

The Intergenerational Effect of Maternal Multicultural Experience on Children's Tolerance: An Example From Palestinians and Jews in Israel

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Abstract

Although recent research has demonstrated the benefits of multicultural experience for reducing personal levels of intergroup bias, the potential for an intergenerational effect has yet to be explored. Using samples of Jewish-Israeli (Study 1a) and Palestinian-Israeli (Study 1b) mother–child dyads, we found that maternal multicultural experience was indirectly related to greater social tolerance among children via lower levels of maternal need for cognitive closure which, in turn, triggered higher levels of maternal social tolerance. These results show that when it comes to multicultural experience, its impact can extend beyond the self to also affect the next generation. Implications for developmental theories of prejudice acquisition and prejudice interventions are discussed.

Keywords

multicultural experiences, children, intergenerational transmission, intergroup tolerance, prejudice

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

—Donald Trump, during his presidential announcement, June 16, 2015

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As illustrated in the epigraph, incidents of social intolerance are rampant in society, propagated even by heads of states. As part of the quest to help uncover ways to annihilate such attitudes, psychological research has demonstrated that exposure to foreign cultures provides a useful approach to reducing intergroup bias (Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012). Although, historically, research has focused on personal contact experiences with outgroup members (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), more recent research has expanded the definition of exposure to include not only interpersonal contact experiences but all experiences of encountering or interacting with elements of foreign cultures, including eating foreign cuisine or listening to foreign music (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). These multicultural experiences have been shown to successfully reduce stereotyping, prejudice, and discriminatory judgments, while also promoting racial engagement (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2011; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012).

One way these effects have been demonstrated to occur is through their impact on motivated cognition. Specifically, exposure to multicultural experiences is thought to call into question the accuracy of long-held beliefs, practices, and assumptions as people are exposed to new information that is distinct, inconsistent, or even contradictory to internalized schemas. Rather than seize and freeze on existing preconceptions to achieve quick and firm conclusions, individuals become motivated by a lower need for cognitive closure, which motivates people to entertain alternative hypotheses and to question existing assumptions. In turn, reliance on existing knowledge structures, including prejudiced perception, is reduced (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2011; Gurin et al., 2002; Roets, Kruglanski, Kossowska, Pierro, & Hong, 2015; Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012).

However, this research has focused exclusively on how people's multicultural experience can help *themselves* become more tolerant. Research has yet to investigate whether the effect of multicultural experience can extend beyond the self. Could adults' multicultural experience act as a precursor to more tolerant children? Our expectation for a positive intergenerational effect of parental multicultural experience on children's tolerance builds on both the extended contact literature and sociodevelopmental theories of child socialization. The extended contact literature suggests that simply knowing that an intimate ingroup member, such as a parent, has positive interactions with members of other cultures will diminish prejudice (e.g., Tausch, Herwstone, Schmid, Hughes, & Cairns, 2011). Extrapolating to the broader context of multicultural experience, it is possible that greater parental multicultural experience will have a *direct* effect on children's tolerance (Figure 1, path E) because it signifies to children that contact with elements and people of foreign cultures should be embraced.

And yet, young children may be unable to draw direct conclusions from their parents' experiences without further instruction. Indeed, sociodevelopmental theories would suggest a more *indirect* route for how parents' multicultural experiences could affect their children's degree of social tolerance. This literature has highlighted parents' major role as socializing agents for their children, especially during early childhood, in which they take on the role of teachers, models, and disciplinarians (Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1986; Bigler & Liben, 2006; Nastie, Diamond, & Bar-Tal, 2015). According to this research, children perceive their parents as ultimate sources of epistemic authority, whereby parents act as filters and interpreters of how children view the social world (Miklikowska, 2016; Nastie et al., 2015). As such, parents' explicit and implicit attitudes about outgroup members may serve as powerful models to children's prejudice and tolerance. As they seek parental approval, children may learn through observation and imitation of their parents' views. They may learn from parents' direct instructions about what views they should and should not hold. And they may learn from parents' reward and punishment of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate attitudes. Thus, as a whole, these processes would suggest a serial multiple mediator model in which child tolerance would arise through a more indirect pathway, whereby parents' higher levels of multicultural experiences would yield reductions

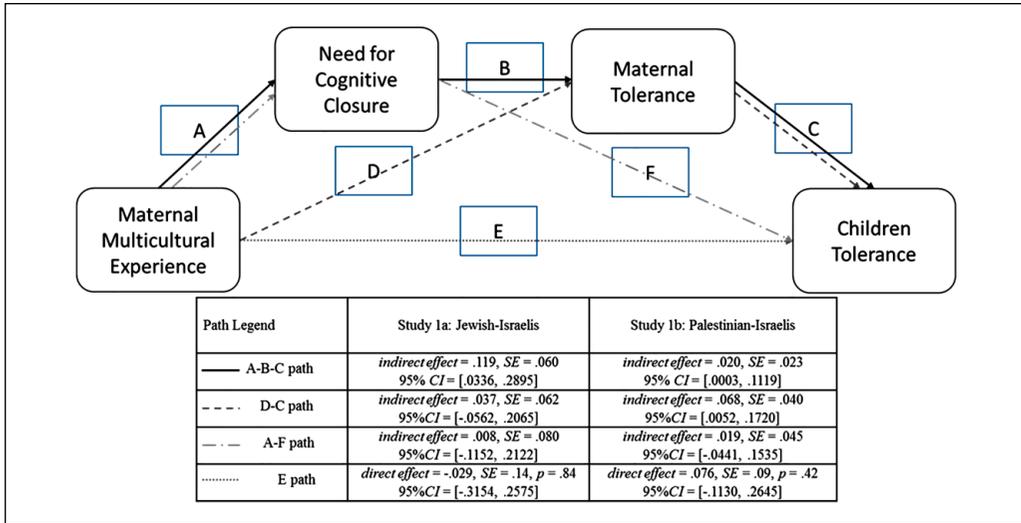


Figure 1. Serial multiple mediator model for influence of maternal multicultural experience. Note. The legend provides statistical bootstrapping results of the different indirect and direct paths for Study 1a (Jewish-Israeli sample) and Study 1b (Palestinian-Israeli sample). Control variables are included in the model but not visualized. CI = confidence interval.

in need for cognitive closure, thereby fostering greater social tolerance in parents, and these higher levels of tolerance in adults will transfer to higher levels of intergroup tolerance in their children (Figure 1, path A-B-C). Notably, although little research has explored antecedents to intergenerational correspondence in intergroup attitudes, a recent meta-analysis has successfully demonstrated a significant concordance in parent–child intergroup attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013), with these results also corroborated in longitudinal investigations (Miklikowska, 2016).

In the current research, we test both the direct model and the indirect (serial multiple mediator) model in samples of Jewish-Israelis (Study 1a) and Palestinian-Israelis (Study 1b). Testing both groups using similar methods allows us to examine generalizability of the effect to both majority and minority cultural members. Furthermore, measuring the attitudes that each of these samples has toward the other group offers a conservative test for our hypotheses given the generally strained relationship that exists between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Palestinians which is fueled by the ongoing intractable Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Nastie et al., 2015). For both groups, we chose to focus on fourth graders because research has shown that children of this age are developmentally amenable to prejudice reduction and that after Grade 4, parents begin to lose their credibility as a primary source of epistemic knowledge (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). We further chose to focus on mothers rather than on both parents because previous research has shown that children’s racial attitudes are generally more aligned with those of their mother, especially in cultures with segmented gender roles, like those in the Middle East, in which mothers have greater responsibility for child rearing and as such are stronger socializing forces (e.g., Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Brosh, 1991; Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009; Zughayar, 1995).

Method

Setting and Participants

Data were collected as part of the larger project conducted in the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, in which Jews and Palestinians generally live in segregated communities, with children almost exclusively

attending different schools. Fifty-nine fourth-grade students from a Jewish-Israeli school (47.5% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 9.10$, $SD = 0.31$) participated in Study 1a and 60 fourth graders (46 Muslims, 14 Christian, 51.7% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 9.12$, $SD = 0.32$) from a Palestinian-Israeli school participated in Study 1b. In all, 88.1% of Jewish mothers ($M_{\text{age}} = .37.03$, $SD = 4.81$) and 76.7% of Palestinian mothers ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.62$, $SD = 4.44$) returned completed surveys.¹ All participants filled out the survey in their native language, with questionnaires translated and back translated by two bilingual research assistants. Mothers filled out the questionnaires at home and children did so at school.

Measures

Maternal multicultural experience. We used the established Multicultural Experience Survey (MES; Leung & Chiu, 2010) to assess mothers' degree of exposure to foreign cultures. The measure has eight items, including length of time lived in foreign countries (Item 1), level of exposure to foreign cultures on a 10-point scale (Item 2), number of foreign languages spoken (Item 3), parents' places of birth (Items 4 and 5; coded as 1 if foreign-born), and the nationality of participants' five favorite cuisines (Item 6), friends (Item 7), and musicians (Item 8), with scores of 1 given to each answer involving a foreign nationality. Items were given equal weight, rescaled to range from 0 to 1, and summed. For a complete description of items and coding procedures, see Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012.

Maternal need for cognitive closure. Need for cognitive closure was assessed using a brief version of Roets and Van Hiel's (2011) 15-item need for cognitive closure scale, which is based on Webster and Kruglanski's (1994) classic measure. Items were measured on a 6-point scale (Study 1a: $\alpha = .95$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .94$). Sample items include "I don't like situations that are uncertain" and "I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life."

Maternal intergroup tolerance. We measured mothers' tolerance toward members of the other group (Jews toward Palestinians and Palestinians toward Jews), as a composite of three separate indicators, all measured on 6-point scales. First, we measured social closeness using a modified social distance scale (e.g., Bogardus, 1925) in which participants rated the degree to which they would be happy to have a person from the other group as colleague, neighbor, good friend, and sister/brother-in-law (Study 1a: $\alpha = .95$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .94$). Second, we measured how often mothers meet with members of the other group in their neighborhood, place of work, social events, and overall (both $\alpha = .85$). Finally, we had mothers indicate whether their interactions with members of the other group were positive, pleasant, stressful (r), and shallow (r) (Study 1a: $\alpha = .84$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .86$). Separate regression and bootstrap analyses of the three measures yielded a similar pattern of results. For brevity, they were averaged to create a composite score (Study 1a: $\alpha = .93$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .95$).

Children's intergroup tolerance. We used three measures to create a composite score of children's tolerance toward members of the other group (e.g., Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001). Each of the items were measured on a 5-point scale. First, we asked children to rate members of the other group on eight bipolar traits (e.g., very smart–very stupid). After reverse scoring, higher scores indicated less negative stereotyping (both $\alpha = .86$). Second, we asked participants to imagine that they were a member of a mixed group of Arab and Jewish children and measured the degree to which they thought they would experience five different emotions (e.g., relaxed, anxious). After reverse scoring of relevant items, higher scores indicated more positive emotions (Study 1a: $\alpha = .82$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .78$). Finally, we asked participants to indicate their willingness to perform five activities with a child from the other group, such as play together (Study 1a: $\alpha = .92$ Study 1b: $\alpha = .87$). Separate analyses of the three measures for each group yielded a similar, although

sometimes weaker, pattern of results and were thus averaged to create a composite tolerance score (Study 1a: $\alpha = .93$; Study 1b: $\alpha = .91$).

Individual differences. We controlled for socioeconomic status (SES) and religiosity which previous research has shown can be associated with intergenerational transition of attitudes (e.g., Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001). In Study 1b, we also controlled for whether or not the family was Muslim. Notably, we found the same significant pattern of results when we ran the analyses below without covariates, which is the typical analysis conducted in this research domain (Degner & Dalege, 2013).

Results

As predicted, results from Hayes (2013) Model 6 bootstrapping test (with 5,000 resamples), which estimated the serial multiple mediation effect of maternal multicultural experiences on child prejudice via maternal need for cognitive closure and maternal tolerance, supported the indirect A-B-C path (Figure 1), demonstrating that for both Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Palestinians, the relationship between maternal multicultural experiences and child tolerance was serially mediated by maternal need for cognitive closure and maternal tolerance (Study 1a: *indirect effect* = .119, *SE* = .060, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.0336, .2895]; Study 1b: *indirect effect* = .020, *SE* = .023, 95% CI = [.0003, .1119]), with the 95% CI not including zero. Interestingly, for Study 1b, results also supported the D-C path (Figure 1), which demonstrates a second indirect effect of maternal multicultural experiences on child tolerance via maternal tolerance (*indirect effect* = .068, *SE* = .040, 95% CI = [.0052, .1720]). This path was not significant in Study 1a (*indirect effect* = .037, *SE* = .062, 95% CI = [−.0562, .2065]). Notably, the alternative mediation path (A-F) through only maternal need for cognitive closure was not significant in either sample (Study 1a: *indirect effect* = .008, *SE* = .080, 95% CI = [−.1152, .2122]; Study 1b: *indirect effect* = .019, *SE* = .045, 95% CI = [−.0441, .1535]). In addition, the bootstrapping test did not support the direct effect for either sample (Study 1a: *direct effect* = −.029, *SE* = .14, $p = .84$; 95% CI = [−.3154, .2575]; Study 1b: *direct effect* = .076, *SE* = .09, $p = .42$; 95% CI = [−.1130, .2645]; path E in Figure 1).²

Discussion

This article is the first to examine the potential intergenerational effects of multicultural experience, demonstrating that the social tolerance benefits associated with it can extend beyond mothers' personal views to also enhance the social tolerance of their children. We further show that this occurs through lower levels of maternal need for cognitive closure yielding higher levels of maternal tolerance. The support for this serial multiple mediator model meshes well with social-developmental theories which suggest that parents' attitudes and beliefs provide an impactful interpretive lens through which young children view their worlds, consequently adopting their parents' views (Allport, 1954; Bigler & Liben, 2006; Nastie et al., 2015). Whereas previous research has demonstrated that social tolerance is indeed shared within the family (Degner & Dalege, 2013), we help provide some evidence for what mechanisms may help induce it. Furthermore, by finding the same pattern of results in samples of both Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli mother-child dyads, we provide the first account of how multicultural experiences can have parallel effects on both majority and minority group members. Finally, we show that the effects of multicultural experiences can be powerful enough to even induce tolerance toward people who are viewed as representing the opposite side of a devastating intractable conflict (Nastie et al., 2015).

Notably, although we do provide a first account of the potential intergenerational benefits of multicultural experience, our research also has several limitations. These include having a correlational design and relatively small samples with few controls drawn from participants living under

conditions of constant conflict. It is therefore encouraging that our findings dovetail with previous experimental research demonstrating the causal effect of multicultural experience on need for cognitive closure and on social tolerance across a wide range of samples (e.g., Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012) as well as with studies showing the intergenerational and causal effect of need for cognitive closure on prejudice (e.g., Dhont, Roets, & van Hiel, 2013; Roets et al., 2015). Previous research also shows that parents are more likely to influence their young children than the other way around (Miklikowska, 2016; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Looking forward, future research would benefit from longitudinal and experimental research investigating the impact of parental multiculturalism on children's prejudice. It would further be fruitful to examine whether these effects would generalize to other intergroup contexts as well as determine whether some of the other benefits associated with adults' multicultural experiences (e.g., increased creativity and flexible thinking; Leung et al., 2008; Maddux, Bivolaru, Hafenbrack, Tadmor, & Galinsky, 2014; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012; also see Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009) may also transfer to their children. Finally, it may be worthwhile to investigate the prejudice reduction potential of interventions that include not only a multicultural exposure component but also parental participation so that the socialization impact on children would be more complete.

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Notes

1. Notably, the children whose mothers filled out the survey did not differ in their social tolerance scores from those whose mothers did not fill out the survey (Study 1a: $p = .615$; Study 1b: $p = .588$). Moreover, to test the representativeness of the children's tolerance levels, we also collected tolerance data from fourth graders in two other schools in which mothers were not asked to participate. Of them, 123 Jewish children and 55 Palestinian children filled out the tolerance measures described in the text. No differences in tolerance levels were found between the children in the two Jewish schools ($p = .602$), and no differences were found between children in the two Palestinian schools ($p = .537$).
2. The same exact pattern of results was found using the classic Barron and Kenny method to assess mediation. However, given previous arguments that this approach should be abandoned (Hayes, 2013), we report only bootstrapping results in the text.

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