



Social Networks and Fears of Stigma by Association with the LGBTQ+ Community

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Abstract

Members of the LGBTQ+ community face unjust stigma and discrimination. People may not want to associate with members of this community due to fear that their association will cause them to be similarly stigmatized, termed fears of stigma by association. The purpose of the current research is to examine whether fears of stigma by association mediate the relationship between indirect contact and microaggressions towards members of the LGBTQ+ community. The results of this study point to reduced fears of stigma-by-association as a novel mechanism through which intergroup contact improves intergroup relations. People with inclusive social networks may be more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community because they are less fearful of being stigmatized by their network members.

Introduction

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community are stigmatized due to their sexual identity (Gower et al., 2019; Herek, 2004).
- People who associate with members of the LGBTQ+ community may be similarly stigmatized due to their association, a phenomenon referred to as stigma by association (Jefferson & Bramlett, 2010).
- People may anticipate and fear stigma by association, given that this stigma can threaten status, belonging, and significance (Anderson et al., 2015; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kruglanski et al., 2022).
- Intergroup contact (IC) theory suggests contact between groups can reduce prejudice under certain conditions (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).
- Even just being aware of relationships between ingroup and outgroup members, known as extended contact, has also been found to promote positive intergroup attitudes (Cameron et al., 2011; Gómez et al., 2011).
- Extended contact usually creates positive ingroup norms about contact with the outgroup. That is, people who experience extended contact typically believe that other ingroup members have favorable attitudes toward interaction with the outgroup (Turner et al., 2008).

The Current Research

We predict that these ingroup norms will mediate the relationship between extended contact and fears of stigma by association. We also hypothesize that fears of stigma by association will be related to the following forms of microaggressions (i.e., everyday and thinly veiled expressions of prejudice):

- Using derogatory terms to refer to the LGBTQ+ community
- Assuming heteronormativity when giving advice/suggestions
- Reluctance to display media featuring queer themes

Methods - Participants

682 undergraduate students from the University of Maryland (M age = 19.13 years) were recruited for two studies. Given the similar methods, we combined the samples for the current research. Of this combined sample, 30.2% of the participants identified as male, 67.5% identified as female, and 2.4% identified as neither male nor female. A majority of this sample identified as White/Caucasian (49.9%), followed by Asian/Asian American (31.4%), Black/African American (12.8%), Hispanic (10.4%), Middle Eastern (3.8%), Other (2.5%), and Native American (0.3%). Most participants of this sample identified as Straight (84.7%), followed by Bisexual (9.8%), Other (3.3%), Lesbian (1.4%), and Gay (.89%). Participants were a part of either study 1 (n = 269) or study 2 (n = 413). The only difference between the studies was that Study 1 measured expectations of stigma by association, whereas Study 2 measured fear of stigma by association. These variables had similar associations with other variables.

Procedure

Participants were first asked to provide the name and contact information for three of their friends (i.e. first name and email address). Then, they completed a series of measures described below. Friends nominated by participants received an email invitation to complete a brief survey containing the conversation measure also described below.

Disguised Microaggression Measures

First Year Dating Advice: Participants were asked to provide dating advice to first-year college students. Responses were coded by 3 raters for heteronormativity (i.e., the response assumes heterosexuality). When coders disagreed, the model rating was used. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable (percent agreement = .96; average Kappa = .89).

Conversational Microaggressions: Friends nominated by participants received an invitation to complete a brief survey which assessed their perception of the primary participant's conversational utterances. Using 5-point response scales, friends indicated the extent to which the primary participant used two phrases that may be hurtful to members of the LGBTQ+ community: "that's so gay" and "no homo." To disguise the purpose of this measure, these phrases were embedded in a list of unrelated decoy phrases (e.g., "what's up?" and "no sweat"). A total of 1,196 friends provided a response (M = 1.75 friend responses per primary participant). Friend informants exhibited moderate agreement with each other (average informant-total correlation = .27; ICC = .53).

Activity Preferences: Participants were instructed to provide suggestions on how to improve a list of activities, all of which were heteronormative. A team of three coders coded the suggestions in terms of whether participants corrected the heteronormative nature of the activities. When coders disagreed, the model rating was used. An example activity was "A program to boost men's confidence in flirting with women".

Film Preferences: Participants were asked to rank order a set of hypothetical descriptions of movies to be shown to UMD. Some movie titles were indicative of straight relationships while others were indicative of queer ones. An example of this were two films, one of which was titled "A film about a nerdy kid who falls in love with a popular girl dating a football player, after tutoring her in math", while another one was titled "A film about a woman cheating on her boyfriend with another woman". Lower values represented higher prioritization of queer films to be shown.

Self Report Measures

Expected Stigma by Association with LGBTQ+ (Adapted from Boyes et al., 2013)

- "If I became friends with someone who was a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I would be teased"
- 10 items, 7-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Fears of Stigma by Association with LGBTQ+ (Adapted from Boyes et al., 2013)

- "If I became friends with someone who was a member of the LGBTQ+ community I would be worried about being teased"
- 10 items, 7-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Quality of Extended Contact (Adapted from Turner et al., 2008)

- "How many of your close friends do you think have friends that are gay?"
- 5 point rating scale (1 = none, 5 = most)

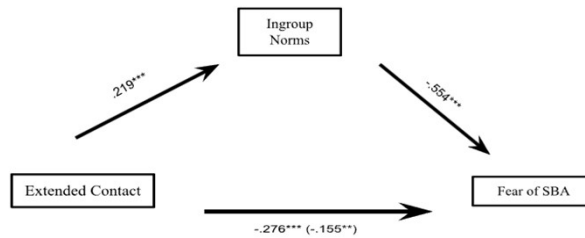
Ingroup Norms (Adapted from Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2011)

- "How do your close friends feel towards gay men?"
- 5 point rating scale (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive)

Results

Ordinary least squares multiple regression models were used to test predictors of ingroup norms, fears of SBA, and the conversational and film microaggressions. Logistic regression models were used to test predictors of first year dating advice and activity corrections microaggressions, given that these variables were binary. We used integrative data analysis (Curran & Hussong, 2009) to improve statistical precision and power. Data from both samples were pooled, and a dummy variable representing the sample was controlled in all models to account for any systematic differences across samples. The confidence interval for the indirect effect of extended contact on lower fears of stigma by association via more positive ingroup norms was computed using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The indirect effect was significant, 95% CI(-.17, -.08).

Figure 1. Ingroup Norms as a Mediator of Extended Contact and Fears of Stigma by Association (SBA):



Notes. ** denotes significance at $p < .01$, and *** at $p < .001$

Table 1:

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Informant-Reported Conversational Microaggressions and Microaggressions When Ranking Films.

Dependent Variable	Conversational Microaggressions				Microaggressions when ranking films			
	B	b	t	p	B	b	t	p
Extended Contact	-.07	-.09	-1.87	.06	-.17	-.07	-1.43	.15
Ingroup Norms	-.10	-.10	-1.98	.048	-.54	-.17	-3.44	.001
Fears of SBA	.05	.08	1.55	.12	-.12	-.06	-1.28	.20

Results Cont.

Table 2:

Results of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Microaggressions when Giving Activity Suggestions and Microaggressions When Giving Dating Advice

Dependent Variable	Microaggressions when suggesting activities			Microaggressions when giving dating advice		
	B	OR	p	B	OR	p
Extended Contact	.31	1.37	.01	-.01	.99	.95
Ingroup Norms	.21	1.24	.25	-.09	.91	.53
Fears of SBA	.06	1.06	.60	.08	1.08	.34

Discussion

- Results did not support an effect of fear of SBA with the LGBTQ+ community on microaggressions.
- However, extended contact mediated the relationship between ingroup norms and fears of SBA. Participants with extended contact were less fearful of SBA and this effect was explained by more positive ingroup norms (i.e., they believed their ingroup members had more positive attitudes about contact with the LGBTQ+ community).

Implications

- Supports prior studies that have demonstrated that extended contact predicts ingroup norms (e.g. Cameron et al., 2011; Gómez et al., 2011).
- Provides evidence for reduced fears of stigma by association with the LGBTQ+ community as a novel outcome of ingroup norms and extended contact.

Limitations and Future Research

- Participants were sampled from a liberal area. Thus, they were relatively more likely to hold favorable views towards the LGBTQ+ community
- Future research should create validated measures of microaggressions from the perspective of those who commit them, as this would facilitate additional research on the predictors of perpetrating microaggressions.
- Longitudinal research is needed to assess changes in the study's variables over time.

