

Intergenerational contact during and beyond COVID-19

Lisbeth Drury¹  | Dominic Abrams²  | Hannah J. Swift² 

¹Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London, London, UK

²Center for the Study of Group Processes, School of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Correspondence

Lisbeth Drury, Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London, UK WC1E 7HX.
Email: l.drury@bbk.ac.uk

Abstract

Intergenerational contact is crucial for promoting intergenerational harmony and reducing ageism. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted and changed the nature and frequency of intergenerational contact. In addition, research suggests that both ageism towards older adults and intergenerational threat regarding succession and consumption, have increased. Through the lens of the Temporally Integrated Model of Intergroup Contact and Threat (TIMICAT; Abrams & Eller, 2016), we explore the implications of these changing dynamics on ageism towards older adults during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Our review reveals that research into intergenerational contact needs to articulate both the time course and salience of contact and threats before making predictions about their impacts on prejudice. The implications of understanding how contact and threat combine to affect ageism for policy and practice are discussed in relation to employment, education, and intergenerational contact programs. We highlight that policy makers play a key role in promoting intergenerational harmony through the reduction of narratives that inflame intergenerational tensions and threat.

INTRODUCTION

The study of positive social interactions between younger and older adults is commonly referred to as intergenerational contact and is crucial for intergenerational harmony, successful aging, and reducing ageism towards older adults (Drury et al., 2017a; Hatton-Yeo & Batty, 2011; Rossi et al., 2014). However, COVID-19 has changed both the frequency and the nature of intergenerational contact. The pandemic has potentially increased intergenerational tensions (Meisner, 2021), and increased young adults' anxieties about their future (Swift & Chasteen, 2021). There is also evidence that ageism has increased escalated during the pandemic (Ayalon et al., 2020). This paper uses a temporal perspective to explore how different forms of intergenerational contact and intergenerational threats may be affecting ageism towards older adults through and beyond the pandemic. We introduce the Temporally Integrated Model of Intergroup Contact and Threat (TIMICAT; Abrams & Eller, 2016) and explore ways that ageism, contact, and threat have manifested. We then consider the implications for future intergenerational relations and policy options.

THE TEMPORALLY INTEGRATED MODEL OF INTERGROUP CONTACT AND THREAT (TIMICAT)

According to the intergroup contact hypothesis, bringing members of opposing social groups together to experience positive social interactions reduces prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Intergenerational contact (contact between different age groups or generations) takes various direct forms including contact during everyday life, co-worker contact, health, and social care contact, and family contact. It also takes indirect forms such as knowing friends who have intergenerational friendships or imagining intergenerational contact experiences (Drury et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2007). Both direct and indirect forms reduce ageism towards older adults and inform the design of structured intergenerational contact programs (Drury et al., 2017a; Levy, 2016). Intergenerational programs are community-based interventions involving positive interactions between younger and older generations often aimed at enhancing well-being and reducing loneliness of older adults in addition to improving younger adults' attitudes towards ageing and older adults (see Drury et al., 2017a; Levy, 2016). For example, an intergenerational community performing arts program featuring university students and older adults improved young adults' views of ageing and reduced ageism (Anderson et al., 2017).

Another important basis of prejudice is perceived intergroup threat (Riek et al., 2006), which includes symbolic and realistic forms (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Symbolic threat undermines the ingroup's morals, values, and way of life. Realistic threat endangers the ingroup's economic situation, and their well-being or survival. Such intergroup threats often arise from competition for scarce resources (cf. Sherif, 1966). Intergenerational threats can involve younger people's perceptions that older generations over-consume resources needed by future generations (e.g., healthcare resources) or that there is a lack of succession in relation to power and jobs and that older generations are job-blocking (North & Fiske, 2013, 2015).

The connections between contact, threat, and prejudice are complex. Although positive intergroup contact reduces threat and prejudice, threat can increase prejudice and may inhibit intentions to have future contact (Demirtahcangeş-Madran, 2020). In addition, contact and threat can have additive, sequential and interactive effects on prejudice (Abrams & Eller, 2016). When

considering the existence of individual and structural interdependencies between generations the overall impact of the pandemic on ageism becomes a particularly important and theoretically challenging question.

The TIMICAT offers a contextually sensitive approach for considering how contact and threat combine to influence prejudice across time. It holds that, depending on their particular temporal characteristics, contact and threat combine psychologically in different ways to affect prejudice. The temporal aspects of contact and of threat involve the onset, frequency, and duration of each, as well as the sequence in which they arise. The salience and intensity of each may vary between temporal elements too. The research question thereby shifts emphasis from *whether* contact or threat has a larger effect or is causally prior per se, to *which* temporal elements of these variables are likely to prevail in affecting current or future intergroup relationships. While the TIMICAT was developed to consider these research questions in respect to all social groups, to our knowledge, our analysis is the first to apply the framework to intergenerational relations.

Table 1 shows the TIMICAT framework along with examples relevant to intergenerational prejudice. The TIMICAT depicts different temporal frames in which threat(s) and contact(s) are psychologically represented. Taking contact as the example, when there has never been any contact intergroup relations may be rather neutral. More commonly, people's awareness of intergroup history means they may be conscious of *past* contact between groups, which casts a legacy into current relationships. Recent or present contact may also take different temporal forms, including *continuous* contact (e.g., living or working with outgroup members), single *discrete* but salient instances (e.g., in a competition or collaboration), or *multiple* contacts (e.g., repeated meetings or encounters, or contacts with multiple members). Moreover, any of these forms of prior contact provide a context for known or anticipated *future* contact. Similar reasoning can be applied to the temporal aspects of threat.

Because aging itself is a journey through time, it seems particularly relevant to consider the linkages between intergenerational contact, threat, and prejudice through a temporal lens. We recognize too that actors are cognizant of where they are in this journey and do not treat any particular instance of contact or threat as if it were an independent variable with little connection to their life as a whole. For example, whilst research based on the intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) explains how prior, current or future intergenerational contact reduces ageism (Drury et al., 2017a; Turner et al., 2007) and whilst intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) explains relationships between threat and age discrimination (North & Fiske, 2016), these frameworks do not offer a theoretical understanding of contact, threat and prejudice in conjunction and across time. The important insight provided by the TIMICAT, to address this theoretical gap, is that the experiences of threat and contact may each follow different temporal paths and have differing levels of intensity, so that understanding the temporal aspects of each in conjunction should improve our ability to explain and predict levels of prejudice.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected people's social connectedness, living circumstances, personal and family health, and working patterns. For many, it has therefore also affected intergenerational contact and aspects of intergenerational threat. For example, there is pre-pandemic evidence that (young) care workers' past positive contact with older people predicted their intergenerational attitudes (see Drury et al., 2017b). As the pandemic took hold with no vaccine in sight, the anticipation of future, potentially infective, contact might become very threatening (both for care workers and those they cared for). In fact, most care workers continued to serve, suggesting that their positive commitment to older generations prevailed even in the face of life-threatening risks. However, a different picture may have prevailed in the wider population because intergenerational threat

TABLE 1 Examples of application of the Temporally Integrated Model of Intergroup Contact and Threat (TIMICAT), applied to intergenerational relations

		Threat				
Temporal context	No threat (baseline)	Past threat	Discrete single threat	Continuous threat	Multiple threat	Future threat
	Examples	'Traditional' roles of younger and older people frame expectations and opportunities.	Election of new government that significantly prioritizes an older (younger) demographic.	Age-related differences in spreading and suffering from disease, growing awareness of health, and economic interdependencies.	Intergenerational divides made more salient as traditional industries and jobs being replaced, older generation culture challenged by new demographics of neighborhood. Fear of crime, property hoarding.	Expectation of increased intergenerational competition in the context of modernizing economies that require greater individual adaptability.
Contact low contact (rare)	Older people living in a retirement village rarely visited by anyone aged under 50.	Acceptance of traditional roles persists.	Attitudes undergo temporary shift in response to threat.	Intergenerational fear, distrust, antipathy grow.	Underpins more entrenched intergenerational division, harder to shift because of multiple components.	Inhibits contact and initiates intergenerational suspicion and anxiety.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Threat		Discrete single threat		Continuous threat		Multiple threat		Future threat	
Temporal context	No threat (baseline)	Past threat	Discrete single threat	Continuous threat	Multiple threat	Future threat	Multiple threat	Future threat	Future threat
Past contact	Growing up living with parents/older generations into one's early adulthood.	Content of past contact may reinforce or may weaken acceptance of traditional roles.	Contact inhibits attitude shift but only if relevant to the particular domain of the threat.	Contact militates against fear in relevant past threat domains, not necessarily in new contemporary ones.	Contact may attenuate impact of threat but not prevent variation in threat from affecting attitudes.	Contact may make people more open to supporting alternative futures that mitigate potential threats (e.g., voting for policy change).	Contact may attenuate impact of threat but not prevent variation in threat from affecting attitudes.	Contact may make people more open to supporting alternative futures that mitigate potential threats (e.g., voting for policy change).	Contact may make people more open to supporting alternative futures that mitigate potential threats (e.g., voting for policy change).
Discrete contact	An inspiring retired professor holds one meeting with a class of freshman students.	Contact may be viewed as an exception to the rule, prior threat perceptions may prevail.	Both the threat and contact are regarded as exceptions, neither has a sustained effect on the other or on attitudes.	Contact has little effect on threat, intergenerational attitudes become more negative over time.	Contact has no effect on threat which consolidates more negative intergenerational attitudes.	Contact offers a positive exemplar but not sufficiently generalizable to prevent intergenerational anxiety.	Contact has no effect on threat which consolidates more negative intergenerational attitudes.	Contact offers a positive exemplar but not sufficiently generalizable to prevent intergenerational anxiety.	Contact offers a positive exemplar but not sufficiently generalizable to prevent intergenerational anxiety.
Continuous contact	Living in a harmonious multigenerational household or working in an age diverse organisation.	Contact experiences prevail over sense of past threat.	Temporary disruption of cordial contact but not of more enduring intergenerational attitudes.	Contact offers opportunity to address threat, potentially supporting constructive attitudes and policy preferences.	Substantial structural changes underlying threats may impede or break sustained contact, with potential to fuel intergenerational division.	Contact motivates intergenerational planning to mitigate the threat together.	Substantial structural changes underlying threats may impede or break sustained contact, with potential to fuel intergenerational division.	Contact motivates intergenerational planning to mitigate the threat together.	Contact motivates intergenerational planning to mitigate the threat together.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Temporal context	Threat			
	No threat (baseline)	Past threat	Discrete single threat	Continuous threat
Multiple contact	Participation in multi-event intergenerational contact programs. A mature or retired student attending weekly lectures in an undergraduate program.	Contact predominates in shaping attitudes.	Threat event is discussed or provides focus for intergenerational interaction, may facilitate empathy but may also temporarily worsen contact quality or frequency.	Contact allows repeated 'tests' of implications of the threat, enabling its consensual management in day-to-day interactions, but threat persistence gradually reduces levels of contact and worsens intergenerational relations.
				Multiplicity of both contact and threat exposes domain specific manifestations of the threats. This creates a basis for contention and possible consensual change. Intergenerational relations become intensified either in consensual or conflictual directions, or sometimes both. Forms and spheres of contact change in response.
Future contact	Expecting to join an age-diverse company, household, or neighborhood	Threat inhibits willingness for contact or leads to stereotype fulfilling behavior during contact.	Whilst still salient, threat adversely affects expectations for future contact, particularly in the specific threat domain.	Threat inhibits contact, but primarily within the specific threat domain.
				To the extent that anticipated interaction is also threatening it inhibits actual contact and reinforces negative intergenerational attitudes.

and fear may have become more influential as the pandemic took hold. For older people, awareness that COVID-19 could be transmitted by symptomless younger people, made their presence objectively more threatening, and for many this could be resolved by avoiding future contact, regardless of any prior positive intergenerational contact. These two examples demonstrate the value of the TIMICAT in framing a more nuanced understanding of how contact and threat at different time points in relation to the pandemic combine to influence ageism.

The TIMICAT adheres to two principles. First, each temporal element of contact or threat impacts prejudice (i.e., ageism). This can be cumulative and additive. For example, individuals may experience more than one temporal category (and type) of threat which can alter the total impact of threat. The same applies to contact and is further complicated because contact can be both positive and/or negative. Moreover, the impacts of positive and negative contact are not equality weighted (Drury et al., 2017b). Effects of single (discrete) instances of negative contact on intergroup attitudes may linger longer than, or counteract, those of frequent (e.g., past, multiple) positive contact (Graf et al., 2014).

The second principle is that a dramatic and salient change in either contact or threat may be sufficient to produce substantial changes in prejudice. For example, pandemic-related changes in household living arrangements with older or younger generations might have either improved or worsened relations with them and the associated attitudes might generalize to their age groups. From younger people's perspectives, the increased salience of the vulnerability of older people to COVID-19 might have reinforced dependency stereotypes. Or differences in attitudes or demands on household resources may have intensified, leading to conflict. Alternatively, young people may have become more aware of and engaged with older people's involvement in organizing grassroots mutual aid groups, which might have strongly counteracted age stereotypes. For different individuals and in different households, particularly those facing vulnerabilities of poverty, disadvantage, and lack of choice about contact, the outcomes of pandemic-related contact could therefore be quite different (British Academy, 2021).

We next consider pandemic related changes in ageism and then how changes in intergenerational contact and intergenerational threats may have contributed and combined.

To anchor our analysis within the global development of the pandemic it is important to note that our analysis was conducted in October 2021, and focuses on high-income and OECD countries. Using PsychInfo and Google Scholar we sourced empirical and theoretical literature using key search terms, intergroup/intergenerational contact, ageism, threat, and pandemic/COVID-19. At this time, many of these countries were in their second or third waves of COVID and had vaccination programs in progress.

PANDEMIC RELATED CHANGES IN AGEISM

Ageism is a multi-faceted form of prejudice consisting of both hostile and benevolent attitudes (Cary et al., 2017). Hostile ageism refers to "contemptuous" attitudes towards older adults (Cary et al., 2017), which are often expressed in uninhibited, overtly negative ways. On the other hand, benevolent ageism is underpinned by the assumption that older adults are stereotyped as warm and friendly but incompetent (Cuddy et al., 2007). Although often well-intentioned, this mixed stereotype can stimulate paternalism, pity, and helping behaviors that limit older adults' autonomy. In 2005, Cuddy and colleagues concluded that this mixed stereotype of older adults was pervasive across cultures (Cuddy et al., 2005).

Pre-pandemic ageism

Findings from the 2009 European Social Survey provided evidence that adults aged 70 and over are viewed as comparatively more warm and friendly than competent across Europe, and further revealed ageism was more likely to be experienced in its benevolent than hostile form, which manifests as a lack of respect (Abrams et al., 2011a). This is further supported by a global survey conducted by Ipsos MORI in 2018 including between 18 and 20 thousand adults aged 16 to 64 in 30 countries across continents (Hall et al., 2019). It reported that globally, a majority across 29 countries think that there is a lack of respect for older people and the level of agreement with this, increased with participant age. The survey also provided further compelling evidence across 30 countries for a mixed stereotype archetype that juxtaposes negative and positive characteristics (Hall et al., 2019).

The mixed components of benevolent ageism perpetuate and legitimize policies and practices that limit the lives of older adults under the guise of protection (Bugental & Hehman, 2007). At the individual level ageism impacts negatively on health. A systematic review conducted by Chang and colleagues, yielded 422 studies published between 1970 and 2017 that have explored effects of ageism on health spanning 45 countries and 11 health domains. The review summarized that ageism led to significantly worse health outcomes in 95% of the studies, with significant associations between ageism and health increasing over the latter 25-year period studied, and more prevalent in less-developed countries (Chang et al., 2020). Lower education was also identified as a risk factor for older adults experiencing adverse health effects of ageism (Chang, et al., 2020).

Another systematic review of the determinants of ageism conducted on 199 papers published between 1970 and 2017, revealed that the quality of contact with older people, and the extent to which older people were positively or negatively viewed, were the two most robust predictors of ageism directed towards or experienced by older adults (Marques et al., 2020). Encouragingly, pre-pandemic, four in five surveyed by Ipsos said they want to mix with people of different ages and generations (Hall et al., 2019).

Post-pandemic ageism

Research published pre, during and post-pandemic have highlighted the need to continue to develop ageism measurement tools to ensure robust comparisons of ageism over time (Ayalon et al., 2019; Swift & Chasteen, 2021, under review; Wilson et al., 2019). Despite the lack of population-representative, studies, pre- and post-pandemic evidence suggests that explicit prejudice has become more readily expressed during the pandemic (Rosenfeld et al., 2021). Ageism became more prevalent in the media and public responses (Lichtenstein, 2021; Ng & Lim, 2021), both in a hostile or calculated form (Barrett et al., 2020) and a benevolent or compassionate form (Abrams et al., 2011b; Chasteen et al., 2021), and this is reflected in older adults' reported experiences of both hostile and benevolent ageism (Barth et al., 2021; Kornadt et al., 2021; Mobasseri et al., 2020). Nonetheless, perceived divisions between younger and older generations appear to have been less strongly affected than those between other groups (Abrams et al., 2021a), and part of the reason may be the countervailing affective implications of different aspects of ageism.

An example of pandemic-related hostile prejudice is derogatory tweets and headlines (Barrett et al., 2020; Bravo-Segal & Villar, 2020; Jimenez-Sotomayor et al., 2020). Hostile ageism has targeted older adults' social status (Swift & Chasteen, 2021) which may have been undermined

through policy stances that encouraged generational self-sacrifice of older adults and health provision rationing (Ayalon, 2020; Ehni & Wahl, 2020; Magen, 2020; White & Lo, 2020), such as the advent and popular use of the hashtag #BoomerRemover (Meisner, 2021; Xiang et al., 2021), linked to intergenerational insults (Sipocz et al., 2021). Analysis of 536 tweets (Sipocz et al., 2021) made in March and April 2020 revealed that the #BoomerRemover tag was mentioned in conjunction with intergenerational blame for infection rates, including negative stereotypes about younger (“sick of snowflake millennials”) and older adults as responsible for future economic downturn (“a generation which forsook their grandchildren”). It is worth noting that these tweets were made during the first wave of the pandemic when intergenerational threat was likely to be high; lockdowns were impacting the economy in many countries and the future of work was uncertain.

Benevolent ageism is likely to have been nourished by the pandemic-related vulnerability narrative emerging from the media (Ayalon et al., 2020), and the perceived homogenization of older adults may have further exacerbated the attribution of benevolent stereotypes (Berridge & Hooyman, 2020; Bravo-Segal & Villar, 2020). For instance, content analysis of Spanish media published between 1 March and 15 April, 2020 (which coincided with the national emergency announcement in which the population’s movement was restricted) depicted older people as a homogeneous group linked with death and extreme vulnerability (Bravo-Segal & Villar, 2020).

Studies exploring hostile and benevolent ageism during COVID-19 show that hostile ageism is linked to lower priority for older adults to receive healthcare and employment resources and less intentions to help older adults (Apriceno et al., 2020; Lytle et al., 2020), whilst benevolent ageism is related to higher priority ratings, increased positive behavior change, more helping intentions and a greater importance attributed to social distance and use of protective devices (Apriceno et al., 2020; Lytle et al., 2020; Vale et al., 2020; Visintin, 2021). However, even positive actions such as social distancing can have negative effects for older adults by increasing the salience of stereotypes of them as helpless and weak (Monahan et al., 2020). For example, in qualitative data reflecting on strict shielding policies for older adults imposed by the UK Government during the first national lockdown (March–May 2020), British older adults reported feeling infantilized by younger family members due to their compliance with the guidelines (Stuart et al., *under review*).

In summary, the pandemic appears to have elevated hostile ageism towards older adults in Western countries. We would contend that increased hostile ageism coincides with intergenerational threats regarding succession and consumption. Increased benevolent ageism meanwhile may reinforce health-protective behaviors but simultaneously limits outcomes for older people by eliciting ‘caremongering’ and offers of unwanted help in some cases (Vervaecke & Meisner, 2021). According to the TIMICAT, changes in ageism should be linked to the combined implications of changes in contact and threat.

PANDEMIC RELATED CHANGES IN CONTACT

The pandemic had multiple implications for intergenerational contact. Within the first month of lockdown in 2020, European older adults’ face-to-face intergenerational contact reduced by 50% during the pandemic (Arpino et al., 2021). Also during this time, shielding and isolation rules (Sparrow, 2020) curtailed visitation at residential care facilities and confined many older adults to their homes. This prevented normal family contact including that between grandchildren and grandparents. Such reduction in contact was likely to have attenuated empathy and perspective taking between age groups (Harwood et al., 2005; Tam et al., 2006). For example, older people may have been unaware of the depth of young adults’ mental health issues arising from a lack

of social contact and schooling. Similarly, younger adults may not have fully appreciated older adults' fears about illness and the impact of practical constraints on their lives. A lack of social interaction may also have loosened the cross-generational social glue needed for intergenerational harmony. For some, however, social restrictions meant much closer and more continuous contact (with the same individuals) within multigenerational households (Fry et al., 2020). Based on the TIMICAT, such dramatic changes in contact (i.e., moving from multiple contact to no contact etc.) would precipitate changes in perceptions of intergenerational threats and competition over resources, thereby affecting ageism.

One correlational study in Italy ($N = 371$), conducted during the first wave of the pandemic when the prevalence of COVID in that country was high (April, 2020), revealed that young people who had more intergenerational contact prior to the pandemic showed less hostile ageism and negative attitudes towards older adults during the pandemic (Visintin, 2021). This is an example (see Table 1) where prior contact provides a buffer against the effects of a new discrete threat (cf. Abrams et al., 2016b).

Turning to benevolent ageism, the role of intergenerational contact is not yet clear. Although young adults who have previously experienced frequent intergenerational contact are less likely to speak to older adults in a benevolent, patronizing way towards older adults (Hehman et al., 2012), intergenerational contact programs do not reliably reduce subtle stereotypes or benevolent attitudes (Drury et al., 2017a). Moreover, adaptations to facilitate contact with older people in care settings during lockdown, such as the use of video calls and instant messages (Arpino et al., 2021; Pritchard, 2021), have the potential to trigger benevolent stereotypes about older people's competence with digital technology (Drury et al., 2017c), or induce age-based stereotype threat, and expectancy confirmation (Lamont et al., 2015; Mariano et al., 2021). During the pandemic, a general increase in benevolent ageism may have overwhelmed any effects of prior contact (Rosenfeld et al., 2021). For example, in Visintin's (2021) study prior contact was unrelated to benevolent ageism, suggesting to us that contact may be a less relevant factor in mitigating prejudice that is not spurred by threat.

Yet, because benevolent attitudes can be both detrimental (Vervaecke & Meisner, 2021) and beneficial (Apriceno et al., 2020; Vale et al., 2020; Visintin, 2021), challenging them can be problematic for policy. The most vulnerable older people certainly require care and protection but activating public concern and mobilizing the necessary resources also reinforces stereotypes of older people's dependency. Thus, a more fine-grained analysis of the implications of benevolent ageism and its relationship to contact would be fruitful as the field moves forwards.

Finally, the media and world leaders have problematized intergenerational contact during the pandemic (Ayalon et al., 2020; Gross & TOI staff, 2020; Sparrow, 2020). Consequently, levels of contact may only slowly, or in some cases never, return to pre-pandemic levels. In line with TIMICAT, it seems plausible that people with low levels of prior intergenerational contact and who perceived a step change increase in intergenerational threat were those most likely to exhibit hostile ageism.

PANDEMIC RELATED CHANGES IN THREAT

Pre-pandemic threat

Recent decades have raised the specter of an 'aging tsunami' (Barusch, 2013) on the overconsumption of pension stocks and healthcare resources (Binstock, 2010; Persad et al., 2009; Pinho, 2014).

While this focuses on the economic pressures (threats) arising from an aging population, it does not consider the bidirectional threat between younger and older adults, which are likely to generate intergenerational tensions and ageism. Evidence from a large ($N = 56,170$) European survey (Ayalon, 2019) revealed that younger adults perceived older adults as posing an economic threat (i.e., “contribution to the economy”). Furthermore, North and Fiske (2013) identified threats to younger people’s economic security, well-being, and social status as predictors of intergenerational tension. Prior to the pandemic younger people faced increasingly precarious employment following the 2008–2009 economic crisis, as well as greater casualization of work, and prospects of taxation to address high national debts. It is understandable, therefore, that succession beliefs, which hold that older workers should move aside to make room for the next generation, are associated with discrimination against older workers (North & Fiske, 2016).

Ayalon’s (2019) evidence also showed that older adults perceived both symbolic threat “to customs and way of life” and economic threat from younger adults, but it is not known which of these might be a stronger predictor of their attitudes towards younger people. Overall, however, there is clear evidence that age-targeted policies can create negative dependencies between younger and older generations, and that such policies are predictive of differences in discrimination (Bratt et al., 2020).

Post-pandemic threat

Scholars forecast that intergeneration tensions will rise due to elevated intergenerational threats (Ayalon et al., 2020; Swift & Chasteen, 2021). Online media reporting that frames the pandemic as a ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation has increased the perception of both younger and older age groups as risky and threatening (Cook et al., 2021). Younger people’s economic precarity has been compounded in many countries by predicted pandemic-related economic downturns, which some may perceive as arising from expenditure on saving the lives of (mainly) older people (Mahase, 2020; Rosenfeld et al., 2021). A large-scale survey across 56 countries, which was conducted from March to May, 2020 during the first global wave of the pandemic, found that younger (rather than older) adults perceived threat from daily changes to life and job insecurity (Jin et al., 2021). Within the USA, a survey conducted the day after the historic pandemic-related stock market drop revealed that younger adults were more anxious about the economy than older adults (Mann et al., 2020). Collectively, this research suggests that economic threats are more intense and salient for younger compared to older adults.

Other studies suggest that younger adults attribute these threats to older adults. Analysis of media reporting about the early spread of COVID-19 in China (Zhang & Liu, 2021) concludes that the portrayal of older adults as a homogeneous vulnerable group antagonized intergenerational tensions and led younger generations to perceive older adults as a threat to public health. Qualitative evidence from older adults also reveals their own awareness of being perceived as posing a health threat by younger people (Falvo et al., 2021). In addition, hostile ageist tweets blamed older adults for the economic downturn (Sipocz et al., 2021). Taken together the evidence points towards young people as feeling greater realistic threat from older people as the pandemic has progressed.

Older people had other reasons to feel threatened. Across Europe there were examples of younger people being portrayed in the media as reckless partygoers, flouting lockdown rules and contributing to the spread of the virus, thus presenting both a symbolic threat to older adults’ way of life and a realistic threat to health (Martikainen & Sakki, 2021; Reicher & Drury, 2021; Sipocz

et al., 2021). Moreover, older adults reported feeling disrespected by the risky rule-breaking of younger adults (Falvo et al., 2021). In the UK older (and younger) adults' age-identity was more salient and they felt more threat to their identity than did middle-aged adults (Lamont et al., 2021). Thus, intergenerational threats and associated stereotypes appear to have been strengthened during the pandemic at the same time as opportunities for contact may have been reduced.

The pandemic has affected both younger and older adults' sense of intergenerational threat, and associated intergenerational attitudes. In many countries the economic reverberations of the pandemic are enormous and the way that huge national debts are managed will have implications for taxation, public services, and employment affecting all generations, but it will particularly intensify the question of how the burden is shared between younger working and older retired people. The implications of these threats are likely to be intertwined with intergenerational contact and relationships, analysis of which invites focus on the temporal aspects of these factors.

IMPLICATIONS OF TIMICAT FOR POST-PANDEMIC INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT

So far, we have outlined how the COVID-19 pandemic has (1) affected hostile and benevolent ageism, (2) affected the nature of intergenerational contact, and (3) affected intergenerational threats. Taking all of this together, we explore in more depth the temporal context of contact and threat to consider how they combine to affect ageism. Again, we will focus primarily on older adults.

During the pandemic, opportunities for various types of intergenerational contact have been dramatically affected. Given that significant changes in threat can strongly affect prejudice the usual relationship between intergenerational contact and ageism is likely to have been disrupted (Abrams & Eller, 2016). Moreover, people now carry forward a new (pandemic-related) legacy of past contact and past threat, from that which framed intergenerational relations prior to the pandemic. Likewise, their future expectations about both contact and threat may have altered.

Contact generally reduces prejudice, and threat generally increases prejudice, but if threat is omnipresent and continuous, repeated routine contact experiences may do little to reduce prejudice (Abrams & Eller, 2016). Consequently, in the temporal frame of the pandemic, where contact diminished and threat increased, we could expect ageism to increase, compared to a situation where contact is regular and threat is low or diminishing. Elevated levels of ageism will then require more intensive or dramatic forms of contact in order to reverse the impact of the pandemic (cf. Rosenfeld et al., 2021).

The temporal sequence of contact and threat also have implications for how they affect one another. Threats induced by the pandemic may militate against people's willingness to engage in intergenerational contact in future, and this may compound existing prejudices and stereotypes. Lack of experience of contact may similarly compound the anxiety or sense of psychological threat that an intergenerational encounter might pose. The pandemic has made both younger and older age groups more aware of their age-identity, and associated negative stereotypes (Lamont et al., 2021), and in the context of a ubiquitous vulnerability narrative, such awareness and self-stereotyping can reduce older adults' intentions to have future intergenerational contact (Fowler & Gasiorek, 2020). The central point we make here is that research into intergenerational contact and prejudice needs to articulate both the time course and salience of contact and threats before making predictions about their impacts on particular forms of prejudice. This greater speci-

ficity and context sensitivity will help to provide more explanatory power both conceptually and statistically.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS AND LIMITATIONS

Intersectionality

Age holds its social meaning both through its biological definition but also in its cultural and situational context. There is considerable disagreement over the thresholds people use when describing the self and others as 'young' or 'old' (Swift et al., 2018). A very important question is how age intersects with other categories and group memberships such as gender, ethnicity, or social class. For example, in the US multigenerational households are more likely to include minority ethnic than white people (Cohn & Passel, 2018). Globally, intergenerational contact is more prevalent in low and middle-income countries (Del Fava et al., 2021). Furthermore, the ageism narrative varies globally according to cultural values (Ng & Lim, 2021), ethnic minorities report higher COVID-19 related prejudice (Miconi et al., 2021), and ageism can be more damaging for older women than older men (Chrisler et al., 2016). Finally, ethnic minorities reported greater economic anxiety during COVID-19 (Mann et al., 2020) and due to higher vulnerability (Dyer, 2020; Yancy, 2020), may perceive greater threat to well-being. In the UK, during the pandemic the intersection of ethnicity, age, and gender combined to compound the likelihood of being a target of discrimination (Abrams et al., 2021a). Future research should examine more detailed analysis of the relationship between contact, threat, and ageism for different intersections between groups.

Other motivations and emotions

In line with the TIMICAT and intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) we have focused on psychological threats. Other types of concern or motivation are also likely to inhibit intergenerational relationships. Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986), proposes that older adults represent a fundamental threat to the young by serving as reminders of mortality, death, and the natural aging process. Aging anxiety refers to concerns about aging in relation to the self (Lasher & Faulkender, 1993). Intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985) is the worry that intergroup contact may be difficult or unpleasant (Greenland & Brown, 1999), which may amplify prejudice and/or avoidance of future contact. For some of these additional emotional and motivational concerns, the minimization of threat and finding ways to increase direct and indirect forms of intergenerational contact seem promising approaches for reducing such concerns (Drury et al., 2016).

Ageism experienced by and directed towards young people

The ageism and intergenerational contact literatures have predominantly focused on older adults' experiences, and on determining whether intergenerational contact can improve younger people's attitudes and behaviors towards older adults. This emphasis is reflected in the present review but we are very aware that young people are as, if not more, likely to be the targets of prejudice and discrimination and that the appropriate focus for research overall is the relationship between

generations rather than solely the perspective of one or other (Bratt et al., 2020). The TIMICAT reminds us that aging is a transition over time where we not only need to consider contact and threat as continually evolving and interacting but as being perceived in their temporal context. That context is likely to look different depending on the individual's own position on the age continuum.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Understanding how contact and threat combine to affect ageism has implications for policy and practice. For example, policies that may protect health (e.g., through physical separation) may also prevent contact or imply threat. Even if the health protection is a short-term process, the implications for social relations may be much longer lasting (British Academy, 2021), such as the persistence of stereotypes of younger people as 'dangerous' or perhaps 'reckless', and of older people as vulnerable or excused from wider participation in social activities. Therefore, government framing of access to healthcare and social support for all age groups requires careful handling to avoid inflating perceptions of intergenerational threat or justifying unequal treatment (see Derrer-Merk et al., 2022). Consideration of ethical communication (Guttman & Lev, 2021) and a code of conduct to reduce ageism within the media would be beneficial (Swift & Chasteen, 2021) to help reduce the devaluing and homogenization of both younger and older adults, ameliorate narratives of intergenerational threat and foster more positive contact.

Ageism can cut both ways, creating risks to any age group when arguments give preferential (rather than equal) treatment to other age group(s) (Kanik et al., 2022). For example, countries that prioritize the younger working age population for vaccination as the basis of economic necessity may also invoke stereotypes of older adults as an economic burden (Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2021, 2022). Conversely, countries that adopt policies to give stronger protections to older people create a more discriminatory environment affecting younger people (Bratt et al., 2020). If governments are to avoid reinforcing or fostering ageist attitudes in society, they should scrutinize and amend policies that are directly or indirectly framed by ageist arguments.

The TIMICAT is used to frame an analysis of intergenerational relations but it does not specify whether the effects operate at the group or individual level. Both are quite possible. For example, an individual could be threatened via stereotyping by colleagues in a workplace, or a whole age group (e.g., over 60s or under 21s) may be threatened by a rule or event that affects their whole group's choices or actions. Similarly, contact may arise predominantly though individualized, one to one, experiences, or as a result of group-based structures (e.g., separated communities designated by age, retirement, etc.). Moreover, both contact and threat will be more psychologically connected to one another if they are linked to the same particular age-related social identity (e.g., Spaccatini et al., 2022). We recognize that in formulating policy it will be important for policy makers to attend to whether contact and threats are predominantly experienced more at individual or at collective levels, and therefore whether policy should be weighted towards one or other level.

Because the pandemic has exacerbated many intergroup tensions (Abrams et al., 2021b; Levy et al., 2022; McDarby et al., 2022; Sutter et al., 2022), the importance of improving social understanding and intergenerational harmony will require advocacy and support from policy makers if it is to be sustained. For example, an understanding of aging could also play a fuller role in educational curricula, supporting schools to explore how we think about age, age-stereotypes, and how we feel about aging, whilst also addressing the cohort or generation specific factors that either

united or separated the generations over time. There is a risk that recent gains in this area may be lost as schools may now be prioritizing 'core' education that was lost during the pandemic, leaving less time or capacity for extra-curricular programs. The education element can enhance cooperation, perspective taking, and debunk stereotypes (Levy, 2016), see del Carmen Requena et al. (2018) for a review of one case study that uses educational methods to support intergenerational interactions. A recent advance in this area, the Age-Friendly University initiative (Montepare & Brown, 2022), implements a systems-based approach to age-inclusivity and reduced ageism in higher education settings, and thus provides an ideal approach for adaptation to school level.

Intergenerational contact programs also hold great potential but their impact will depend on the preceding and anticipated contacts as well as the historical and current threats. Given continued uncertainty about the wider impacts and future variants of COVID-19, new forms of higher quality contact, and more frequent contact, might be necessary both to allay accumulative threat and attenuate perceptions of future threat. Moreover, different types of contact may also be needed to address different temporal elements of threat. If the purpose of initial contact is to reduce past or current multiple threats, this may best be achieved initially via indirect contact (Lytle & Levy, 2022) which can reduce intergroup anxieties about contact (Drury et al., 2017a, 2016). More direct contact might then be a better vehicle for reducing future threat and preventing ageism. However, the particular modalities and contexts of contact are also important, particularly as both the medium of contact (e.g., digital technology) can itself pose a threat. It is perhaps too early to evaluate whether the increased volume of online communication during 2020 and 2021 has changed the potential role and impact of different forms of contact and threat (see Jarrott et al., 2022), and we hope that the framing of the TIMICAT should be helpful in embracing these elements into future research and analysis. Intergenerational contact programs need to consider the effects on both benevolent and hostile ageism as well as how to sequence repeated contact of different kinds to reap the most benefit from intergenerational contact. However, more research and evaluation are needed on the optimal timing and role of indirect contact during, or prior to, intergenerational contact programs. More widely, creating longer-term opportunities for contact within the community, such as shared spaces should focus on how these opportunities can reduce threat, aging anxieties, and negative age stereotypes.

Employment contexts are another setting which can promote and support intergenerational contact opportunities (Fasbender & Drury, 2021), but they can also be a significant source of intergenerational threat if there is competition over resources and jobs (North & Fiske, 2016). In times of austerity, workplace inclusion and diversity policies and programs are often dropped (Vassilopoulou et al., 2019) and yet sustaining an age-varied workforce should be considered a strength by most organizations (Iles & Parker, 2021). For example, organizations will need to consider how they frame their return to work policies to avoid age stereotypical assumptions (Abrams et al., 2016a; Iles & Parker, 2021) such as the Australian government's program for returning older workers post-pandemic (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020) and social campaigns to reduce ageism in prospective employers in Israel (Okun & Ayalon, 2022).

The economic impact of the pandemic will vary from country to country, but as many begin their economic recovery, there is a danger that support packages for individuals of all ages will be squeezed, intensifying competition and realistic threat between younger and older adults (and both with middle-aged adults) over resources and benefits (Garstka et al., 2005). Thus, as well as the challenge of ensuring intergenerational fairness, governments will need to guard against fueling intergenerational antipathy and prejudice. Developing a clear narrative as well as appropriately targeting support and opportunities for younger and older adults may aid this endeavor.

The pandemic has demanded that psychologists and others must view their current theories, measures, and expectations in a new light. In particular the importance of the cultural, geographical, and temporal contexts has been exposed (British Academy, 2021). At the macrosocial level, it will be important that each country evaluate their pandemic-related measures implemented relative to their age stratification, intergenerational contact, threat, and levels of ageism. This is mirrored by the World Health Organization's (WHO) call to collect more qualitative data on psychological and social implications of the crisis (United Nations, 2020). At the individual level we argue that for intergenerational relations in particular, our theories and measures should try to capture the temporal context of the antecedents and consequences of age-related prejudice.

CONCLUSION

In reviewing how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected ageism, intergenerational contact, and intergenerational threat we drew on the Temporally Integrated Model of Intergroup Contact and Threat to frame our thinking about ageism towards older adults. In the context of dramatically altered opportunities for, or imposition of, intergenerational contact, and the presence of new types of intergenerational threats, it seems likely that both the levels and forms of ageism have been affected. Moreover, the social psychological contact of the future is now very different from that which preceded the pandemic. There are good reasons to be concerned that the combination of an extended period of diminished intergenerational contact and elevated intergenerational threat could be particularly problematic for future intergenerational relationships. More research will be needed to determine whether legacy factors including past contact, or new unifying factors, may help to mitigate the accumulating effects of social and economic threats. More work is also needed to understand how far investment in specific forms of education, policy support or intergenerational contact programs have short-term or enduring effects.

ORCID

Lisbeth Drury  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0964-7068>

Dominic Abrams  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2113-4572>

Hannah J. Swift  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1911-0782>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Libby Drury is a Senior Lecturer in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her research interests include intergenerational relationships, ageism, stereotypes, and aging at work. She has contributed evidence to the UK Government Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness and the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Inclusion. She has published reports for Age UK, British Medical Association and UK Government Office for Science. Her empirical research is published in *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology*, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*.

Dominic Abrams is Professor of Social Psychology and Director of the Centre for the Study of Group Processes at the University of Kent. His research focuses on the psychological dynamics of social exclusion and inclusion within and between groups. He is a past president of SPSSI, and currently the Academic Lead for the British Academy's Covid and Society reviews and chair of its Cohesive Societies program. He is co-Editor with Michael A. Hogg of the journal *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*.

Hannah J. Swift is Senior Lecturer in Social and Organizational Psychology at the University of Kent. Her research focuses on attitudes to aging, ageism, stereotype threat, and factors that contribute to active, healthy aging, and has contributed to the evidence base on ageism

with reports for UK government, charity, and third sector organizations, and has been widely published in peer-reviewed journals.

How to cite this article: Drury, L., Abrams, D. & Swift, H.J. (2022) Intergenerational contact during and beyond COVID-19. *Journal of Social Issues*, 78, 860–882.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12551>