

From Egosystem to Ecosystem in Intergroup Interactions:
Implications for Intergroup Reconciliation

Jennifer Crocker

Julie A. Garcia

University of Michigan

Noah Nuer

Learning as Leadership, Inc.

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Prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination are universal realities of social existence . They are sometimes created and often reinforced by social structure, including group differences in power, status, privilege, and access to resources (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). They both result from and contribute to intergroup conflict (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Social psychologists and sociologists have increased understanding of intergroup relations by documenting the pervasiveness of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, and showing that they can operate automatically and outside of conscious awareness, with negative consequences for outgroup members (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; Devine, 1989). Sociologists have shown that these psychological phenomena are not merely intrapsychic; they are connected to social structure, power, and the distribution of resources and opportunities, and can become self-perpetuating (Ridgeway, 1992; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005).

The under representation of women in tenured positions in science departments at universities exemplifies the intersection of status, power, and social structure with implicit psychological processes (Rimer, 2005). Women rarely hold positions of power in academia, such as department chair or dean in the sciences; men are more likely to have decision-making authority. Norms about what good scientists should be like are not gender-neutral, but masculine, and work to women's disadvantage (Georgi, 2000). Women job applicants and tenure candidates are often evaluated more negatively than men with identical experience and accomplishments (Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritske, 1999). A Swedish study found that female applicants for post-doctoral fellowships from the Swedish Medical Research Council had to be 2.5 times more productive than their male counterparts in order to receive the same competence ratings from reviewers (Wenneras & Wold, 1997). Gender stereotypes about the characteristics of men and women that make them suited or unsuited for an academic career in science can operate implicitly (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and undermine the

performance of women in domains where their abilities are negatively stereotyped (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele, 1997). Taken together, this research suggests that gender disparities can be explained, at least in part, by stereotypes and prejudice rather than differentials in actual ability.

This example of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination at play underscores the importance of critically examining and changing both the power structure and the explicit and implicit stereotypes people hold of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups that maintain inequality. Yet, such change is difficult and slow, often too slow to be useful to people who are contending with these obstacles in their daily lives. Although women scientists may wish there were more women department chairs and deans, there is little they can do to effect such change in the short term. And although they might fervently wish to change the unconscious biases their colleagues hold against women scientists, those biases are reinforced by pervasive cultural messages and are highly resistant to change.

Consequently, the emphasis on documenting power and status differences between groups, and the often implicit or unconscious biases that perpetuate these differences, can create a sense of powerlessness and victimization in the targets of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Individual members of devalued groups typically have little or no ability to influence the power structure in which they live or work, and they have little ability to change the unconscious stereotypes and biases of the people with whom they interact.

Awareness of these obstacles can also create a sense of powerlessness and victimization among people with valued identities, even those in high-power or high-status, privileged positions. People whose identities are valued are vulnerable to accusations of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Because these processes often occur outside of conscious awareness (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), such accusations could have validity even if the person has no conscious experience of harboring negative stereotypes or discriminating

against others; thus, it can feel impossible to correct for the bias or defend oneself against accusations even when they feel untrue. In sum, identifying and understanding both structural barriers and prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, particularly in their implicit or unconscious forms, can be extremely important for understanding the obstacles people with devalued identities confront. Nonetheless, these approaches have limited immediate utility for those on the front lines of intergroup relations.

In this chapter, we present a framework for thinking about intergroup relations that can be immediately useful to people who are confronted with these issues in their daily lives. We suggest that downward spirals in intergroup relations are a product of egosystem motivational dynamics, and suggest that ecosystem dynamics can create upward spirals in intergroup relations. In doing so, we do not advocate abandoning attempts to change stereotypes and prejudice, or alter power and status relations; rather, we aim to explore where individuals caught in these processes have leverage to create positive dynamics in their intergroup relations.

Egosystem Motivation

The ego, as used here, refers to a set of beliefs, goals, strategies, and routines developed over the lifespan and driven by the desire to protect or inflate the self, especially one's self-image and the image that others hold of the self. The ego has both proactive and defensive aspects. When driven by their egos people proactively desire and seek recognition, acknowledgement, and attention on the one hand. On the other hand, they defensively fear and protect the self from rejection, humiliation, and criticism.

Furthermore, the egosystem is concerned with what events (including imagined or fantasized events) mean about the self—am I worthy or worthless? What does my self-image or public image stand to gain or lose? In the egosystem, other people are viewed as agents of validation or invalidation of the self. Others can enhance the self through praise, admiration,

and acknowledgement, or by performing worse than the self. Alternatively, others can threaten the self by criticizing, overlooking, rejecting, humiliating, outperforming, or abandoning the self. Others are viewed as judges, competitors, or threats to the self in a zero-sum framework; the self is typically seen as the victim of other people and events.

When driven by egosystem motivations, people often act in destructive or self-defeating ways (Crocker & Park, 2004). For example, when they are uncertain of success, people will often self-handicap, creating a good excuse or explanation for failure, such as procrastinating (Tice, 1991). Self-handicapping protects self-esteem by providing an explanation for failure, but undermines the likelihood of success. A recent series of studies shows that when people are driven by egosystem motivations, they often end up with the opposite of what they want. Zhang and Baumeister (2004) showed that ego threat increases costly entrapment in bad decisions, known as the problem of sunk costs or “throwing good money after bad.” For example, a subtle ego threat such as telling people that they should not continue with a game if they are the kind of person who chokes under pressure actually increased the tendency to persist in a money-losing endeavor. Participants given an irrelevant ego threat were more likely to pay more than \$1 in an auction for a \$1 bill, because they did not want to lose face. Under ego threat, people not only lost money, they also ultimately lost their pride as a result of entrapment in a poor decision. It is easy to see how these ego-defensive routines can be costly in intergroup conflicts, when actions that could resolve a conflict such as making a concession or admitting past mistakes are resisted because of the desire to validate that one (or one’s group) is competent, right, virtuous, or just.

Driving idea. The egosystem motivational framework has three foundational concerns, each with cognitive, affective, and motivational aspects. The first concern is organized around what we call the driving idea, or the person’s belief about the key danger that other people can represent, the anxiety one feels about that danger, and the motivation to

protect oneself from that danger. This driving idea can be expressed in the form, “They will {do something to} me,” and stems from interpretations of events that occurred earlier in life, often in childhood. People are vigilant for signs of the danger, and events are perceived and interpreted through the filter of the driving idea (Crocker & Park, 2004). Consequently, they are likely to “see” the danger where it doesn’t exist in reality, or where the reality is ambiguous. Rejection sensitivity, defined as the anxious expectation of rejection (G. Downey & Feldman, 1996; G. Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998), exemplifies the driving idea. The driving idea elicits strong emotion because it implies that the self is unloveable, incompetent, worthless, or unsafe.

Interactions with outgroup members are fertile ground for the driving idea. Outgroup members have, or are perceived to have, different experiences, beliefs, and goals than the self or ingroup members. Perceived difference easily fosters misunderstanding and undermines trust, activating the driving idea, which becomes the filter through which the other is perceived. Furthermore, in reality intergroup relations are often difficult, fraught with conflict, and outgroup members can pose a real threat, or have real power over one’s outcomes. These real differences in goals and interests are rich soil for the growth of the driving idea especially when people feel they lack power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).

For people with devalued identities, the driving idea may be directly linked to identity, grounded in emotionally powerful early experience with prejudice, discrimination, or harassment connected to one’s identity. Thus, the driving idea can take the form, “They will {reject/hurt/discriminate against} me, because I am{black/Japanese/Latina/gay/female}.” As Mendoza-Denton, et al. (2002, p. 897) suggest, “As targets of discrimination and prejudice, members of stigmatized groups might be particularly likely to develop

expectations of rejection by those who do not share their stigma and by social institutions who have historically excluded or marginalized them.”

Unconscious goal. People draw conclusions about what they need to be or do to protect themselves from the danger of the driving idea, leading to the second foundational concern of the ego system, the unconscious goal. The content of the unconscious goal is idiosyncratic, based what gave the person recognition, attention, and acknowledgement in the context of the family, community, peer group, or culture. Unconscious goals include things like being strong, tough, smart, charming, attractive, virtuous, and so on. The unconscious goal represents an extreme version of these qualities. For example, the unconscious goal of the egosystem is not simply to be smart, but to be the most brilliant; it is not simply to be respected by some people, but to be admired by everyone.

Social identities can either thwart or foster the unconscious goal. Group-based stereotypes, and social status and power differences, can buttress or undermine the unconscious goal. To return to our previous example, the unconscious goal to be the most brilliant and creative scientist may be fostered by the identity of being a man, and therefore more similar to the stereotype of a brilliant scientist; it may also be fostered by subtle biases that provide recognition, acknowledgement, and opportunities to male scientists compared to female scientists with equal credentials.

These two concerns of the ego system—the driving idea and the unconscious goal—represent both an avoidance or prevention goal, focused on the driving idea, and an approach or promotion goal, focused on the unconscious goal. Subjectively, people experience themselves as victims in the ego system—based on threatening childhood experiences, people feel the need to protect themselves, and to do so they believe they need to be the best, most outstanding at something. The proactive, self-promoting unconscious goal, which victimizes

others, feels like a necessary response to the danger that others pose. In the egosystem, everyone feels like a victim and no one sees himself as a perpetrator.

Desired image. The third foundational concern of the egosystem is the desired image, the positive views people have (or want to have) of themselves and want others to have of them. These beliefs shape goals, particularly the goal to prove or demonstrate that one has the qualities of the desired image (Crocker & Park, 2004). Because people need others to recognize and validate these qualities in the self in order to sustain self-esteem, they do things to make sure others see them in this way, and do not see them as the opposite. For example, a person with the desired image of “unprejudiced” may bend over backward in favoring a target of prejudice to avoid the appearance of being prejudiced (Plant & Devine, 1998).

Because they emphasize appearance over reality, desired images have many costs. First, as noted, the things people do to *appear* as their desired image sometimes actually undermine their ability to *be* that way, such as when students who want to appear smart decide not to raise their hand and indicate when they are confused by a point in a lecture—they avoid risking appearing stupid, but at the expense of learning, and becoming smart. Second, when people are driven by their desired image, their focus is on demonstrating and proving something about themselves, rather than learning. The pursuit of the desired image fosters self-validation goals at the expense of learning, especially on difficult tasks (Crocker & Park, 2004; Dykman, 1998; Grant & Dweck, 2003). Third, when people are driven by the desired image they become disconnected from other people; in emphasizing appearance over reality, people are inauthentic and even manipulative, blocking meaningful connections with others.

In intergroup interactions, people bring with them the usual or typical desired images they have in any interaction (e.g., competent, virtuous, important, good student, good mentor), and also those aspects that are specifically relevant to their identity as a member of a

particular valued or devalued group (e.g., fair, unprejudiced, deserving of respect, intelligent, not ignorant). When the goal to validate the desired image is activated, people process events for what they mean about their image. Success at building or bolstering the desired image triggers positive self-relevant emotions such as pride; threats or obstacles to the desired image trigger negative self-relevant emotions such as shame, guilt, or humiliation, as well as other negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear.

Contexts in which one's identity is linked to negative stereotypes may activate the goal to prove that those stereotypes are untrue, or do not apply to the self or one's group (Steele, 1997). For example, a student of color in the classroom may interpret a teacher correcting her in terms of what it means for her personal or group desired image of intelligent. Likewise, contexts in which one's identity is valued or idealized may activate the goal to demonstrate that one possesses the positive traits the identity is supposed to bestow; that one is fair and unprejudiced, or that one has not benefited unfairly from one's privileged status. Thus, whether stigmatized or idealized, social identities can trigger goals to validate desired images in intergroup interactions. This goal will take on heightened importance when it is not only one's personal image that is at stake, but also the image of one's group. Defending the image of the group may feel noble, because it is done for the sake of others, but it also involves egosystem motivations, because it involves validating the desired group image.

Ego-defense. In sum, the egosystem is a motivational framework in which people strive to protect the self from the danger of the driving idea, acquire the recognition, acknowledgement, and feeling of safety that accompanies achievement of the unconscious goal, and to validate the desired image. We argue that the egosystem drives most behavior most of the time—it is the habitual, or default motivational system. To achieve the ends of the egosystem, people proactively seek success and accomplishments that will give them

recognition, acknowledgement, and attention. Recognition, acknowledgement, and attention are often confused with power and respect on the one hand, and love, connection, and inclusion on the other hand. But receiving recognition, acknowledgement, and attention elicits jealousy and competition in others, which reinforces or heightens intergroup tension. Threats to the goals of the egosystem trigger emotional responses such as anger, shame, humiliation, and anxiety. People also learn many ego-defensive and protective mechanisms, routines, and strategies to cope with minor threats to the ego; these strategies are well-known in psychological research. They include vigilance for rejection (Kramer & Messick, 1998; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), preemptive maneuvers like rejecting others before they can reject me (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998), blaming others for failure and taking credit for success (Bradley, 1978), protecting the self from possible failure by self-handicapping (Jones & Berglas, 1978), disengaging from goals when failure is a possibility (Carver, Blaney, & Scheier, 1979), and so on—the list of ego-defensive routines is too long to enumerate here.

Events that clearly and strongly confirm the driving idea, or demonstrate that one is the opposite of one's desired image or unconscious goal pose major threats to the egosystem. These events trigger intense initial emotional numbness (Campbell, Baumeister, Dhavale, & Tice, 2003), typically followed by negative self-relevant emotions (Tangney, 1999; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996), and elicit extreme, and extremely destructive, responses (Tangney, 1999). Research on the consequences of social rejection, which is a common driving idea, provides a good example of this last-ditch response of the egosystem to major threat. Laboratory studies of rejection show that rejected people are more aggressive (Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), and self-destructive, behaving in risky and unhealthy ways (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002). We suspect that self-destructive behaviors in response to major ego

threat are particularly characteristic of people who otherwise feel powerless. As Eric Harris, one of the Columbine High School shooters, said “Isn’t it fun to get the respect that we’re going to deserve?” (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). When they cannot see other ways to draw attention to their needs, people will hurt themselves to hurt others, and in the process force others to notice their pain or frustration . In the context of intergroup relations, these destructive behaviors may emerge as acts of terrorism.

In sum, our framework suggests that intergroup relations provide fertile ground for the operation of egosystem motivations, powerful self-relevant emotions, and behaviors that are mutually destructive. In the context of tense intergroup relations, with past histories of mutual mistrust and harm, real conflicts of interest, negative stereotypes, and social structures that exacerbate these problems, adding egosystem motivational orientations can be like adding fuel to the fire of intergroup relations.

Downward Spirals of Egosystem-Driven Intergroup Relations

Difficult interactions between people with different social identities are exacerbated when their egosystems can become intertwined and mutually reinforcing, creating a downward spiral that is difficult to break. These downward spirals involve expectancy confirmation processes (Snyder & Stukas, 1999) and self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1948; Snyder, 1984). Social psychologists typically describe expectancy confirmation and self-fulfilling prophecy effects as primarily cognitive. For example, in much research on self-fulfilling prophecies and expectancy confirmation effects, expectancies are manipulated by the researcher, or derive from widely known social stereotypes of a group. However, in our view the particularly negative and destructive aspect of these downward spirals in intergroup relations stem from their connection to the powerful motivations of the egosystem. People bring their driving ideas about the danger that other people represent to these interactions, and are vigilant for signs of their driving idea. Because the driving idea represents the worst

case scenario for the egosystem, this anxious expectation is particularly potent in intergroup interactions. Although the driving idea is easily activated, it is not often true; other, more benign explanations for an outgroup member's behavior are not usually considered, because the driving idea fits one's past experience and one's beliefs about outgroup members. Unconscious goals and desired images also drive people in these downward spirals, contributing to their negative reactions to outgroup members. For example, a common unconscious goal is to be right over others. Thus, when a person perceives that he has been stereotyped or discriminated against, he thinks he is correct in his interpretation. Consequently, possible misconceptions are left unchallenged, perpetuating negative dynamics.

From the perspective of the outgroup member or the person who is stereotyped, interactions are ego-threatening because of the possibility of harm, devaluation, or rejection linked to one's identity. Concern that outgroup members will harm, reject, or devalue the self may be connected to one's driving idea, and strengthened by knowledge of past outgroup attacks on ingroup members, or by personal experience with such attacks. In many cases, there is a history of real physical harm to the ingroup by outgroup members, so vigilance for the possibility of harm or rejection may feel necessary to survival, activating the fight-or-flight response. This threat can lead to withdrawal from the interaction (Wright, Gronfien, & Owens, 2000), heightened vigilance for signs of rejection or devaluation (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997; Kramer, 1998; Kramer & Messick, 1998; Pined, 1999), or if possible, concealing one's identity from the other (Goffman, 1963; Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller, & Scott, 1984). People who are vigilant for intended harm, rejection, and devaluation see them easily and often, because perceptions of reality are filtered through the anxious expectation that they will occur (G. Downey et al., 1998; Kramer, 1998; Kramer & Messick, 1998; Pined, 1999). Thus, vigilance repeatedly leads people to perceive the rejection or

devaluation they fear. In response, they react, perhaps by withdrawing or by accusing the other of prejudice (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). Often, as we note shortly, outgroup members react badly to these behaviors, becoming defensive, angry, or blaming. However painful this sequence of events may be, there is a sense in which these reactions feel satisfying to the ego because they affirm one's rightness and victimhood. Yet, they have high costs for the self and others (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). It is important to note that we do not argue that prejudice and discrimination exist only in the mind of the target; rather, we suggest that past experience and awareness of the realities of prejudice and discrimination can arouse egosystem-based vigilance and self-protective routines, which can sometimes lead to a misperception of reality, contributing to the downward spiral of intergroup relations and causing people to re-experience precisely what they want to avoid.

From the perspective of the person with a valued identity, especially someone who does not see himself as prejudiced, the interaction is threatening because he could be perceived as prejudiced. Most people have desired images of being fair, reasonable, and unprejudiced. In the context of intergroup relations, threats to these desired images have a particular potency, because their opposites--prejudice, racism, and discrimination--have strong negative connotations, including associations to being a perpetrator, an exploiter, even a killer. Furthermore, social norms dictate that one should be unprejudiced (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Monteith, Deneen, & Tooman, 1996). Thus, the possibility of being accused by an outgroup member of bias or discrimination can threaten the ego, and create vigilance for unfair accusations. Consequently, non-stigmatized people may be anxious about appearing prejudiced, vigilant for accusations of prejudice, attempt to inhibit or suppress expressions of prejudice, and become defensive in response to any questions about their intentions (Crandall et al., 2002; Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Monteith et al., 1996; Plant & Devine, 1998). Suppressing prejudice has paradoxical

effects—when the effort to suppress is lifted, fatigue sets in, or there are distractions, suppression of stereotypical thoughts can have rebound effects (MacRae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994), making it more likely that the person will “slip” and say something inappropriate. This can trigger guilt or blame (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Most likely, the person with the valued identity will conclude that his good intentions are unappreciated, feel falsely accused, and paradoxically, feel victimized if his behavior is criticized. Thus, the vigilance of the person with a valued identity may lead him to “walk on eggshells,” censor himself around outgroup members, and repeatedly perceive the criticism or accusation he fears. In response, he may accuse the other of being overly sensitive, affirming his rightness and victimhood, which also has high costs for the self and others.

The resulting dynamic can be painful for both parties, confirming their worst fears about outgroup members. Each person in the interaction, driven by fears and anxieties, triggers the fears of the other and creates what they want to avoid. Of course, there are many versions of this, depending on whether the devalued person withdraws, conceals, or accuses, and on whether the valued person reacts to this behavior with guilt, anger, or withdrawal. The general rule, in our experience, is that each person acts in ways that make it more, rather than less, likely that his or her worst fears will come true.

Consider the dynamic depicted in Figure 1. To help the discussion, we refer to the person with a devalued identity as “she” and the person with a valued identity as “he.” It is important to remember that a person who is valued in one context may be devalued in another, and even in the same interaction, each person may fear being devalued. For simplicity’s sake, however, Figure 1 assumes that one person has a valued identity and the other has a devalued identity. The devalued person in this dynamic begins with anxiety about being devalued, rejected, overlooked, or harmed, related to the belief or concern that the other may be prejudiced. Her belief might be based in past experience or knowledge gleaned from

others' experiences. She is vigilant for signs of prejudice or unfair treatment, resulting in a level of scrutiny of his words and deeds that few could pass. Sensing that he is under scrutiny, the valued person might become nervous, distracted, or focused on suppressing inappropriate thoughts, which paradoxically can lead to a slip of the tongue (or a slip of the mind), and the unwanted expression of prejudice. The devalued person may respond with complicated emotions. On the one hand, her worst fears have come true; on the other hand, she knows that she was right to be vigilant and mistrusting, and there is a relief in being right, and knowing where the danger of the driving idea resides. She may confront him about his behavior. He, thinking of himself as a good, fair, and nonprejudiced person, may react to this accusation either with rage, or with shame and humiliation, or both. He may become angry, defensive, and feel that his good intentions are unappreciated. He may conclude that she always sees herself as a victim, is critical and judgmental, and never gives him the benefit of the doubt. He may respond with greater anxiety about being accused of prejudice, defending himself, counterattacking, withdrawing, or resisting. She, in turn, will feel misunderstood, judged, and disrespected, and this will reinforce her conclusion that he is prejudiced.

We began describing the cycle with her, the devalued person's, belief that she might be the target of stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination. But we could just as easily have begun describing the cycle with him, and his anxiety about being accused of prejudice. The important thing to note is that there is no single person who started this cycle—both people in this dynamic bring with them their fears and anxieties, and both contribute to the cycle.

In this cycle, the worst fears of both the valued and the devalued person are confirmed. He was right to be worried about being accused of prejudice, and she was right to worry that he is prejudiced. It is difficult for either of them to see how they are each partially responsible for this reality. In fact, talking about who is right and who is wrong in this dynamic is usually not a way out of the cycle; instead, it is counterproductive, at least when

egosystem motivations are at play. Both are right, and both are wrongly accused. Both are innocent victims in their own minds, and both are perpetrators in the other person's mind. In reality, each person in this interaction is both a victim and a perpetrator. After this interaction, each will approach the next interaction with more anxiety, mistrust, and suspicion, and create a new destructive cycle.

Our analysis begs the question whether the person with the valued identity did in fact harbor prejudice or discriminate against her in the first place. It is not that we think this question is unimportant; rather, we think it is a difficult and delicate process to uncover the answer. In many cases, because stereotypes can be over-learned, unconscious, and expressed implicitly, the answer is probably yes. But discovering the answer to this question in a specific instance is very difficult. It requires honest, non-defensive self-examination on the part of the person with the valued identity. Such exploration is very difficult when he fears being judged or criticized, or wants to protect a desired image. People with valued identities will either deny their prejudice, or in some cases, readily confess their prejudice to demonstrate that they are on the side of good. Uncovering the truth about one's own prejudices is almost impossible in the egosystem.

To this point, we have described a downward spiral involving two people with different social identities. It is important to recognize that these interactions take place in the context of groups, which have their own internal dynamics that can reinforce the downward spiral. Groups create common values, worldviews, and practices among their members, and they are invested in defending the correctness of these values, views, and practices (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). In addition, groups, like individuals, often feel insecure about the correctness of their worldview, and are punitive toward those who threaten it (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Rosenblatt, Veeder, Kirkland, & Lyon, 1990). When the participants in this cycle feel wrongly treated or wrongly accused, they can turn to ingroup

members for support and validation of the correctness of their beliefs, interpretations, and actions. Typically, ingroup members will reinforce the person's view of himself as a victim, whose negative responses to the other are not only justified, but imperative. Ingroup members may encourage a combative response, or even take it upon themselves to correct, or avenge, the wrong. Thus, when a conflict between two individuals occurs in the context of intergroup tension or hostility, ingroup members tend to shore up the egosystem, making it less likely that participants will question the assumptions, beliefs, and filters they bring to the interaction, or recognize their own responsibility in the downward spiral.

In sum, when people are motivated by the egosystem, real group differences in perspective, experience, interests, and worldviews become fertile ground for the operation of the driving idea, the unconscious goal, and the desired image. The ego threat that outgroup members pose triggers ego-defenses that are ultimately self-defeating and destructive. They contribute to escalating conflicts, mistrust, hostility, and it becomes increasingly difficult to communicate constructively and achieve mutually beneficial goals.

In our experience people have little awareness of the dynamics of these downward spirals, their own responsibility for creating and maintaining them, and their costs for the self, the ingroup, the outgroup, and often innocent bystanders. The ego benefits of being sure one is right and morally superior, seeing oneself as the victim and the other as the perpetrator, and consequently not feeling responsible for the current situation, obscure the long term costs, especially the costs to others. When people are unaware of the costs, they may be caught in a misery of their own making, yet unable to see where they have the power to avoid these costs and create a different dynamic.

These destructive dynamics in intergroup relations continue, in part, because people believe their reactions are appropriate, justified, and right, and that it would be dangerous or irresponsible, to oneself or one's group, to do otherwise. People want outgroup members to

understand their experience and respond to their needs, but they do not want to understand the other's experience or respond to the other's needs. Often, the only way people try to improve the situation is to convince outgroup members of the rightness of their own views, and that the outgroup member is wrong. Yet, attempting to convince outgroup members of the wrong-headedness of their views or behaviors is rarely successful; it triggers defensiveness, argumentation, and resistance. Outgroup members become more firmly entrenched in their position. Could there be a goal that is more productive, more constructive, than wanting to be right and prove the other wrong?

Ecosystem Motivation

We believe it is possible to shift the paradigm so that, instead of triggering ego-defenses, real group differences in perspective, experience, interests, and worldviews become an opportunity to expand one's understanding of reality, fostering learning, growth, and connection. Where egosystem motivations foster downward spirals in intergroup relations, we propose that ecosystem motivations may create upward spirals.

The ecosystem, as used here, refers to a motivational orientation driven by goals that are larger or more important than the ego, such as what people want to create or contribute, what they want to give, or how they want to grow. Whereas egosystem motivation is concerned with self-preservation, and physiologically involves the fight-or-flight stress response, ecosystem motivation is concerned with caring for or giving to others, and physiologically involves the species-preservation response (Henry & Wang, 1998), also called the tend-and-befriend response (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, & Updegraff, 2000). Whereas the egosystem is focused on protecting or inflating the self, the ecosystem is concerned with being authentic, acknowledging one's fallibility, and growing for the sake of goals that are larger than the self. In contrast to egosystem goals, which are concerned with "What does it mean about my image or my worth?" and "What's in it for

me?” ecosystem goals are concerned with making a difference for the greater whole. Ecosystem goals are not self-sacrificing; they are good for the self and others. Ecosystem goals are sustainable; if every person had the same goal, it would support rather than threaten the self. In the ecosystem, other people are resources, sources of support, and potentially aligned with the self, rather than threats. Whereas the framework of the egosystem is zero-sum, the framework of the ecosystem is not zero-sum. Whereas people driven by egosystem motivations are concerned with being right, and proving or demonstrating their desired images or their worth, ecosystem goals encourage openness to learning, understanding the perspective of others, and constructive communication. Ecosystem goals may require risking being rejected, devalued, or criticized, and saying, “So what?” because the goal at stake is more important than the ego. Ecosystem goals empower, because they start with the self, not others. Others can support, but cannot replace the responsibility and ownership of the self. Consequently, ecosystem goals push people into action.

For example, Garcia (2005) has examined motivations for disclosing and concealing a concealable stigma. Participants were college students with a history of depression or a non-straight sexual orientation. She assessed a wide range of reasons for and against disclosure, and found that many loaded on two uncorrelated factors, which she identified as egosystem goals and ecosystem goals. Egosystem goals against disclosure involved fear of rejection, avoiding conflict, protecting privacy, and wanting the other’s approval, and egosystem goals for disclosing involved testing the other’s reaction and catharsis. Items loading on the second, ecosystem goals factor were all reasons to disclose, and included educating the other, personal growth, similarity with the other, and the importance of the stigma to identity. Garcia (2005) found that egosystem goals were correlated with stress, low self-esteem, and depression, whereas ecosystem goals were correlated with lower levels of stress, higher self-esteem and less depression. Importantly, ecosystem goals predicted decreased symptoms of

depression two weeks later. Furthermore, ecosystem goals were associated with increased disclosure of the stigma, and more positive emotions when people disclosed, whereas egosystem goals—even egosystem reasons for disclosing—were associated with less disclosure. Thus, this initial study supports the notion that people can have egosystem or ecosystem goals in intergroup relationships, and ecosystem goals are associated with more positive outcomes for the individual and the relationship.

Creating Upward Spirals in Intergroup Relations

How can we use the idea of ecosystem goals to create a more positive dynamic in intergroup relations? We believe that there are several elements to creating upward spirals.

Taking stock. The first step toward creating a different dynamic involves taking stock of the current situation, stepping out of one's egosystem to examine the dynamic and one's own contribution to it thoroughly and honestly. To be sure, such self-examination is not easy or comfortable for the ego. But a realistic assessment of the dynamic and one's contribution to it is the essential first step in deciding whether one is fed up with the dynamic, and therefore wants it to change, and identifying where one has the leverage to create something different.

Regaining responsibility. In downward intergroup spirals, each person or group feels a victim of the other, and believes that their own reactions are necessary and justified by the other's behavior. Ecosystem goals, because they start with the self, encourage people to explore their own responsibility in these cycles. For example, a person can check his interpretation of the interaction, examining whether his understanding is skewed or incomplete. Doing so may threaten desired images, yet enables people to step out of their victim role. He may realize, for example, that he was wrong or jumped to conclusions. However minor one's role in the downward spiral, it is precisely the places where one has

responsibility that one has the leverage or opportunity to create a different outcome. Thus, once ego concerns are set aside, looking at one's own responsibility is empowering.

Clarifying ecosystem goals. Once people have clearly identified their responsibility for negative dynamics, and the costs of those dynamics, they can clarify ecosystem goals for what they want to create in their intergroup interactions. One interesting starting point is taking what one wants to experience in intergroup interactions, and asking "How can I create that for others?" People who want to feel safe, want the other to be trustworthy, or don't want to be victimized can begin by creating those experiences for others. Perhaps the most important aspect of ecosystem goals is their sustainability—if everyone, including outgroup members, had the same goal, would that be good for me or for us? In the context of intergroup relations, ecosystem goals might focus on creating trust, or creating constructive communication with outgroup members. Rather than ask, "Is the other trustworthy, is it safe to talk to this person?" a person with an ecosystem goal might ask, "What can I or we do to create trust and improve our communication?" Because these goals are good for others as well as the self or the ingroup, they can be inspiring to others.

Creating a safe space for constructive communication. The next step in creating upward spirals in intergroup relations concerns creating a "safe space" for talking about the real issues in the relationship. There are many elements to creating a safe space, including, first of all, working through one's own fears. As we have seen, interacting from the standpoint of being vigilant for harm, rejection, or devaluation by others contributes to downward spirals, so it is essential to become aware of those fears when they arise, and sort through their connection to ego mechanisms, such as the driving idea, the unconscious goal, and desired images. A second aspect of creating a safe space is suspending judgment and criticism of the other, and of oneself; judgments and criticism make it unsafe to look at one's

own contribution to the problem. Third, being emotionally vulnerable elicits more empathy and caring from others than being tough, strong, or apparently invulnerable.

Respect and empathy for the other's situation. Often people want outgroup members to change their beliefs, values, or interpretations of the situation. This desire automatically creates tension in the relationship, because it begins with one person looking down at the other, thinking that the other should believe something different, and wanting to be right about that. Many responses in that moment are very destructive. Even if one disagrees with the other, it is important to understand and accept that that's what the other believes, and not begin by wanting them to change their beliefs.

Being in learning mode. Instead of wanting to convince others to change their beliefs or interpretations, a more constructive goal would involve wanting to identify the places where one's own understanding of the situation or of the other's point of view is incomplete or distorted, and expand one's understanding. When outgroup members feel heard and understood, they are more able to hear and understand the other (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999).

Compassion for oneself. Finally, in the attempt to create upward spirals in intergroup relations, it is important to have compassion for oneself; to acknowledge that one is human, and therefore will make mistakes, and be nonperfect. The alternative, wanting to be perfect and right, makes it very difficult to be open to the other person's experience. Compassion for one's own human failings can make it easier to hear and respond to the pain or complaints of the other person.

These elements can create a context in which it is possible to have a constructive dialogue about real issues and concerns. In exploring and identifying their own ego mechanisms and owning up to them, people realize where they are least able to distinguish their biased and distorted perceptions from reality. If they can create a dialogue with the

other to check their interpretations and expand their understanding of reality instead of reacting from their interpretations as if they were reality, then they have a vastly improved chance to reverse the cycle. For example, with these elements in place, it is possible to have a constructive conversation about whether the other is prejudiced. But with clear ecosystem goals, one may discover that clarifying if the other is prejudiced is not necessarily the most important thing for creating the relationship one wants.

A Useful Perspective

We have argued that egosystem motivations create and foster downward spirals of intergroup relations, whereas ecosystem motivations can break those downward spirals, and even create upward spirals. Although this perspective might seem hopelessly idealistic, we think it is eminently practical and pragmatic if practiced properly. Understanding that prejudice, stereotypes, power, and social structure play a role in these downward spirals does not provide much leverage for the individual to change the direction of the spiral. However, understanding how one's ego gets triggered in these spirals, and that it is possible to shift from egosystem to ecosystem motivations and change the spiral creates amazing opportunities.

We do not mean to diminish the value of trying to change the system. However, because systematic change is often slow, identifying strategies that can help individuals create positive changes can be a source of efficacy and empowerment. In day-to-day interactions, societal and structural disparities are manifested in interpersonal encounters. One does not interact with the "system" as much as one interacts with other people who have fears and an ego just like the self. Thus, we advocate a bottom up approach to improving intergroup relations, starting with the self. This strategy is not a competing framework to a top down strategy of changing the system, but a complementary approach. Indeed, changing the system with an ecosystem goal will likely be more effective in the long run. History has

shown that groups of victims who obtain power often become perpetrators, recreating the cycle of intergroup hostility. Creating a context in which the person with prejudice feels safe to change may be much more effective in the long run for creating the intergroup relations one wants than trying to force others to change.

Conclusion

We have argued that egosystem goals contribute to downward spirals and ecosystem goals can create upward spirals in intergroup relations. One objection to this approach is that it is too dangerous to let down one's guard, set aside vigilance, and take risks to create a more positive intergroup dynamic, because past events demonstrate that the danger from outgroup members is real. Protective mechanisms based on dangerous past events feel necessary to survival, and they make people blindly distrustful of outgroup members, and blindly trustful of their fears. But vigilance for prejudice and discrimination can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, because it activates the fight or flight response. It is very difficult to be vigilant in a healthy, constructive way. Rather than be afraid of outgroup members, we suggest that people need to be responsible, aware, and respectful of other's beliefs and views, while not necessarily agreeing with them.

A second objection to our approach is that it shifts the focus away from stereotypes, prejudice, and social structures that create obstacles to fairness, equality, and social justice, toward a more inward focus on the self. People who feel it is urgent to create social change may feel that an internal focus on shifting from egosystem to ecosystem motivations distracts from more pressing external problems. In our view, these are mutually interacting and reinforcing processes. Egosystem motivations amplify the effects of social structure, prejudice, and stereotypes. And when people are driving by the egosystem, they are ineffective at creating what they want. For people who see themselves as agents of social change, awareness of these processes is not a distraction, but an important tool for becoming

a more effective change agent. The first step toward making the world more fair and just is becoming a more fair and just person oneself.

A third objection to this approach is that, in urging people to focus on their own responsibility for downward spirals in intergroup relations, we are blaming the victim. Why should targets of prejudice and discrimination focus on their own egosystems when the perpetrators of prejudice and discrimination are truly at fault? Yet, as we have seen, in downward spirals of intergroup relations everyone believes they are the victim and the other is the perpetrator; if all victims wait for perpetrators to change their behavior, the downward spiral will continue unabated. The best possibility for creating change is starting with the self, at the places where one has responsibility, for those are the places where one has the leverage to create upward spirals in intergroup relations.

Why would a leader want to make this shift from egosystem to ecosystem goals in intergroup relations? To us, the reason is clear; the costs of egosystem dynamics and the downward spirals of intergroup relations can be tremendous, including the deaths of many innocent people. From an ecosystem perspective, a leader can best contribute to the well-being of the ingroup by also caring about the well-being of the outgroup. Would a leader who shifted from egosystem goals to ecosystem goals risk losing the support of his or her followers? Perhaps followers who are driven by their own egosystem goals will be disappointed or even angry with a leader who articulates ecosystem goals. Change can be threatening, especially to people who are firmly caught in their egosystem dynamics. But more often, we believe that leaders who are guided by their own egosystems do not inspire trust or loyalty and quickly lose support, whereas leaders who have been guided by an ecosystem vision, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, are among the most inspiring figures of history, and the changes they nurtured will be enduring.

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Correspondence should be directed to Jennifer Crocker, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109 (jcrocker@umich.edu), Julie Garcia, Department of Psychology, Stanford University, 450 Serra Mall, Stanford, CA 94305 (jagarcia@stanford.edu), or Noah Nuer, Learning as Leadership, Inc., PO Box 150090, San Rafael, CA, 94915 (noahn@learnaslead.com).

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