

A Mega-Analysis of the Predictive Power of Initial Contact within Minimal Social Network

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Abstract : It is accepted in social psychology that categorization leads to ingroup favoritism, without further thought given to the processes that may co-occur or even precede categorization. These categorizations move away from the conceptualization of the self as a unique social being toward an increasingly collective identity. Subsequently, many individuals derive much of their self-evaluations from these collective identities. The seminal literature on this topic argues that it is primarily categorization that evokes instances of ingroup favoritism. Apropos to these theories, we argue that categorization acts to enhance and further intergroup processes rather than defining them. More accurately, we propose categorization aids initial ingroup contact and this first contact is predictive of subsequent favoritism on individual and collective levels. This analysis focuses on Virtual Interaction APPLication (VIAPPL) based studies, a software interface that builds on the flaws of the original minimal group studies. The VIAPPL allows the exchange of tokens in an intra and inter-group manner. This token exchange is how we classified the first contact. The study involves binary longitudinal analysis to better understand the subsequent exchanges of individuals based on who they first interacted with. Studies were selected on the criteria of evidence of explicit first interactions and two-group designs. Our findings paint a compelling picture in support of a motivated contact hypothesis, which suggests that an individual's first motivated contact toward another has strong predictive capabilities for future behavior. This contact can lead to habit formation and specific favoritism towards individuals where contact has been established. This has important implications for understanding how group conflict occurs, and how intra-group individual bias can develop.

Keywords : categorization, group dynamics, initial contact, minimal social networks, momentary contact

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