait adjectives derived from Tarrant (2002). Five of these adjectives were positive ("nice"; "popular"; "intelligent"; "trustworthy"; "thoughtful") and five were negative ("mean"; "boring", "unpleasant"; "snobbish"; "selfish"). Participants were asked to rate how well each adjective could be used to describe the two groups. Responses were made on 11-point

scales where 0 = "describes us/them poorly" and 10 = "describes us/them very well". Responses to the negative items were reverse-scored for analysis. For the meta-stereotyping measure, participants were presented with the same set of 10 adjectives employed for the intergroup discrimination measure, but this time were asked to rate the extent to which the outgroup would use each trait to describe the participant's group. Responses were made on 11-point scales where 0 = "they are not likely to use it to describe us" and 10 = "they are very likely to use it to describe us". Responses to negative items were reverse-scored for analysis. Finally, participants were presented with a 5-item scale which assessed their degree of psychological attachment, or identification, with their group (e.g., "How similar do you think you are to the average convergent [divergent] thinker?"; "How pleased are you to be described as a convergent [divergent] thinker?"). Responses were made on 11-point scales, as before. This measure served as a check of the manipulation of ingroup identity: If the manipulation was successful in making salient a common ingroup identity, then participants in this condition should report lower levels of social identification with the original category relative to the control group.

Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire quietly without discussing their answers with anyone else; they were also told not to inform anyone else which thinking style they had been assigned to. Presentation of the intergroup discrimination and meta-stereotyping measures was counterbalanced across conditions. Each testing session lasted approximately 35 minutes. After the main questionnaire had been completed participants were fully debriefed as to the study's aims and expectations and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

RESULTS

Scale construction

Internal consistency of each scale was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. For the intergroup discrimination measure, both scales achieved an acceptable level of internal reliability (ingroup ratings $\alpha = 0.71$; outgroup ratings $\alpha = 0.77$) and so responses were collapsed into two single variables (one for each group) based on the mean of the contributing items. Similarly, the meta-stereotyping measure achieved an acceptable level of internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.74$) and so responses on this scale were also collapsed into a single variable based on the mean response. Finally, the group identification scale was internally reliable ($\alpha = 0.77$) and responses were similarly collapsed into a single variable.

Intergroup discrimination

Prior to hypothesis testing, we compared the responses of participants assigned to the "convergent thinkers" group and those assigned to the "divergent thinkers" group. This analysis indicated that participants in the two groups did not respond any differently from each other on any of the dependent measures. Responses made by participants in these two groups were therefore collapsed into a single "ingroup" variable for analysis.

Our first analysis examined participants' overall ratings of the ingroup and outgroup using the composite trait adjective score. A related *t*-test indicated that participants evaluated

the ingroup more favorably than they evaluated the outgroup: $t(79) = 7.98, p < 0.001$ (ingroup mean = 6.84; outgroup mean = 5.17). This confirms that the manipulation of group membership using the thinking styles categorization task was successful in raising the salience of group members' social identity concerns (cf. Tajfel *et al.*, 1971).

Next, we tested whether the introduction of a common ingroup identity and expected interaction influenced group members' intergroup perceptions, as hypothesized. To this end, ratings of the ingroup and outgroup were analyzed using a 3 (ingroup identity) \times 2 (intergroup interaction) \times 2 (target group) mixed ANOVA, with repeated measures on the last factor. This analysis revealed a main effect of target group which confirmed the above finding that group members evaluated the ingroup more positively overall than they evaluated the outgroup ($F(1, 74) = 90.54, p < 0.001$). There was also an interaction between ingroup identity and target group ($F(2, 74) = 18.65, p < 0.001$), indicating that the effects of ingroup identity differed across ratings of the ingroup and outgroup. We followed up this interaction with planned comparisons. For ingroup ratings, these indicated that participants who believed the ingroup and outgroup had similar musical preferences (common ingroup identity condition: $M = 7.00$) evaluated the ingroup more positively than those who believed the groups had different preferences (uncommon ingroup identity condition: $M = 6.21; t(56) = 2.35, p = 0.022$). This latter group of participants also evaluated the ingroup less positively than those told nothing about the preferences of the two groups (control group: $M = 7.27; t(56) = 3.53, p = 0.001$). Participants who believed the groups had similar musical preferences did not report any different perceptions of the ingroup from those who were told nothing about the groups' preferences. For outgroup ratings, participants who believed the ingroup and outgroup had similar musical preferences reported more positive evaluations of the outgroup ($M = 5.07$) than participants told nothing about the groups' preferences ($M = 4.33; t(51) = 2.23, p = 0.030$). Those led to believe the groups had different preferences ($M = 6.07$) reported more favorable evaluations than both those told nothing ($t(53) = 5.10, p < 0.001$) and those led to believe the groups had similar preferences ($t(54) = 2.76, p = 0.008$). There were no effects involving expected intergroup interaction. In terms of our hypotheses, these analyses demonstrate that the belief that the two groups had similar musical preferences (common ingroup identity) did not yield any change in perceptions of the ingroup relative to the control group, but did lead to more positive perceptions of the outgroup as hypothesized.

We conducted a further analysis of participants' intergroup perceptions using a compound measure of intergroup differentiation based on the difference score between ratings of the ingroup and outgroup. This measure enabled an assessment of the extent to which participants sought to differentiate between the two groups as a function of the experimental manipulations (see Mummendey & Simon, 1989).

Outgroup ratings were subtracted from ingroup ratings for this purpose. Consequently, a positive score indicated preference for the ingroup over the outgroup and a negative score indicated preference for the outgroup over the ingroup (a score of zero indicated equivalence of ratings of the ingroup and the outgroup). A 3 (ingroup identity) \times 2 (intergroup interaction) ANOVA on this score revealed a main effect of ingroup identity ($F(2, 74) = 18.65, p < 0.001$). This showed that participants led to believe the groups had similar musical preferences reported lower levels of intergroup differentiation ($M = 1.95$) than those told nothing about the groups' preferences ($M = 2.88: t(51) = 2.09, p = 0.041$). However, those who believed the groups had similar preferences demonstrated greater differentiation than did those who believed the groups had different preferences ($M = 0.24: t(52) = 4.20, p < 0.001$). Participants told nothing about the groups' preferences also demonstrated greater intergroup differentiation than those who believed the groups had different preferences ($t(51) = 6.42, p < 0.001$). There were no effects involving intergroup interaction. These findings are consistent with those achieved from the separate analysis of ingroup and outgroup perceptions above and support our prediction that perceiving that the ingroup and outgroup have similar musical preferences can yield lower levels of intergroup differentiation.

Meta-stereotyping

The next analysis tested our hypothesis that the introduction of a common ingroup identity and expected intergroup interaction would influence group members' meta-stereotype ratings. To this end, meta-stereotype ratings were assigned to a 3 (ingroup identity) \times 2 (intergroup interaction) ANOVA. There was a main effect of ingroup identity ($F(2, 86) = 7.19, p = 0.001$) which indicated that the meta-stereotype was more positive when participants believed the two groups had similar musical preferences ($M = 5.50$) compared to when they were told nothing about the groups' preferences ($M = 4.86: t(57) = 1.96, p = 0.054$). Additionally, the meta-stereotype was found to be most positive when group members perceived that the groups had distinct musical preferences ($M = 6.11$). This value was significantly higher than that observed in either the control condition ($t(60) = 4.33, p < 0.001$) or the common ingroup identity condition ($t(61) = 1.94, p = 0.057$). Supporting our hypothesis, then, perceiving intergroup similarity in musical preference led to the expression of more positive meta-stereotypes relative to the control group. However, meta-stereotypes were most positive when group members believed the ingroup and outgroup had different preferences, and this was not predicted.

To test the relationship between meta-stereotyping and intergroup discrimination, a series of product moment correlations were performed between meta-stereotype ratings and ingroup and outgroup ratings, and differentiation scores. These analyses revealed two significant effects. First, perceived

positivity of the meta-stereotype was positively correlated with perceptions of the outgroup: $r(97) = 0.52, p < 0.01$. This indicates that participants who expected the outgroup to evaluate the ingroup most positively reported the most positive perceptions of that outgroup. Second, and consistent with this finding, perceived positivity of the meta-stereotype was negatively correlated with intergroup differentiation: $r(97) = -0.43, p < 0.01$. That is, the more participants felt the ingroup would be positively evaluated by the outgroup, the less they sought to differentiate the two groups. The correlation between meta-stereotype positivity and evaluation of the ingroup was non-significant, indicating that the meta-stereotype neither influenced, nor was influenced by, perceptions of the ingroup.

Identification effects

Our final analysis focused on the effects of the experimental manipulations on group members' levels of social identification. A 3 (ingroup identity) \times 2 (intergroup interaction) ANOVA revealed a single main effect of ingroup identity: $F(2, 91) = 6.92, p = 0.002$. Thus, the effect of ingroup identity on social identification was in the expected direction with group members who were told the two groups had similar musical preferences reporting lower levels of identification than those told nothing about the groups' preferences. Planned comparisons indicated that participants told the two groups had distinct musical preferences reported lowest levels of identification of all: These were lower than participants in either of the other experimental conditions ($t(62) = 3.65, p = 0.001$ and $t(64) = 2.28, p = 0.026$: Mean identification = 4.69, 4.05 and 3.05 for participants in the control, common and uncommon identity conditions respectively).

Social identification was also correlated with the measure of intergroup differentiation ($r(80) = 0.39, p < 0.001$). This positive correlation indicates that the more strongly identified the group members were with the ingroup, so the more they differentiated between the ingroup and the outgroup. Finally, social identification was found to be negatively correlated with perceived positivity of the meta-stereotype ($r(97) = -0.25, p < 0.05$). This indicates that group members who most strongly identified with the ingroup believed that the outgroup would evaluate the ingroup most negatively.

DISCUSSION

The current study adds to recent research which has elaborated the role of music in social identity processes during adolescence. In the same way that music can be strategically used by adolescents to differentiate between groups in an intergroup context (e.g., Tarrant *et al.*, 2001, 2002), the results of the current study indicate that music can also be used to promote improvements in intergroup relations. Such improvements were observed both in terms of group members' ratings of the outgroup and intergroup differentiation,

and in terms of their meta-stereotype ratings. We believe, therefore, that we have offered an affirmative answer to the question posed in the title of this article: Can music bring people together? Specifically, our results lead us to conclude that adolescents' perceptions that their own groups and outgroups have similar musical preferences can facilitate development of positive intergroup relations. We believe that this is the first study to demonstrate this empirically.

We address first the effects of introducing a common ingroup identity on group members' intergroup perceptions. The finding that adolescents reported more positive intergroup perceptions when they believed the ingroup and outgroup had similar musical preferences compared to when they were told nothing about the groups' preferences is consistent with predictions of the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner *et al.*, 1993). As outlined earlier, this model proposes that relations between groups can be improved by changing group members' cognitive representations of the intergroup context. From this perspective, emphasizing the similarities between our groups' musical preferences can be seen to have encouraged group members to reorganize the ways in which they cognitively represented the groups. The outcome of this reorganization process is that the two groups came to be perceived as cognitively overlapping. Stated simply, we found that encouraging adolescents to focus on shared musical preferences facilitated recategorization of the two groups at a superordinate level. Once categorized in this way, the two groups were no longer perceived as distinct entities, but rather as one group, the members of which were relatively interchangeable. Moreover, and as we discuss below, leading group members to believe that the groups had similar musical preferences also influenced their expectations concerning how the ingroup was perceived by the outgroup.

When adolescents believed that the two groups shared musical preferences, they reported that the outgroup would perceive the ingroup more positively than when they were told nothing about the groups' preferences. That is, they reported more positive meta-stereotypes. Furthermore, such perceptions were found to be inversely related to intergroup differentiation. That is, adolescents who reported that the outgroup would form a positive evaluation of the ingroup tended to report lower levels of discrimination: They evaluated the outgroup more positively and reported fewer differences between the two groups. This finding is consistent with the argument put forward by Vorauer *et al.* (2000).

One surprising finding in the study was that although the introduction of a common ingroup identity yielded improvements in intergroup perceptions in line with our predictions, improvements were also observed when a common ingroup identity was absent. Specifically, group members who were told that the two groups had different musical preferences reported the most positive intergroup perceptions and most positive meta-stereotypes. While this response pattern was not predicted by the common ingroup identity model, a plausible explanation for it can be derived from recent

research on the role of group distinctiveness in intergroup relations. We develop this explanation below.

In their studies involving both real and laboratory groups, Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1998) found that the relationship between group distinctiveness and intergroup discrimination is curvilinear (i.e., it follows an inverted U-shape). Jetten *et al.* reported that levels of discrimination were lowest when intergroup similarity was either very high (in line with the common ingroup identity model) or very low (i.e., when the groups are highly distinct). Intergroup discrimination was observed to be highest at intermediate levels of group distinctiveness. These findings were discussed in terms of the differential importance of the outgroup as a source of social comparison. The researchers suggested that highly distinct outgroups may lack relevance in terms of their social identity value (also Brown & Abrams, 1986; Vanbeselaere, 1996). In relation to the current study, Jetten *et al.*'s findings might indicate that encouraging group members to believe that the ingroup and outgroup had very different musical preferences actually created a context in which the groups were seen as highly distinct. In such a context, the outgroup may not have been regarded as a relevant source of intergroup evaluation and social identity. Put another way, the presence of such a distinct outgroup may not have been sufficiently threatening to group members' social identity to activate identity-protection strategies (cf. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999). Consequently, group members felt able to evaluate the ingroup and outgroup similarly positively.

We turn now to the effects of our second independent variable, expected interaction. Previous research led us to predict that the effects of introducing a common ingroup identity would be most pronounced when group members expected to interact with members of the outgroup (Vorauer *et al.*, 2000). The data failed to support this prediction: Group members' intergroup perceptions and their meta-stereotype ratings were not influenced by whether or not they expected to interact with the outgroup. However, we do not believe that failure to confirm this prediction means that intergroup evaluations are not affected by the context in which they are made. Instead, we suggest that it may reflect a problem with the way interaction expectations were operationalized in the current study. In an attempt to lead group members to believe their responses would be communicated to the outgroup, we informed them that a meeting would be held at the end of the study during which they would discuss their answers with the outgroup. However, when asked at the end of the study to report their concerns about their questionnaire responses being communicated to others, less than 10% of members expressed any such concerns. It remains possible, therefore, that concerns over evaluation can in fact influence intergroup perceptions but that the current manipulation was not powerful enough to make such concerns salient. Consequently, we conclude that future research would benefit from manipulating evaluative concerns more

directly, and we suggest that the procedures developed by Voraeur *et al.* (2000) might be useful in this regard.

Finally, it is worth considering some of the broader implications of the current findings for relations between real social groups, and we do this with reference to the ongoing Middle East conflict. Comprising equal numbers of individuals on either side of the conflict, the Jewish-Arab Musical Youth Orchestra has received considerable publicity recently and has understandably been triumphed as demonstrating the power of music to foster positive intergroup attitudes (Wiesel, 2004; see Wright, Aron, McLaughlin Volpe & Ropp, 1997). The current research elaborates the underlying psychological processes which enable such social groups to function: By encouraging members to focus on the superordinate (orchestra) identity, subordinate (Arab/Jewish) identities become less salient and so members are able to develop positive attitudes towards the outgroup. What is less clear, however, is whether such positive intergroup attitudes extend beyond the social context in which they initially develop, when the superordinate identity is perhaps less readily salient. We note this as a challenge for future research.

In conclusion, the study has been successful in applying the common ingroup identity model in a musical context and has shown how statements about musical preference can be used productively to improve intergroup relations. An obvious goal for future research should be to extend these findings to applied social settings in which the practical value of music as a means of promoting better – and sustainable – intergroup relations can be determined. The extent to which these effects hold for other preferences and behaviors (e.g., leisure interests; health behaviors) that are important to adolescents should also be examined. On the basis of the current study, we believe that the continued adoption of the common ingroup identity model, and the social identity approach more generally, is likely to prove informative in this regard.

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