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Perceptions of Equality and "Good Relations" Between and Within Groups: Testing Communities



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Overview of the research

This research, sponsored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is part of the UK Government's framework for evaluating attitudes towards equality and "good relations" across communities.

On the basis of self-categorization theory and social identity theory it is hypothesised that:
•fostering "good relations", or harmony, within a group can impact upon harmony between groups, in particular that it may cultivate hostility towards other groups¹.
•This pattern will only appear when there is intergroup inequality.

These hypotheses were supported.

Exploring group harmony

This research explores the operationalisation of social harmony ("good relations") using indicators from government surveys and psychological literature.

Indicators: Government surveys: wellbeing²; cohesion³, sense of community⁴.

Psychological measures: perceived entitativity; evaluation of the group; equality; fairness.

Study 1 used scenarios to test the effects of unfairness, inequality and good relations on these measures.

Study 2 examined responses to these measures in a real community sample

Study 1: An index of 'good relations'

Participants rated two groups in intergroup scenarios that were equal/unequal and in which resources were shared fairly/unfairly. The groups were described as having positive or negative within-group relationships and positive or negative intergroup relationships.

Results

Factor analyses revealed two factors, reflecting within-group harmony and between-group harmony, respectively. Composite measures of each construct were used in the following analysis (also See Table 1).

A GLM ANOVA revealed significant main effects of Equality ($F=35.10, p<.001$), Within-group Relations ($F=144.09, p<.001$), and Between-group Relations ($F=94.06, p<.001$), and a significant 3-way interaction ($F=4.72, p<.005$).

Regardless of whether intergroup relations and within-group relations are positive or negative, perception of within-group harmony (advantaged group, $p=.01$, disadvantaged group, $p<.001$) and intergroup harmony ($p<.001$) is significantly lower in an unequal intergroup setting.

When groups are equal

There is no impact of positive vs negative intergroup relations on within-group harmony. See Figure 1. However, groups with positive within-group relations are also perceived to have higher intergroup harmony ($p=.02$). See Figure 2.

When groups are unequal

Advantaged groups

Is perceived within-group harmony affected by the quality of intergroup relations?

No. Perceptions of within-group harmony are not affected by whether relations between groups are described as positive or negative.

Disadvantaged groups

Is perceived within-group harmony affected by the quality of between-group relations?

Yes. Within-group harmony is perceived to be greater if within-group relations have been described as positive but intergroup relations have been described as **negative** ($p=.086$). See Figure 1.

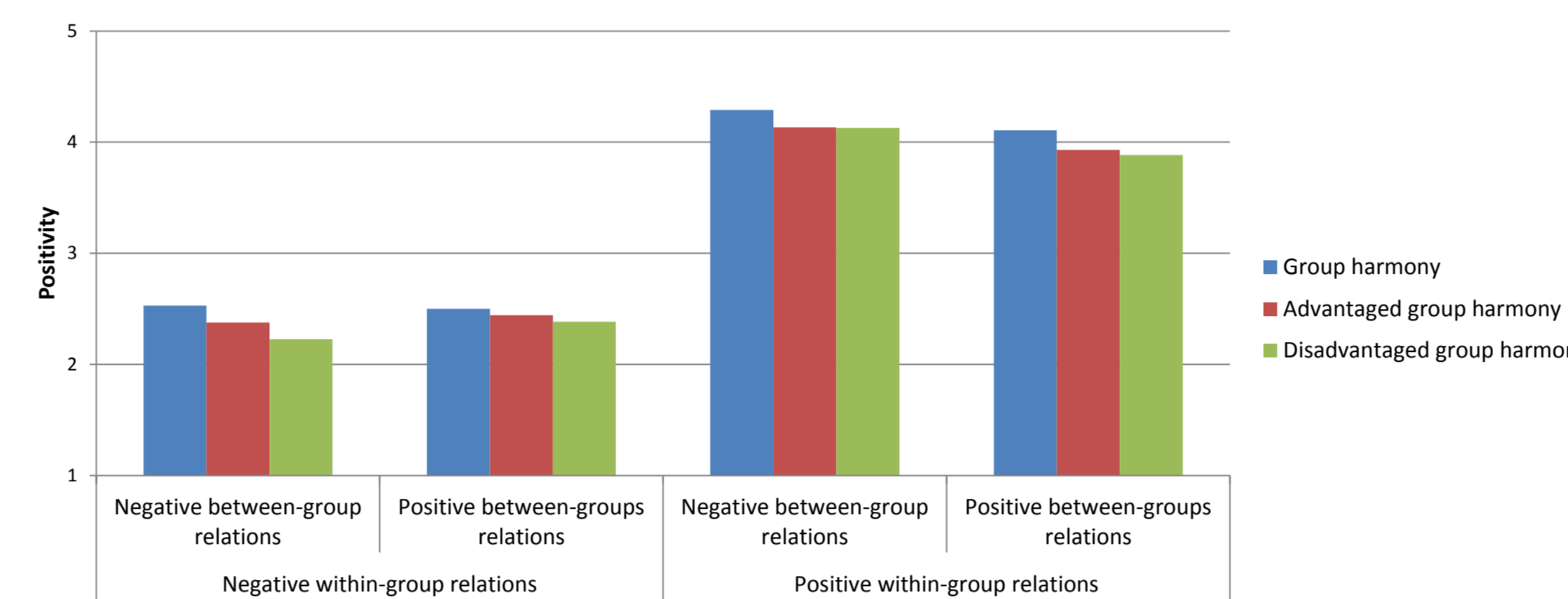


Figure 1: perception of within-group harmony when within- and between-group relations are described as positive or negative.

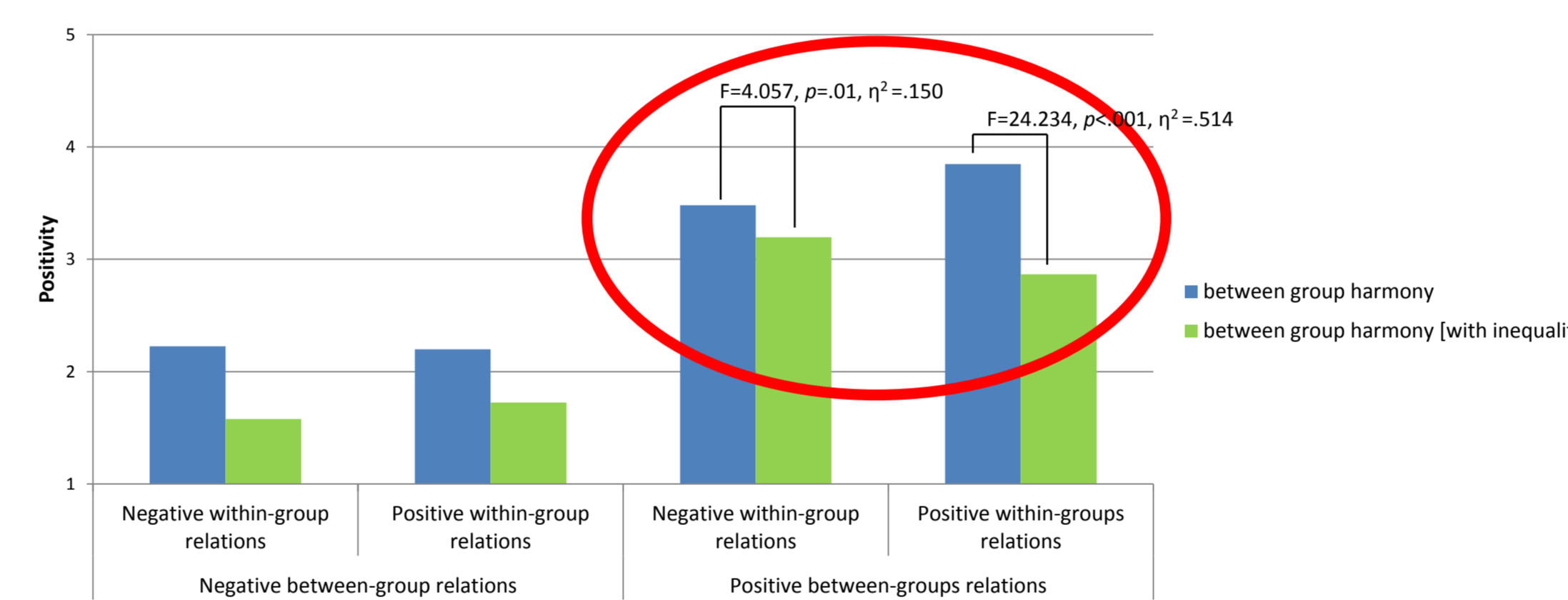


Figure 2: Effect of descriptions of within- and between-group relations upon perceived between-group harmony.

Table 1
Examples of measures of group harmony from Study 1

Within-group harmony	Intergroup harmony
•Group members as a single group	•Shared vision of the future
•Perceived sense of belonging	•Respect differences within the group
•Trust each other to act fairly	•Care for and look after each other
•Pride in their community	•First group trust second to act fairly

Table 2
Examples of indices of within-group harmony and outgroup tolerance in Study 2

Within-group harmony (Cronbach's Alpha = .89)	Outgroup tolerance (Cronbach's Alpha = .74)	Outgroup as problematic (Cronbach's Alpha=.94)
•People in town very similar to one another	•See less/more immigrants in the town in 5 years	•How much is immigration a problem in your town?
•Perceived sense of belonging	•UK economy made better/worse by people coming to live in the UK from other countries.	•How much are asylum seekers a problem in your town?
•Shared vision of the future		
•Look after each other		

¹ Well being measures taken from the Local Wellbeing Project booklet on promoting community wellbeing
² Cohesion indicators used by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion
³ Measures on sense of community taken from measures used in the 2005 Citizenship Survey.
⁴ Abrams, D. (2008) Processes of Prejudice: Theory, evidence and intervention (in press).

Perceptions of the intergroup relationship

Is the perceived level of intergroup harmony affected by inequality?

Participants perceived greater overall intergroup harmony when intergroup relations were described as positive, although this was lower if the groups were described as unequal rather than equal. This difference was largest when both intergroup and within-group relations were described as positive ($F=24.234, p<.001$). See Figure 2.

Study 1: Discussion

Our hypotheses were supported. When groups are unequal, relations within and between groups have interactive effects on perceptions of group harmony.

In Study 2, the indices of good relations are tested in a real group setting, and the role of inequality in perceptions of group harmony is explored.

Study 2: Real-world good relations

Surveys were sent to a cross-section of residents in two Kent towns. Questions included the indices of good relations from Study 1 as well as items relating to neighbourliness, helping behaviours (volunteering), town involvement, and diversity of friendships. Perceptions of equality and fairness of access to resources in the towns, and attitudes towards immigrants and people coming to the UK from other countries were also measured.

Preliminary analysis of survey data (N=146)

•**Indices of good relations.** Factor analysis confirmed that within-group harmony items comprised a single factor. The composite score was reliable (see Table 2).

•**Perceived equality, within-group harmony and feelings about the outgroup.** Perceived equality was positively correlated with within-group harmony, and negatively correlated with perceptions of the outgroup as problematic. Within group harmony was not correlated with feelings about the outgroup. See Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations between equality, group harmony, and perception of the outgroup.

	M, SD	2	3	4	5
1 Perceived Equality	4.32 1.55	.75**	.34**	.09	-.22**
2 Perceived Fairness	4.24 1.45	----	.35**	-.24**	.17*
3 Within-group harmony	4.33 .97	---	---	-.01	.03
4 Outgroup tolerance	3.05 1.31			---	.97**
5 Outgroup problematic	3.08 1.70				---

** p < .01, *p < .05

Preliminary conclusions

The finding that within-group harmony unrelated to feelings about the outgroup is in line with our hypothesis that greater within-group harmony does not necessarily extend to more tolerant attitudes towards an outgroup.

This has implications for policies that look to boost good relations within communities by encouraging general group cohesion. The combined findings across studies suggest that boosting group harmony without considering potential moderating factors and implications for attitudes towards outgroups may not always be the route to "good relations".

The research highlights the importance of understanding intergroup equality when designing a good relations strategy. A good relations strategy that is effective for equal groups may not be similarly effective when one group is disadvantaged. Inequality can alter the perception of group harmony.

This research shows that inter- and intra-group relations are potentially independent, showing that they need to be assessed separately. It suggests cautiousness about public policy strategies to foster good relations when they focus only on one level of analysis (i.e. within or between groups).

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