



Complex Social Identities and Intergroup Relations

Gateway Groups in the Western Balkans

Aharon Levy¹ , Iris Zezelj², Marija Branković³, Srdjan Dusanic⁴, Martijn van Zomeren⁵, Tamar Saguy⁶, and Eran Halperin⁶

¹Columbia Business School, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

²Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, Serbia

³Department of Psychology, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

⁴Faculty of Philosophy, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia & Herzegovina

⁵Heymans Institute for Psychological Research, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

⁶The Ivcher School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel

Abstract: Gateway Groups are characterized by a unique social categorization which enables them to be identified with two or more groups within the context of intergroup relations. Due to their strategic situation, Gateway Groups have been found to have the potential to improve the relations between their distinct social counterparts. In this paper we attempted to replicate the Gateway Group line of research in the Western Balkan context with two different kinds of Gateway Groups: Children of mixed Serb(s) and Bosniak families, and Bosniak citizens of Serbia. As in previous Gateway Group studies, we found that in both cases the exposure to a dually identified Gateway Group lead to a more complex perception of the Gateway Group itself, a higher belief in the potential of the Gateway Group to bridge the relations between the ingroup and the outgroup, and a greater sense of closeness between the ingroup and the outgroup.

Keywords: gateway groups, dual identity, social identity complexity, western balkans, intergroup conflict, replication

In recent years, researchers studying social identity have advanced toward a more complex understanding of identity, and moved beyond mere ingroup-outgroup distinctions (e.g., *cross-categorization*, Crisp, Walsh, & Hewstone, 2006; *social identity complexity*, Roccas & Brewer, 2002; *dual identity*, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; or *multiculturalism*, Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). One of the most recent developments in the realm of complex social identity is the *Gateway Group* notion. This new conceptual framework addresses the potential of groups with complex social identities to facilitate the intergroup relations between their distinct social counterparts, and act as a gateway across social borderlines. Hence the term Gateway Groups (GG; Levy, Saguy, Halperin, & van Zomeren, 2017; Love & Levy, in press). Here, we focus on these multiple-identity groups, and attempt to replicate the previous GG effect findings in a complex social identity context that is subject to intergroup conflict: The Western Balkans.

So far, research in the field of complex identity has focused mainly on how the dominant group (e.g., Serbs) reacts to individuals who hold such complex forms of identity (e.g., half Serbian half Bosniak; Branković, Turjačanin,

& Maloku, 2017; Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013; Pauker, Meyers, Sanchez, Gaither, & Young, 2018; Steffens et al., 2016; Urbiola, Willis, Ruiz-Romero, Moya, & Esses, 2017; Young, Sanchez, & Wilton, 2017; Wilton, Rattan, & Sanchez, 2018; Žeželj & Pratto, 2017), and on how such individuals with complex identities feel and behave (Baysu et al., 2011; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Gocłowska & Crisp 2014; González & Brown, 2003; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Kunst, Dovidio, & Dotsch, 2018). Notwithstanding the breadth of this research, almost none of it has examined the potential that such multiple-identity groups may have for improving the relations between the groups that represent the respective sources of their multiple identities.

Emerging research has now begun to examine this possible multiple-identity GG potential (e.g., Levy, Saguy, van Zomeren, & Halperin, 2017; Levy, van Zomeren, Saguy, & Halperin, 2017). The findings of these studies suggest that the mere presence of GGs can improve the perceptions and behavioral tendencies between the groups comprising the identity of the GG. For example, highlighting the presence of biracials in the inter-racial context in the US led

Whites to exhibit less racism toward Blacks (Levy, Halperin, van Zomeren, & Saguy, 2018), and in the Israeli-Palestinian context, the presence of the Arab-Israeli GG diminished Israelis' support for aggression toward Palestinians (Levy, Saguy, van Zomeren, et al., 2017). While these findings are initial, they point to the promising potential of such GGs with multiple identities, particularly with an eye to conflict reconciliation endeavors. With this in mind we sought to replicate the GG findings in a context in which different social identities are embedded in one another, and are both a significant factor in an ongoing intergroup conflict: The intergroup relations in the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkans Context

The relations between Serbs and Bosniaks have come into focus during the Yugoslav wars. These groups each make a majority in Serbia and Bosnia, respectively. Both Serbs and Bosniaks perceive their ethnic ingroup positively, and their outgroup negatively (interestingly using the same mirror image content, Petrović, 2003; Skoko, 2011; Majstorović & Turjačanin, 2013). The level of social distance is relatively high in both countries, even among the generations born and raised after the conflicts (Kalaba, 2013; Puhalo, 2009; Skoko, 2011; Žiga et al., 2015). These two countries make a unique, and highly relevant case-study. Although people from both groups perceive ethnicity as an essentialized identity, and the inter-group boundaries as impermeable (Branković et al., 2017; Pratto, Žeželj, Maloku, Turjačanin, & Branković, 2017; Turjačanin, Žeželj, Maloku, & Branković, 2017), in reality the growth in social interconnections, has led to the sharing of multiple social identities by individuals and groups (Branković et al., 2017). There is a growing number of people that identify to some extent with their national identity even if it does not coincide with their ethnic one (i.e., Bosniak citizens of Serbia that also identify with their Serbian national identity; Turjačanin et al., 2017), and intermarriage between ethnic Serbs and Bosniaks has led to a community of people who are ethnically both Serb(s) and Bosniak (Bieber, 2003, 2015). The rise of these complex forms of social identity calls for a new examination of the local forms of social identity, and the potential impact of GGs on the intergroup dynamic in the Western Balkans.

Current Research

We test whether the positive impact GGs were found to have in other contexts can also be found in the Western Balkans. To this end we ran two studies in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, each examining a different type of GG. In Study 1 we recruited a Serb(s) sample in Bosnia

and Herzegovina, and examined the impact of exposure to a GG that is ethnically both Serb and Bosniak (i.e., children of mixed marriage). In Study 2 we recruited a Serbian sample in Serbia, with a GG that is ethnically Bosniak and nationally Serb (i.e., the Bosniak minority in Serbia). Based on previous studies we hypothesized that exposure to a dually identified GG would lead participants to (1) identify the GG with both the ingroup and the outgroup to a greater extent, (2) see the GG as having greater potential for facilitating intergroup relations, (3) have a greater sense of ingroup-outgroup closeness, and (4) have greater motivation for contact with the outgroup.

Study 1

Method

Participants

We recruited 207 participants (102 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.74$ years, $SD = 2.61$) in the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since small-medium-sized effects were found in previous GG studies (Levy, Saguy, van Zomeren, et al., 2017), our power analysis (G*Power; Faul et al., 2009) was calibrated to detect a small-medium-sized effect ($d = 0.4$). This analysis suggested a sample size of 156 participants for a statistical power of 0.80.

Procedure and Measures

Based on the design from the Levy, Saguy, van Zomeren, et al.'s study (2017), participants in the experimental condition read an article describing a survey that asked the GG from mixed Serb and Bosniak families about their identity. The results of the survey described in the article showed that the majority of children that had both Serb and Bosniak parents identify both as Serb(s) and as Bosniak, and do not necessarily see a contradiction between their two identities. Participants in the control condition did not read an article. Next, participants were asked questions about their social perception of the GG and the outgroup using the following measures:

Dual Identification

Participants were asked to assess the level of dual identification of the GG, based on Simon, Reichert, and Grabow (2013), using four items such as: "I see children of mixed Serb-Bosniak marriages as related to both the Serbs and the Bosniaks" ($\alpha = .76$).

Potential Bridge

Participants were asked to what extent they felt the GG has the potential of acting as a bridge between the ingroup and the outgroup.

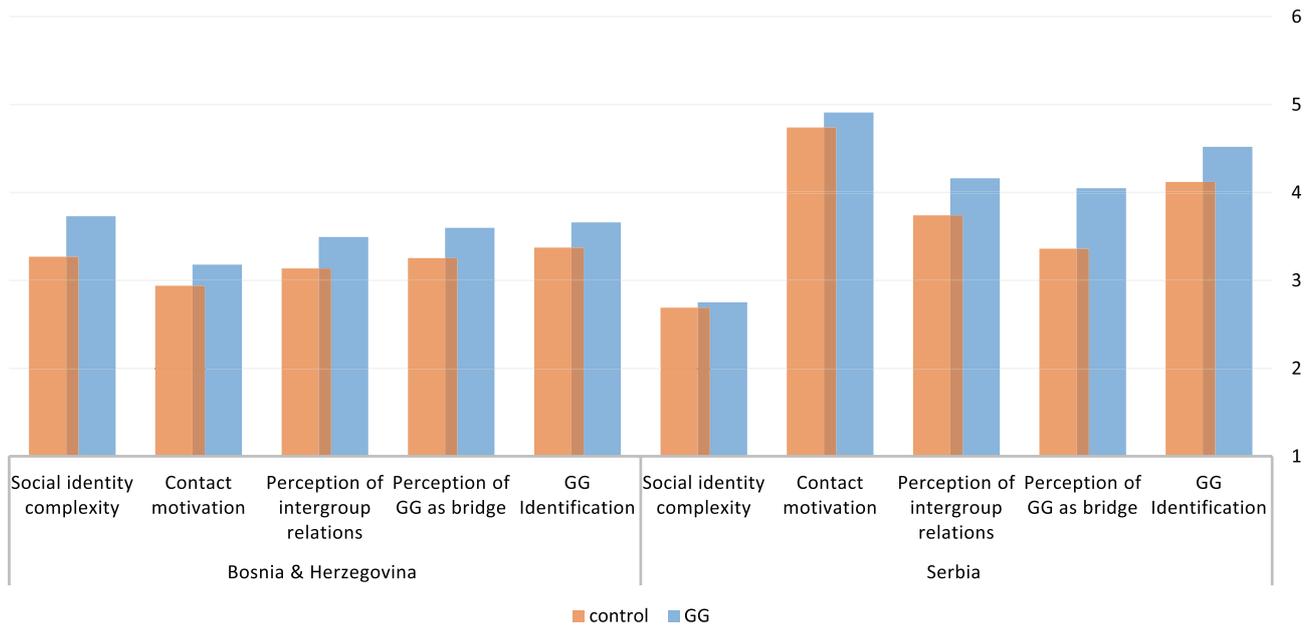


Figure 1. Across all variables the exposure to the GG manipulation had a positive impact on intergroup dynamics (the social identity complexity results were reversed for the sake of presentation, i.e., $10 - x$).

Perception of the Ingroup-Outgroup Closeness

Participants chose from different diagrams with a circle representing the ingroup and a circle representing the outgroup, ranging from two circles completely separate from one another to two completely overlapping circles (Schubert & Otten, 2002).

Social Identity Complexity

Participants were asked to rate the degree of overlap between their three main ingroups: national, ethnic, and religious (“When you think about people who are [Citizens of Serbia\Serbs\Orthodox], how many are [Citizens of Serbia\Serbs\Orthodox]?”), i.e., a higher grade indicates lower social identity complexity, $\alpha = .81$).

Contact Motivation With Outgroup Members

Finally, participants were asked to what extent they would like to have an outgroup member as an acquaintance, friend, neighbor, and so forth ($\alpha = .78$; Bogardus, 1925).

Results

Dual Identification

The manipulation had the expected effect, and participants in the experimental condition perceived the GG as more dually identified ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.81$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.78$, $t(205) = 2.60$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.35$).

Potential Bridge

Participants in the experimental condition also perceived the GG as having a greater potential for bridging the ingroup-outgroup divide ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.11$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.14$, $t(205) = 2.28$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.31$).

Social Identity Complexity

Participants in the experimental condition displayed higher levels of social identity complexity ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 1.71$) compared to the control condition ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 1.68$, $t(205) = 1.95$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.27$).

Perception of Ingroup-Outgroup Closeness

Participants in the experimental condition portrayed a marginally closer relationship between the ingroup and outgroup ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.50$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.46$, $t(205) = 1.74$, $p = .08$, $d = 0.18$, see Figure 1).

Contact Motivation With Outgroup Members

In terms of contact motivation we did not find any difference between the experimental ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.80$) and the control condition ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.66$, $t(205) = 0.91$, $p = .36$).

Discussion

Study 1 replicated the findings of previous GG studies in the Balkan context. We found that exposure to the GG made

participants see them as having more of a dual identity, more of a potential intergroup bridge, sense a higher level of social identity complexity, and also perceive the ingroup and outgroup as socially closer to one another. As for contact motivation with outgroup members, we did not find any difference between conditions. The lack of effect for this measure might be a result of the unique setting in Banja Luka, where the Serb(s) are an ethnic minority on the national level but a majority in the region, and might therefore be sensitive to the rise of Bosniak presence in the region. Accordingly, we intended to examine this variable again in Study 2 where the Serb group was the majority.

Study 2

Method

Participants

We recruited 174 participants (56 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.76$ years, $SD = 4.12$) in the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Since the effect size in Study 1 varied across the different variables, we maintained a similar sample size based on previous studies as described above.

Procedure and Measures

Study 2 was a replication of Study 1 only in the Serbian context with ethnic Bosniaks that live in Serbia as the GG between Serbia and Bosnia. The questionnaire was also the same as in Study 1 (Scale alphas: *Dual identification* $\alpha = .69$; *Social identity complexity* $\alpha = .70$; *Contact motivation* $\alpha = .89$) with two small additions. First, in order to provide a more substantial examination of the perception of the GG's dual identity, we added the dual identity formula from the Levy, Saguy, van Zomeren, et al.'s paper (2017; $ID_{\text{ingroup}} + ID_{\text{outgroup}}/2 - \text{ABS}(ID_{\text{ingroup}} - ID_{\text{outgroup}})$). A higher grade on this measure indicates both high identification with the ingroup and outgroup, as well as a small difference between identification with the two groups. Second, since we were dealing with a substantial overlap between the interethnic relations and the international relations, when we asked the participants about the potential of the GG to facilitate intergroup relations, we asked two separate questions, one addressing the potential to bridge interethnic relations within the country, and the other addressing international relations, between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina ($\alpha = .82$).

Results

Dual Identification

Participants in the experimental condition rated higher on perception of the GG as dually identified ($M = 4.52$,

$SD = 0.70$) compared to the control condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.83$, $t(172) = 3.20$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.52$). Additionally, using the dual identity formula we found the same effect in which participants in the experimental condition rated the GG with a higher dual identity grade ($M = 71.35$, $SD = 19.89$) compared to the control condition ($M = 56.79$, $SD = 26.36$, $t(172) = 3.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.62$).

Potential Bridge

Participants in the experimental condition perceived the GG as having a greater potential for bridging the ingroup-outgroup divide ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.00$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.06$, $t(172) = 4.19$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$). This effect was found both for the interethnic relations $t(172) = 4.60$, $p < 0.001$, and for the international relations $t(172) = 2.95$, $p = .004$.

Social Identity Complexity

In terms of social identity complexity we did not find any difference between the experimental ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 1.26$) and the control condition ($M = 7.31$, $SD = 1.35$, $t(172) = 0.30$, $p = .77$).

Perception of the Ingroup-Outgroup Closeness

Participants in the experimental condition displayed a closer relationship between the ingroup and outgroup ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.19$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(172) = 2.28$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.36$, see Figure 1).

Contact Motivation With Outgroup Members

Compared to the participants in Study 1 ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.73$) there was higher motivation overall for contact with the outgroup in Study 2 ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 0.60$, $t(373) = 12.66$, $p < .001$). More importantly, Participants in the experimental condition displayed higher levels of contact motivation ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 0.21$) than participants in the control condition ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.60$, $t(172) = 2.17$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.38$, see Figure 1).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1. We found that exposure to the GG made participants see them as having more of a dual identity, more of a potential intergroup bridge, perceive the ingroup and outgroup as socially closer to one another, and have greater motivation for contact with the outgroup. The fact that we found similar results for the dual identity measures in Studies 1 and 2, but there was no effect for social identity complexity in Study 2 might imply that while the dual identity measures are an indicator of more malleable subjective perception of individuals and

groups, the complexity scale is more an indication of socially stable prototypes.

General Discussion

The growing prevalence of complex social identities creates challenges and opportunities in terms of intergroup relations (Halperin & Levy, 2017). One such opportunity is the potential of *Gateway Groups* with multiple identities to facilitate the relations between the different groups they are affiliated with. In this paper we attempted to replicate the GG effect in the Western Balkans. In the two studies described above we replicated the existing GG findings, and found that the exposure to a dually identified GG lead to a more complex perception of the GG itself, a higher belief in the potential of the GG to bridge intergroup relations, and a greater sense of ingroup-outgroup closeness. Moreover, we also found that the exposure to the GG increased the sense of social identity complexity in the Bosnian and Herzegovinan sample, and the motivation for contact with the outgroup in the Serbian sample.

Limitations and Future Directions

The studies above still do not provide much information regarding the underlying mechanism at hand. One potential mechanism may be exposure to complex stimuli that challenges simplistic categorization. If this is the case, then exposure to any social group that embodies complex social categorization may have the same impact as a GG, even without direct ties to the groups involved. An alternative mechanism might be that the GG signals that the two distinct social identities are compatible. If this is the case than there can be additional ways to signal compatibility even in the absence of a GG. Future research should consider designs with more than a single experimental condition in order to examine these potential mechanisms, and attempt to shed more light on the underlying mechanism, as well as alternative identity-based interventions. Additionally, It is likely that in the context of intergroup conflict GG members will be expected to “choose sides”, and the GG’s interaction with the outgroup might be perceived as an act of betrayal. Moreover, affiliation of the GG with the outgroup coupled with mistrust is likely to have a negative overall intergroup impact as well (Kunst et al., 2018). Accordingly, future research should examine expectation of GG loyalty, and elements of trust and threat, in order to account for possible GG backlash effects.

In sum, the presence of GGs with complex multiple identities was found to have a positive impact on their

social counterparts, thus enforcing the premise that GGs can play an important role in improving intergroup relations.

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History

Received September 27, 2018

Revision received December 23, 2018

Accepted December 24, 2018

Published online April 17, 2019

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the design, research conduction, and writing of this manuscript.

Open Data

Data are available at <https://osf.io/p9xvf/>

ORCID

Aharon Levy

 <https://0000-0001-5808-5244>

Aharon Levy

Columbia Business School

Columbia University

3022 Broadway

New York, NY 10027

USA

admlevy@gmail.com