

Self-expansion motivation improves cross-group interactions and enhances self-growth

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Abstract

Rather than seeing outgroup members as targets of fear, conflict, or even tolerance, the self-expansion model proposes that outgroup members might be seen as attractive opportunities for self-growth. The current study utilizes an experimental manipulation to raise (or lower) self-expansion motivation prior to a positive interaction with a stranger from a different ethnic group. The results show that priming high self-expansion motivation leads to higher quality interactions, greater interpersonal closeness, greater feelings of self-growth, and higher feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, these outcomes show patterns of mediation consistent with the predictions of self-expansion theory. These findings point to a potentially valuable tool for improving the quality of cross-group contact experiences. More broadly, they focus attention on the genuinely positive functions that relationships with outgroup members can have for the self.

Keywords

cross-group friendships, cross-group interaction, intergroup contact, self-expansion, self-growth

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The social psychological literature is replete with evidence of and explanations for why we distrust, dislike, avoid, and mistreat outgroup members, and the challenges (e.g., anxiety, insecurity) and pitfalls (e.g., miscommunications, misunderstandings) associated with interactions across group boundaries are well-documented and explained (e.g., Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Shelton, Dovidio, Hebl, & Richeson, 2009; Vorauer, 2008). Obviously, it would be foolish to deny that intergroup relations can be highly problematic, or to claim that daily cross-group interactions are necessarily smooth and easy. The challenges are real; prejudice is depressingly

common; and mistreatment because of group membership remains a daily reality for many. However, this simply cannot be the entire story. Even the most cursory survey of contemporary societies provides evidence that some of us are less bound by the negative side of cross-group

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interactions and engage in satisfying and exciting interactions and form meaningful relationships across group boundaries of all kinds—race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, etcetera. In fact, people often show clear interest in meeting and “getting to know” outgroup members. Exchanges and travel to bring us into contact with people from other groups is a multibillion dollar industry.

Pittinsky (2012) provides a strong critique of psychology’s ardent focus on the negative—on prejudice and discrimination—arguing that we have all but ignored an alternative genuinely positive orientation towards difference and “the other.” This one-sided representation can be found even in our most prominent theoretical frameworks to explain prejudice reduction—intergroup contact theory (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Nearly 70 years of research show that positive interpersonal contact can reduce prejudice (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and there is a growing consensus that close interpersonal friendship is the most effective form of contact (e.g., Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Wright, 2009). Those who measure contact in terms of close, even intimate, interpersonal friendships seem able to find plenty of these kinds of relationships. Nonetheless, this literature remains couched in the language of “undermining prejudice,” “improving negative attitudes,” and “reducing discrimination.” Although there is an extensive literature on the types of interactions and the structural conditions that facilitate cross-group contact’s ability to reduce prejudice (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998), there remains little discussion of how or why very positive interpersonal relationships might emerge naturally and be common enough to be relatively easily found by those studying contact. While our understanding of how and why cross-group contact can make people less prejudiced is extensive, social psychology has much less to say about why people might seek out and willingly engage in cross-group contact; why they might enter into these interactions with excitement and positive anticipation (see Pittinsky, 2012).

Seeking out the Other: Self-Expansion and Outgroup Interactions

It seems a more complete understanding of cross-group interactions must account for both the challenges and the appeal of cross-group interactions. We must seriously consider not just distrust and tolerance, but also admiration and active seeking out of interactions with outgroup members. Over a decade ago, Wright, Aron, and Tropp (2002) drew on Aron and Aron’s (1986) *Self-Expansion Model* to propose one potential psychological mechanism that should produce a positive, even preferential, predisposition towards outgroup members.

Aron and Aron (1986) propose that humans have a basic motivation to enhance their personal efficacy by acquiring new resources, perspectives, and identities that can facilitate the achievement of present and future goals, and that one of the primary means by which people satisfy this motive is forming close relationships that allow for *including the other in the self*. As we become close to another, that person’s identities, resources, and experiences are increasingly experienced as belonging to the self (see Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The result of this is an enhanced sense of self-growth and an associated increase in self-efficacy.

By this logic, if people seek relationships as a means of self-expansion, those who share our current resources, perspectives, and identities provide little that is new and should be less appealing. Wright et al. (2002) extended this logic to intergroup relationships, proposing that because outgroup members, by definition, hold resources, perspectives, and identities not currently available to the self, forming relationships with them offers an especially attractive opportunity for self-expansion. Therefore, self-expansion motivation represents a basic human process that should inspire an appetitive interest in outgroup members as friends, and should stand in opposition to processes that inspire dislike or avoidance.

Self-Expansion as an Engagement Motivation

We consider two critical extensions of these ideas. First, in many contemporary Western cities, diversity is the norm, making cross-group interactions frequent and even unavoidable. In these cases, the issue is not only whether self-expansion motivation will inspire cross-group interactions, but as importantly how this motivation influences the quality of the individual's experience during and following these interactions.

Second, the strength of one's current self-expansion motivation waxes and wanes as it competes with other motives and concerns. For example, theoretical perspectives like self-congruence (Sirgy, 1986) and self-coherence (e.g., dissonance theory; Festinger, 1957) make clear that people also seek to maintain a stable and coherent sense of self. Similarly, Aron and Aron (1986) recognize that self-expansion can be restrained by a need for self-integration. After a period of self-expansion people may need time to integrate newly acquired self-aspects. Thus, the ongoing competition between the need for self-expansion versus self-clarity and self-consistency means that one's current level of self-expansion motivation will vary depending on recent experiences and messages in the local environment. In the current study, we take advantage of this and experimentally induce different levels of self-expansion motivation using different contextual cues.

The Current Study

The current study investigates whether one's current level of self-expansion motivation influences the perceived quality of a cross-group interaction, the level of interpersonal closeness that develops, and the benefits to the self that might follow from the interaction. The logic is that, when self-expansion is high, an outgroup member should be seen as an opportunity for self-expansion, inspiring interest in forming an interpersonal relationship in order to include the other in the self. Thus, the individual should engage in actions that improve the quality of the interaction and produce the

desired feelings of interpersonal closeness, which should in turn result in feelings of self-growth, and ultimately increased self-efficacy. However, when self-expansion motivation is low, interactions with an outgroup member will be dominated by a focus on similarities that will serve to consolidate the current self, resulting in lower quality interactions, and less interpersonal closeness (i.e., less inclusion of the other in the self), self-growth, and self-efficacy.

To test these claims, incoming university students were paired with a cross-ethnic partner. Prior to the interaction, self-expansion motivation was primed by reading a passage that encouraged them to focus on either: (a) the benefits of being open to new challenges, seeking novelty, and expanding oneself (high self-expansion), or (b) the benefits of sticking to well-defined personal goals, knowing "who you are," and being consistent with one's true self (low self-expansion). The subsequent interaction was designed to encourage feelings of friendship, after which they completed measures of perceived quality of the interaction, feelings of interpersonal closeness, and self-growth. Two weeks later, they returned with their partner for additional friendship-making activities and then completed measures of general and social self-efficacy.

We hypothesized that, compared to those primed with low self-expansion motivation, those primed with high self-expansion motivation would experience the cross-group interaction as more positive, feel closer to their partner, and report greater self-growth and self-efficacy. In addition, consistent with the self-expansion model, we predicted that the effects of the self-expansion manipulation on self-growth would be mediated sequentially by the quality of the interaction and feelings of interpersonal closeness. In addition, the effect of the self-expansion manipulation on self-efficacy, should be mediated by self-growth.

Method

Participants

Participants were incoming students at a large Canadian university. A total of 272 volunteered

for Session 1 during a 2-day Student Orientation Program. Due to efforts to ensure that assignment to partnerships was random, 98 participants were inadvertently assigned to same-ethnic partnerships. They were dropped from the current analyses, leaving 174 participants who engaged in cross-group interactions (70 males and 103 females; 44 international students; mean age 18.48 years; ethnicity: 58 Caucasian, 58 East Asian, 9 Pacific Asian, 12 South Asian, 11 Middle Eastern, 4 African, 2 Latin American, 1 First Nations, and 19 multiethnic).

In addition, 82 of these participants returned to Session 2 two weeks later (30 males and 52 females; 22 international students; mean age: 18.48 years; ethnicity: 32 Caucasian, 27 East Asian, 5 Pacific Asian, 5 South Asian, 4 Middle Eastern, 3 African, and 6 multiethnic).¹

Session 1 – Fast Friends Lunch

Participants were divided into groups of 20 to 40 each led by two research assistants. Participants were assigned to a partner using a number-drawing procedure that, although random, also allowed researchers to use participants' phenotypic cues to clandestinely create as many cross-ethnic partnerships as possible. Thus, all participants used in the analyses were paired randomly with someone they had never met and who was an ethnic out-group member.

The self-expansion manipulation. Pairs of participants were randomly assigned to read, and think about, one of two persuasive messages describing the orientation that one should take to be successful at university. Thus, both partners within a pair were assigned to the same condition. The high self-expansion motivation message described the benefits of being open to new challenges, seeking novelty, and expanding oneself. It opened with: "In general students who get the most out of university life find it an exciting challenge and an opportunity to broaden their horizons. These students are open to new discoveries and to things that challenge their current views." In contrast, the low self-expansion motivation message

described the benefits of sticking to clear well-defined goals, knowing "who you are," and being consistent with one's true self. It opened with: "In general, students who get the most out of university life are focused and clear about their personal goals. These students stay grounded and maintain a stable sense of who they are as a person." Participants then answered five leading questions that encouraged responses that would further support the manipulation, such as "I believe it is good to strive for personal growth and development" (high self-expansion) or "I strive to maintain a clear and stable sense of self" (low self-expansion).

Positive cross-group interaction. Next, pairs engaged in the Fast Friends Procedure, an activity designed by Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, and Bator (1997) that effectively facilitates feelings of interpersonal closeness and friendship. Using a set of cards, partners take turns answering questions and responding to requests that require increasing levels of personal self-disclosure.

Outcome measures. Finally, participants were separated from their partner and completed a questionnaire. Unless otherwise indicated, all items were answered on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*)

The Quality of the Interaction Scale ($\alpha = .71$) included three items: "How comfortable were you with your partner during this activity?"; "How much did you enjoy interacting with your partner during this activity?"; and "How effective and successful were you in getting to know your partner?"

Feelings of *interpersonal closeness* were measured using the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale; a single-item measure consisting of a set of seven pairs of circles that increase in their degree of overlap. Respondents select the pair of circles that best describes their relationship with their partner. This scale has been shown to be valid and reliable and functions as well as other multi-item measures of closeness (Aron et al., 1992).

The Self-Growth Scale ($\alpha = .81$) included three items adapted from Robitschek's (1998)

Personal Growth Initiative Scale: “I feel that I have grown as a person through meeting my partner”; “Meeting my partner has allowed me to gain new perspectives”; and “I feel somehow bigger and more flexible after spending time with my partner.”

Session 2 – Friendship Building Event

Positive cross-group interaction. Pairs returned to the lab 2 weeks later and completed four new friendship-making activities designed to involve cooperation, shared laughter, joint success, and trust. In the first activity, one person would draw a picture while blindfolded, and her/his partner would try to identify it. In the second activity each partner individually drew half of a face. Then, the two face halves were joined and they worked together to adjust their creation to create a coherent face. The third activity involved drawing a map of the university campus. The fourth was a trust-building activity, wherein one person maneuvered through obstacles in the room blindfolded, while their partner provides verbal guidance.

Outcome measures. Finally, partners were separated and completed a questionnaire including the measure of *self-growth* used in Session 1 and two measures of self-efficacy adapted from Jerusalem and Schwarzer’s (1992) General Self-Efficacy Scale.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = .82$) included five items (e.g., “I feel like I can solve difficult problems if I try hard enough”).

The Social Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = .77$) included three items (e.g., “I feel like I have people in my life who are there to back me up when I need them”).

Supplementary Study

Due to concerns that any attempt to measure self-expansion motivation (explicitly ask participants to think about their current level of self-expansion motivation) would, in and of itself, serve as a manipulation of self-expansion, we could not include a manipulation check. Thus, we

were not able to demonstrate directly that our manipulation effectively altered participants’ self-expansion motivation. In addition, it is possible that this effort to manipulate self-expansion motivation also influenced other related psychological processes that might account for any effects on our outcome measures. In an effort to investigate these possibilities, we undertook a supplementary study.

Participants. A sample ($N = 142$) very similar to the sample used in the primary study (diverse student sample at the same university, similar in age, gender, and number of international students) was recruited via email invitation to participate in an online survey.

Procedures and measures. Participants were first primed using the same procedures as in the primary study and then completed three measures of self-expansion motivation: a 14-item Self-Expansion Motivation (SEM) scale ($\alpha = .91$; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002), and two 5-item subscales from the Personal Expansion Scale (Gordon & Luo, 2011): *Augmentation* (PESA; $\alpha = .73$) and *Novelty* (PESN; $\alpha = .82$). They also completed a 15-item measure of *need for closure* ($\alpha = .85$; Roets & van Hiel, 2011), a 10-item measure of *openness to experience* ($\alpha = .81$; John & Srivastava, 1999), a 15-item measure of *openmindedness* ($\alpha = .81$; Altemeyer, 1996), an 11-item measure of *personal need for structure* ($\alpha = .84$; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993), an 11-item measure of *promotion* ($\alpha = .75$) and *prevention* ($\alpha = .79$) *focus* (Higgins et al., 2001) and a five-item measure of *social desirability* ($\alpha = .59$; Haghighat, 2007).

Results. *T* tests contrasting the high and low self-expansion conditions yielded significant differences on two of the three self-expansion motivation scales: SEM, $t(140) = 2.59, p < .01$ and PESA $t(140) = 1.92, p = .04$. Participants receiving the high self-expansion prime reported higher levels of self-expansion motivation on these two scales than those receiving the low self-expansion prime. No other significant effects were found. The effect for *openness to experience*,

Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviations (in parentheses), and tests of significance (drawn from hierarchical linear modeling analysis) for all dependent measures at Sessions 1 & 2.

Outcome measures	Conditions		HLM test of significance
	High self-expansion	Low self- expansion	
Session 1 (N = 174)			
Quality of interaction	5.94 (0.93)	5.51 (0.98)	$\gamma = .434, t(85) = 2.71, p = .008$
Interpersonal closeness	4.52 (1.51)	4.15 (1.48)	$\gamma = .365, t(85) = 1.45, p = .15$
Self-growth	4.57 (1.24)	4.21 (1.21)	$\gamma = .388, t(85) = 1.93, p = .05$
Session 2 (N = 82)			
Self-growth	4.80 (1.14)	4.31 (1.24)	$\gamma = .480, t(39) = 2.14, p = .04$
General self-efficacy	5.51 (0.91)	5.18 (0.79)	$\gamma = .215, t(39) = 0.93, p = .36$
Social self-efficacy	5.97 (1.07)	5.43 (1.02)	$\gamma = .540, t(39) = 2.25, p = .03$

$t(140) = 1.76, p = .08$, and *promotion focus*, $t(140) = 1.67, p = .10$ approached statistical significance, while the effects for *openmindedness*, *personal need for structure*, *need for closure*, *prevention focus*, and *social desirability* were all very small (all $ps > .40$). This supplementary study provides evidence that our manipulation does have the predicted effect of self-expansion motivation and that it is relatively specific to this motivation, as it had smaller and nonsignificant effects on a number of other conceptually similar variables.

Results

First, it should be noted that the mean scores for all variables across both conditions are above the midpoint (see Table 1). Thus, consistent with previous research using the Fast Friends Procedure (e.g., Aron et al., 1997) it appears that this activity did create interactions that were generally experienced as positive and engendered moderately strong feelings of closeness, self-growth, and self-efficacy. Therefore, it is appropriate to describe any effects of the manipulation of self-expansion as improving what are generally positive interactions.

Effects of the Manipulation of Self-Expansion Motivation

Individual participants were nested within pairs. Thus, we used hierarchical linear modelling (see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), using HLM 7

software to test the effects of the manipulation on each of the outcome variables. Thus, the dependent variable (measured at the level of participant) is included in Level 1 and the manipulation (measured at the level of pairs) is included in Level 2.

Descriptive statistics and HLM tests of significance for the six dependent variables are provided in Table 1. As predicted, compared to participants in the low self-expansion condition, participants in the high self-expansion condition reported significantly higher scores on *quality of interaction* (Session 1), *self-growth* (Session 1), *self-growth* (Session 2), and *social self-efficacy* (Session 2). Although the means were in the predicted direction, the effect of the manipulation on *interpersonal closeness* (Session 1), and *general self-efficacy* (Session 2) was not statistically significant.

Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was used to test the proposed mediation models. As participants were nested within pairs, we used the more conservative approach of treating pairs as the unit of analyses for these tests.

Session 1: Indirect effects of the manipulation on self-growth. We tested the proposed mediation of the effect of the *self-expansion motivation* manipulation on *self-growth* by *quality of interaction* and *interpersonal closeness* (see Figure 1). Model parameters were computed as unstandardized regression

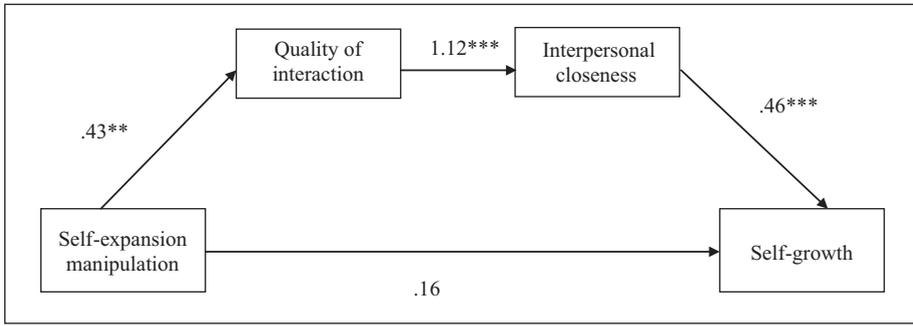


Figure 1. Unstandardized coefficients for the indirect effect of the *self-expansion motivation* manipulation on *self-growth* through *quality of interaction* and *interpersonal closeness*.
 Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

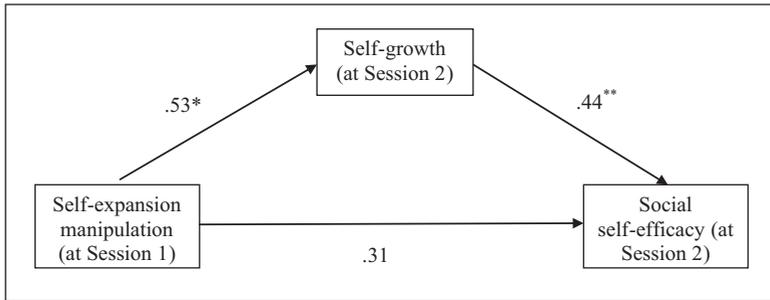


Figure 2. Unstandardized coefficients for the indirect effects of the *self-expansion motivation* manipulation on *social self-efficacy* through *self-growth* at Session 2.
 Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

weights with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. This analysis revealed that the only significant indirect effect of the *self-expansion motivation* manipulation on *self-growth* was the sequential mediation by *quality of interaction* and *interpersonal closeness* ($IE = .2202, SE = .1079, 90\% \text{ CI } [0.0866, 0.4563]$). This suggests that partner’s with higher self-expansion motivation enjoy higher quality interaction which in turn leads to greater inclusion of the other in the self, which in turn leads to stronger feelings of self-growth.

Session 2: Indirect effect of manipulation on social self-efficacy. We tested for mediation of the effect of the *self-expansion motivation* manipulation on *social self-efficacy* by *self-growth* at Session 2 (see Figure 2). Model parameters were computed as unstandardized regression weights with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. This analysis revealed the predicted indirect

effect ($IE = 0.2375, SE = .1339, 90\% \text{ CI } [0.0769, 0.5470]$)

Session 2: Indirect effect of manipulation on general self-efficacy. An identical analysis was performed with the measure of *general self-efficacy* as the dependent variable. Again, the predicted indirect effect emerged ($IE = 0.1803, SE = .1180, 90\% \text{ CI } [0.0404, 0.4635]$).

This suggests that raising self-expansion motivation at Session 1 resulted in stronger feelings of self-growth and these stronger feelings of self-growth increased feelings of both social and general self-efficacy at Session 2.

Discussion

These findings provide the first experimental evidence that one’s current level of self-expansion

motivation can have a meaningful impact on the experienced quality of a cross-group interaction, on the level of interpersonal closeness that emerges during that interaction, and on the psychological benefits one gains as a result. Entering a cross-group interaction with a strong self-expansion orientation can lead to more positive interpersonal outcomes and stronger feelings of self-growth and self-efficacy. In addition, this research provides support for the process predicted by Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model. The subjective quality of the interaction and the degree of closeness that developed (the degree to which the other is included in the self) predicted the extent to which individuals felt they had grown as a result of the cross-group interaction. In addition, these differences in feelings of self-growth in turn appear to account for subsequent stronger feelings of self-efficacy (both social and general).

Previous research on cross-group friendships and self-expansion motivation (e.g., Davies, Wright, Aron, & Comeau, 2013; Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008; Wright, 2009; Wright et al., 2002) has focused on ways that self-expansion, specifically the inclusion of the other in the self, can account for positive changes in intergroup attitudes. The current research extends this work, showing that self-expansion is not only a potential consequence of cross-group contact but that self-expansion can also be understood as a motivational state that one brings to a contact experience and that the level of this motivation can influence both the success of the interaction and self-related outcomes.

The design of the current study has a number of positive features, many of which speak to its potential practical value. It has high external validity. It involved societally meaningful groups—ethnic groups. It was integrated into the participants' normal student life—an orientation program. Thus, participants did not experience it as an artificial psychology experiment, but rather as a meaningful first-time interaction with a partner who was a legitimate potential friend. As important, in addition to being effective, the manipulation was simple, quick (less than 5 minutes), and innocuous. Within the context of a

2-day orientation and just preceding the highly engaging Fast Friends Activity, a short paragraph and five questions were enough to significantly impact the quality and psychological consequences of a meaningful cross-ethnic interaction. Furthermore, the manipulation had lasting effects on this developing relationship. It continued to influence participants' feelings of self-growth and self-efficacy following a second interaction 2 weeks later. It appears that the initial manipulation sets in motion a pattern of interpersonal interactions and this pattern creates a legacy that continues to influence the impact of that relationship on the partners' perceptions of themselves over time. Thus, this work may have practical value. Improving the quality of interactions across divergent groups and building stronger cross-group relationships with a relatively simple intervention that primes self-expansion motivation may be a very attractive tool for those working in educational, governmental, and organizational institutions.

However, there are also potential limitations to this study. The supplementary study offers some suggestion (although not statistically significant) that our effort to manipulate self-expansion motivation may also have influenced openness to experience and promotion focus. Yet, we do not see this pattern as a problem for the theory. Instead, it makes sense that an increase in one's motivation to expand the self should lead to the kind of orientation towards the world that would reflect greater openness to novel experiences and the seeking of positive outcomes that is associated with promotion focus. Thus, it is not surprising to find that there is some covariation of self-expansion motivation and these particular concepts. Investigating more thoroughly the connections between self-expansion motivation and these other concepts and their joint impact on cross-group interactions might be a very fruitful pursuit for future research.

Also, one might wonder whether the effects found in the supplementary study might result from an order effect, such that the manipulation might affect measures completed first with decreasing impact over time. Although the self-expansion measures were completed first, the

measures of *openness to experience* and *promotion focus* on which the marginally significant effects were found were presented fifth and eighth respectively among the nine scales presented to participants. Thus, while a counterbalanced order might have been preferred, there does not appear to be an obvious latency effect for the manipulation. In addition, it would be valuable to find a way to include the manipulation and measurements of self-expansion motivation and other related psychological concepts in the same study. This would allow for analyses to test for indirect effects of the manipulation mediated by self-expansion and these other related concepts. However, as we have pointed out, this may be very difficult to do as completing a number of lengthy measures of self-expansion (and other related concepts) is very likely to serve, in and of itself, as a manipulation; likely returning participants to their personal default levels of these variables and negating the effects of the manipulation.

Finally, the sample used in this research was very diverse and one obvious question that this might raise is whether the ethnicity of the participant or the ethnic composition of the partnership would play a role in determining the outcomes we measured. We performed numerous statistical tests to investigate this possibility. We compared Whites, East Asians (our two largest ethnic groups) and a category including the other ethnic minority group members and found no significant differences between these three groups on any of our outcome measures, nor did ethnic group moderate the effects of the self-expansion motivation manipulation on any of our measures. In addition, we found no main effects of the ethnic composition of the partnership on any of our outcome variables, nor did it offer any consistent moderation of the effects of the self-expansion manipulation.²

This lack of effects of ethnic group and ethnic composition of the partnership may be surprising given evidence that cross-group contact often has different effects on minority and majority group members (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). However, most of these existing findings examined effects of contact on attitude change or prejudice reduction. In this research, we are

investigating perceptions of the quality of the relationship, interpersonal closeness, and self-change. It is not clear whether these dependent variables should be affected by minority versus majority group status in the same way that attitudes and prejudice often are. Finally, our sample is much more diverse than most used in investigations of cross-group contact, and the ethnic diversity is further complicated by other forms of diversity. For example, 1/3 of our minority sample was international students, which provided related, yet cross-cutting, alternative intergroup distinction. It is certainly possible that, despite our efforts to uncover them, these multiple forms of diversity are obscuring some differences between specific groups.

Nonetheless, we believe that the diversity of our sample is indeed a strength of this work. It is a testament to the power of the self-expansion manipulation that it yields significant effects across this very diverse group of participants and across a wide array of types of cross-group partnerships as both these forms of diversity should create much more “noise” in the data compared to a sample including only two distinct groups (i.e., most contact research). However, we recognize that this diversity comes with the cost that it is really difficult to provide strong and simple tests of the effects of ethnicity.

Finally, the current research also points directly to a number of important additional questions that will need to be answered in subsequent research. First, for practical reasons, pairs of participants were assigned to the same self-expansion motivation conditions. This leaves open the very interesting question of impact of interactions where partners do not share the same self-expansion motivation levels. It is possible that these kinds of mismatches in self-expansion motivation could further exacerbate other differences in motivation that have been found to exist in interpersonal interactions across group boundaries (e.g., Bergsieker et al., 2010). Second, in introducing this study we recognized that self-expansion motivation should be constrained by opposing motivations of self-consistency and self-integration. In the current research we have focused only on the potential benefits of increased

self-expansion. However, future research should also attempt to investigate more directly the impact of these other motivations on the processes and outcomes of cross-group interactions. Third, although we show that the self-expansion manipulation continues to influence levels of self-growth and self-efficacy following a second interaction 2 weeks later, this initial investigation does not provide a complete explanation for this continued influence. Currently, we theorize that the influences of the manipulation create a psychological legacy that remains to some degree during subsequent interactions and thus the benefits of high self-expansion continue into subsequent interactions and thus may persist for some time if the relationship continues. Generally, our thinking is in line with research on the enduring effects of self-affirmation (e.g., Sherman et al., 2013) which shows that positive effects of a single self-affirmation intervention can persist over long periods of time.

In addition to widening the focus of contact research, more broadly we believe that this line of research encourages a shift away from the dominant focus on the problematic aspects of intergroup relations. It encourages us to consider how members of outgroups can be—and probably often are in our increasingly diverse societies—approached with positive expectations and an appetitive interest. It shows the value of seeing “the other” not as a target of distrust, trepidation, and avoidance, but rather as one that is an appealing, even tempting, source of potential self-growth.

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Notes

1. Numerous statistical tests were performed to investigate potential differences between those who returned for Session 2 and those who did not return. Chi-square tests showed that the two subsamples did not differ in terms of: gender composition ($\chi^2 = 0.97, p = .32$); number of international students ($\chi^2 = 0.19, p = .66$); ethnic minority versus majority composition ($\chi^2 = 2.26, p = .14$), and that the manipulation had no impact on whether participants returned or not ($\chi^2 = 0.35, p = .55$). In addition, 2 x 2 (returning/not returning by high/low self-expansion condition) ANOVAs revealed no main effect of whether the participant returned or not and no interaction effect for: age (both $p > .16$) and quality of the cross-group contact experience in Session 1 (both $p > .32$). Those who returned did report higher levels of closeness than those who did not return, ($p = .04$). However, this main effect was not qualified by an interaction with condition ($F < 1.0, p = .89$). Thus, although the Session 2 sample included more close partnerships than those who did not return, these closer partnerships were equally distributed across the high and low self-expansion conditions. Thus, this preferential return rate for those who were close cannot explain any effects of the self-expansion motivation manipulation that persist through Session 2. In summary, although the attrition rate was quite high, there was only one difference between those that did and did not return, and we speculate that the primary reasons participants did not return were associated with the time pressures of the first week of classes and difficulties scheduling a time when both partners were available.
2. Additional details and statistics from these analyses can be obtained by contacting the authors.

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