

A Theoretical Review of Interactions between Different Ethnic Groups

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Abstract: Currently, there exist multiple primary theoretical frameworks for examining cross-group contact, specifically intergroup contact theory, social identity theory, and information decision theory. These frameworks elucidate the circumstances, expressions, and outcomes of cross-ethnic interactions from varying vantage points. This study critically evaluates and critiques the aforementioned theories, contending that intergroup contact theory inadequately addresses the non-attitudinal ramifications of ethnic contact in comparison to social identity theory and information decision theory.

Keywords: Interactions between Different Ethnic Groups; Intergroup Contact Theory; Social Identity Theory; Information Decision Theory.

1. Introduction

Currently, within the social science community, there exist several primary theoretical frameworks for examining cross-ethnic interactions, including intergroup contact theory, social identity theory, and information decision-making theory. These theories offer distinct perspectives on the circumstances, expressions, and consequences of cross-ethnic contact, which will be expounded upon in the following discussion.

2. Intergroup Contact Theory.

The Intergroup Contact Theory, a fundamental concept in the fields of psychology and ethnology, examines interactions between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds. The "Intergroup Contact Hypothesis" is widely recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing intergroup relationships, as evidenced by seminal works by Allport, Pettigrew, and Pettigrew [1][2][3]. The roots of intergroup contact theory can be traced back to the 1930s, when Zelig and Kesen investigated individual variations in self-reported familiarity and attitudes towards diverse racial groups, positing a correlation between self-reported familiarity and social tolerance [4]. Following World War II, an increasing number of academics embarked on the examination of intergroup contact and interaction, focusing on the experiences of American soldiers and sailors [5][6][7]. Subsequently, this research expanded into the realm of education, highlighting the significance of cross-ethnic contact in mitigating racial prejudice and conflict within public schools [8].

2.1. The Conditions for Intergroup Contact

Allport's (1954) seminal intergroup contact hypothesis is renowned for its elucidation of the circumstances in which intergroup contact can mitigate bias [9]. This hypothesis not only occupies a prominent place in theoretical discourse but also garners significant attention for its implications on policy formulation. Allport outlined four essential conditions for fostering positive outcomes from intergroup contact based on empirical research: equality in status, shared objectives, collaborative group dynamics, and legal backing.

In addition to the four factors proposed by Furthermore, in

conjunction with the four factors posited by Orport, recent research has identified opportunities for intergroup contact and the development of intergroup friendships as additional factors that facilitate positive interactions between groups [10][11]. Facilitating contact between individuals from different groups can prompt both parties to shift their attention towards individual characteristics that are unrelated to group categorizations, thereby offering increased prospects for challenging and dispelling stereotypes associated with outgroups [12]. Orport, as research progresses, opportunities for contact between members of different groups and intergroup friendship have also become new additional factors that promote positive interaction between groups [10]. By promoting contact between members of different groups, it can encourage both parties in the interaction to shift their focus to individualized features unrelated to the group category, providing more opportunities to overturn stereotypes of external groups [12]. Group friendship also plays an important role in reducing prejudice through contact [3]. Moreover, recent research has identified opportunities for intergroup contact and the development of intergroup friendships as additional factors that, in conjunction with the four factors posited by Orport, facilitate positive interactions between groups. Facilitating contact between individuals from different groups can prompt both parties to shift their attention towards individual characteristics that are unrelated to group categorizations, thereby offering increased prospects for challenging and dispelling stereotypes associated with outgroups [12].

2.2. The Way Groups Interact with Each Other.

Over time, scholars have identified numerous factors that facilitate intergroup contact, expanding the conditions outlined in the intergroup contact theory and transforming them into a collection of loosely defined criteria, rather than contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual framework established by positive intergroup contact. Scholars have redirected their attention from examining conditions to investigating the mechanisms of interaction among groups, positing potential mechanisms as stemming from functional relationships, behavioral factors, emotional factors, and cognitive factors within groups [13].

The preceding discussion encapsulates the core tenets of the intergroup contact theory, delineating the pivotal factors and mechanisms underpinning intergroup interactions. The theory has significantly contributed to elucidating the effects of intergroup contact on prejudice and attitudes. By delving into this framework, scholars can attain a more profound comprehension of the contextual nuances and operational dynamics inherent in intergroup contact.

3. Social Identity Theory

In the context of the varied composition of the labor force in the United States, recent research in the disciplines of management and organizational sociology has delved into examining the influence of labor force composition on organizational outcomes through the theoretical framework proposed by Allport. The notion of team diversity in management pertains to the distinct objective and subjective traits held by individuals within a team, which may result in their perception of differences from others [14].

The social identity theory, as proposed by Hogg and Abams and Tajfel, elucidates the genesis and ramifications of group identity through the lenses of cognition and motivation [15]. Grounded in the concept of social classification, this theory posits that individuals engaged in group dynamics are inclined to discern distinctions between themselves and others. Consequently, the activation of the social classification process prompts individuals to categorize themselves and others into distinct social groups, thereby assuming divergent social identities. This classification process implies that individuals working in groups that are dissimilar to their own may encounter greater challenges in collaborating with others compared to those working in groups that are similar. Consequently, these theories propose that individuals categorize themselves and others based on perceived similarities and differences, ultimately influencing their decisions regarding collaboration. Furthermore, the initiation of the social categorization process can impede the dissemination of task-related information as a result of favorable biases towards individuals within the ingroup (e.g., favoritism) and unfavorable biases towards individuals in the outgroup (e.g., defamation) [16].

Group members' identity and collective interests are important aspects of social identity. Group membership reflects an individual's self-concept and individuals prioritize collective interests over their own. Social identity is formed through categorizing oneself and others based on criteria like race, gender, and values. Following the process of classification, individuals tend to perceive others not as autonomous entities but rather as representatives of their respective social groups. Furthermore, a key function of social identity is to bolster and uphold one's self-esteem [17]. The act of social classification elicits distinct expectations among group members and those outside the group, fosters a dichotomy between the in-group and out-group, and gives rise to group biases and stereotypes. Stereotypes influence how group members expect each other to behave, leading to different treatment of group members. This bias can result in preferential treatment of internal group members and biased behavior towards external group members.

The social identity theory explains how team member diversity can lead to lower dependence, less commitment to the organization, lower work attendance rates, and increased conflicts. Ethnic diversity in teams was not widely studied until the 21st century. Researchers are now examining how it

affects group cohesion, employment relationships, and team performance.

4. Information Decision Theory

Social Identity Theory Contrary to the viewpoint of social identity theory, studies informed by information decision-making theory have demonstrated that diverse group composition, characterized by a variety of knowledge, skills, and perspectives, facilitates the generation of novel ideas and approaches, enhances decision-making quality, and ultimately boosts team effectiveness [15][18]. The theory of information decision-making examines the influence of organizational diversity on organizational results in a favorable light, positing that diversity fosters an environment conducive to enhancing team effectiveness [19].

Interacting with individuals from different groups can broaden one's understanding of information networks and provide access to diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences. While the introduction of diversity may present challenges related to coordination and integration within a team, it ultimately contributes to enhancing team performance [20][21]. Information decision-making theory posits that heterogeneity among group members can facilitate creativity and innovation in the workplace by incorporating diverse knowledge, experiences, and perspectives [22]. For instance, proponents of immigration argue that diversity can stimulate workforce creativity. New immigrants need unique information and the ability to share it with others to achieve their goal, according to information decision-making theory.

Traditional information decision-making theory emphasizes the benefits of information, education, and diversity. Research suggests that a diverse workforce can enhance decision-making through increased creativity and innovation.

5. Summary

5.1. The Intergroup Contact Theory Focuses on the Conditions and Outcomes of Ethnic Interactions.

Intergroup contact theory emphasizes the importance of conditions for positive outcomes. Despite not always meeting all conditions, many studies have still shown positive effects. This raises questions about the necessity of all proposed conditions. By examining the research context, various factors like language, resources, and economic status can be included in the list of conditions. The hypothesis of intergroup contact theory can be continuously expanded without distinguishing between necessary and favorable conditions, leading to an endless verification process in previous studies. The complexity of conditions limits theoretical application. Confusion between necessary and favorable conditions hinders analysis of intergroup contact mechanisms. Some favorable conditions may not be necessary for intergroup contact. This study examines the outcomes of cross-ethnic interactions, noting that while it is important to consider the conditions that facilitate such interactions, this is not the main focus. As a result, the theory of intergroup contact has limitations in analyzing ethnic diversity and its effects.

The theory of intergroup contact focuses on the impact of intergroup interactions on attitudes, but research shows that attitude change is just one outcome of cross-ethnic contact. Studies in sociology, psychology, and anthropology offer

insights into the various consequences of such interactions. Prior research has found that ethnic diversity in education can have various effects on cognitive and non-cognitive development, social behavior, and other aspects, but more research is needed to fully understand the impact on adolescent development.

5.2. The Paradox of Social Identity Theory and Information Decision Theory

Research in management focuses on the impact of diversity in organizational member composition, specifically ethnic diversity, using social identity theory and information decision-making theory as frameworks. Social identity theory and information decision-making theory offer contrasting perspectives on the impact of organizational diversity in management analysis. Social identity theory suggests that overall member diversity may not benefit organizations, while information decision-making theory indicates that diversity can improve group performance.

How should we consider the varying perspectives of the two theories on diversity consequences? Recent research suggests that diversity in different dimensions can have significantly different outcomes, with scholars categorizing diversity as surface or potential based on classification criteria. Surface level social category differences, like ethnicity, gender, and age, can hinder group effectiveness, while differences in education or personality can actually improve performance. In management, ethnic diversity is considered surface-level diversity, but research in education consistently shows its positive impact on student development.

Why do diverse levels yield opposite outcomes? Why does education research mainly emphasize the benefits of ethnic diversity? To answer these questions, we need to focus on the mechanisms and conditions that determine the effects of diversity. Recently, organizational behavior has focused on moderating variables to understand when diversity can enhance group performance. Time, organizational culture, and atmosphere have been identified as key moderating variables in research. Research in social psychology explores how factors like intergroup interaction, intergroup anxiety, and collaboration influence diversity at a micro level. These studies align with intergroup contact theory, emphasizing the importance of understanding when intergroup contact leads to positive outcomes. This revisits the theory of ethnic contact and suggests that diversity in education may have different effects than in management. This suggests that management theories, such as social identity theory, are not effective for studying diversity in education. Similarly, information decision-making theory does not consider the impact of organizational diversity on ethnic groups, making it unsuitable for analyzing research on ethnic diversity in education.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of using inter-group contact theory, social identity theory, and information decision theory to analyze the effects of ethnic diversity in basic education in ethnic areas of China is limited and should be considered in conjunction with the specific research context.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by Inner Mongolia Department of Education, China, grant number NJSY22312.

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