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Urban Space and Social Cognition: The Effect of Urban Space on Intergroup Perceptions

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Cities and neighborhoods are key sites of migration-related diversity. Differences in lifestyle, class, ethnicity, or religion become visible in urban spaces, such as neighborhood bars, shops, or cafes. This article applies a social cognitive approach to explore how urban spaces shape the relationship between ethnic encounters and intergroup perceptions. Theoretical work on urbanism suggests that public and private spaces have different effects on people's perceptions of group interdependence and relative group status. This article contributes to the ongoing debate between conflict and contact schools of thought by defining how contextual conditions promote ethnic diversity's positive or negative effects on intergroup perceptions.

Keywords: urban space; city; intergroup perceptions; stereotype content; migration; social cognition

Recent migration research shows renewed attention to cities and neighborhoods as key sites of migration-related diversity (Crul 2016; Vertovec 2007). Cities with inhabitants comprising more than 170 nationalities are becoming more a rule than an exception. With no less than 50 percent of the population from first- or second-generation migration backgrounds, and more than 180 different nationalities, cities such as Amsterdam or Rotterdam are hubs for ethnic

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and cultural diversity (Crul, Lelie, and Keskiner 2019). In these cities, people with diverse backgrounds live in close proximity to one another and share various urban spaces. Differences in lifestyle, class, ethnicity, or religion become visible in urban localities such as neighborhood bars, corner shops, and cafes (Valentine 2014). Scholars are, therefore, trying to better understand how people perceive an increasingly diversifying urban population “on the ground” within the contexts of their own city and neighborhood localities (Berg and Sigona 2013).

Research in social cognition that examines how context shapes intergroup perceptions has established that people’s ability to navigate in a social context depends on their mental representations of social groups (Fiske and Taylor 2020). When encountering diverse others, people have to evaluate quickly whether members of a particular social group are friendly (or hostile) and likely to promote (or threaten) the goals of the ingroup. The stereotype content model (SCM) offers a framework to study intergroup perception (Fiske et al. 2002, 1999). The model proposes that intergroup perceptions are both group and context dependent. People in a given context are likely to share stereotypes and, consequently, feel and act similarly toward social groups depending on structural group interdependencies and status/power relations between groups (Fiske 2018). Empirical data from different cultures have corroborated the relationship between social structural variables and intergroup perceptions (e.g., Asbrock 2010; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Fiske et al. 2002).

However, researchers using the SCM usually study “context” at the level of the nation-state. The micro-setting, that is, the level of everyday life encounters such as in restaurants, cafes, or public transport stations, is rarely studied. A rich social sciences tradition shows that contextual diversity in spaces, such as associations (Van der Meer 2016), schools (Janmaat 2015), leisure (Schaeffer 2013), consumption (Radice 2016), the workplace (Kokkonen, Esaiaasson, and Gilljam 2015), or social organizations (Achbari 2015), provides important *meeting opportunities* for people of different backgrounds. Based on the contact theory framework, research has argued that regular exposure enhances knowledge about the outgroup, reduces anxiety about intergroup contact, increases empathy, and facilitates general trust (e.g., Hewstone 2003; Stephan and Stephan 2000; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008).

Yet urban scholars have pointed out that urban spaces are not “physical container[s]” (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1991) that merely provide meeting opportunities for different groups. Recent research suggests that the type of urban micro setting in which people are exposed to one another strongly shapes how other groups are perceived. Different urban spaces tend to socially produce

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different group interactions, depending on whether the space is more (or less) public or private (Piekut and Valentine 2017). Ethnographic observations for example reveal that more distant encounters with strangers on the streets and other publicly accessible spaces, such as shopping plazas, often lack structural interdependencies. Interethnic encounters in public spaces often remain largely fleeting and superficial, while sometimes even reinforcing preexisting group stereotypes (Matejskova and Leitner 2011; Valentine 2008). In contrast, research has shown spaces such as local libraries (Peterson 2017) or the workplace (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2015) to be more conducive to positively influence intergroup perceptions. What is missing in the literature is a systematic identification of stable principles of how and when urban micro settings affect the relationship between ethnic exposure and intergroup perceptions.

Building on existing research, this article starts with a discussion of how intergroup perceptions are formed using dimensions identified by the SCM (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Fiske et al. 2002). In the second section, we draw on urban research studies to conceptualize different types of urban spaces and how they relate to the SCM's intergroup perceptions. Based on this literature, we identify different types of urban spaces that systematically facilitate certain group interdependencies and status perceptions between groups.

Identifying the principles of how urban spaces affect intergroup perceptions can provide valuable clues for policy-makers in diverse communities. The demographic trend toward increasing ethnic diversity in today's cities is likely to continue over the coming decades. Policy-makers who have an interest in finding solutions to tensions arising from ethnic encounters benefit from being able to geographically, demographically, and psychologically locate the sources of intergroup conflicts. The nature of the relationship between urban space and intergroup perceptions may indicate not only where to concentrate efforts to alleviate racial and ethnic tensions, but also which mechanisms are likely to be effective in fostering better intergroup relations.

Conceptual Framework

According to the SCM, people's mental images of diverse social groups are formed along two fundamental dimensions: perceived warmth (Do others have good intentions?) and competence (Are they capable of carrying out their intentions?). The model proposes that these two dimensions of warmth and competence are fundamental to the cognitive categorization of social groups and the organization of emotional and behavioral responses to these groups (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007, 2008; Fiske et al. 2002). Different combinations of stereotypic warmth and competence result in four possible categories of stereotype content, associated with different emotional responses and action tendencies (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007, 2008). Those viewed as low in both warmth and competence (e.g., undocumented migrants) are likely to generate feelings of contempt, prompting discriminatory or exclusionary behaviors. Those viewed as high in both warmth and competence (e.g., middle-class westerners) are expected to elicit feelings of admiration and pride along with more positive interpersonal

behaviors like approach and cooperation. Groups with mixed stereotypes elicit more ambivalent emotion and behavior. For example, those viewed as high in warmth but low in competence (e.g., Italians in the United States) elicit pity or sympathy associated with the desire to help but to avoid social contact when possible. Conversely, stereotypically low-warmth but high-competence groups (e.g., Asian Americans) elicit envy or jealousy, which can lead to either cooperation (to benefit from their resources) or the tendency to attack these groups and blame them for disruptions in society (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007).

The SCM posits that perceptions of warmth and competence depend largely on the type of structural *interdependence* between groups and the relative *status* between groups. People attribute warmth to those perceived to be harmless (in that they are not competing with the ingroup, for jobs, school admissions, power, and resources). Competition for resources suggests that group members have negative intentions toward others, while knowing that a group intends to cooperate suggests positive intentions toward others. Status, on the other side, answers the question of competence. Groups with high status are typically perceived as more competent, while low-status groups are associated with less competence. In a related argument, Allport (1954) posited equal-status relations between racial and ethnic groups as a necessary precondition for improving intergroup perceptions. Discriminatory practices within societies often establish and maintain a lower status position for minority groups, for instance in terms of attainable jobs, income, housing, and education. In that sense, equal-status situations in which differences in academic backgrounds, wealth, skill, or experiences are less salient across groups should lead to improved intergroup perceptions (Koschate and van Dick 2011).

Empirical work on stereotype content has typically measured perceptions of social groups using ratings of warmth and competence. Although both warmth and competence dimensions emerge consistently across a variety of studies, much of the evidence suggests that warmth judgments are more dominant. Warmth judgment come before competence judgments while also more strongly influencing affective and behavioral reactions. The primacy of warmth judgments is likely the result of evolutionary forces as another person's intentions for good or ill are more important to survival than whether the other person can act on those intentions (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007, 2008).

Overall, the SCM places the origins of intergroup perceptions primarily in the social-structural relations between groups. Group-level characteristics such as nationality, migration history, or socioeconomic status influence how a particular group is perceived and stereotyped (Bai, Ramos, and Fiske 2020). The next section elaborates on how different types of urban micro settings shape how social-structural relations between groups are perceived on a local level. Based on urban research, different types of urban spaces can systematically shape group interdependencies and status perceptions between groups.

Urban Space

In everyday urban life, routines such as picking up groceries, getting a haircut, stopping for coffee, or walking to the metro station are always bound to particular

spaces. As such, urban encounters happen at a variety of different spaces in the city (Piekut and Valentines 2017). The most common conceptual distinction separates public and private space. While public space usually refers to openly accessible space, private space usually does not allow strangers free access (Wentz 2010, 452). However, the public-private dichotomy has broken into more fine-grained typologies to better reflect the complexity of urban encounters, for example, by distinguishing between public, semipublic, and the private realm (Peterson 2017). While the public realm includes streets, parks, or the public transportation system where one meets strangers, semipublic spaces are characterized by communal relations among neighbors, with colleagues in the workplace or acquaintances through nonprofit organizations or schools. Semipublic spaces might include consumption spaces such as cafes, bars, and restaurants; or socialization spaces, such as sport clubs, interest clubs, or places of religious meetings (Piekut and Valentine 2017).

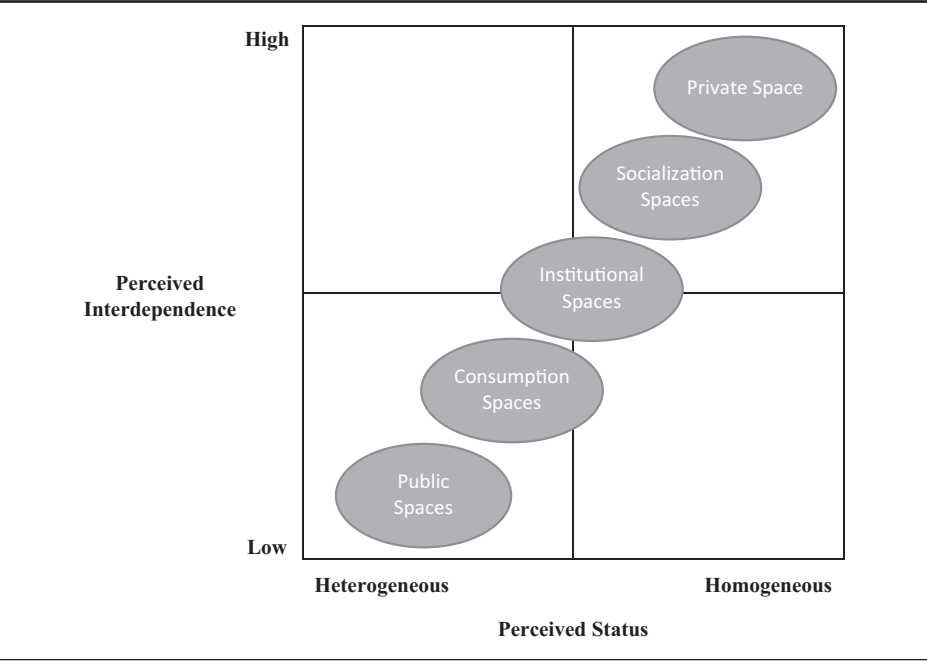
Urban scholars suggest a causal relationship between urban spaces and intergroup perception. They have focused, for example, on the way certain *spatial configuration* facilitates or inhibits cooperative intergroup relations within spaces. Shared corridors and common spaces of high-rise buildings in Singapore have been found to facilitate positive interactions such as greeting neighbors and sharing household tasks (Wise and Velayutham 2014, 410–15). Similarly, Dutch residents without migration backgrounds living in dense four-story buildings have been found to feel less threatened by ethnic diversity than people living in suburbs characterized by larger housing blocks (Crul, Steinmetz, and Lelie 2020). Research has also pointed out that street furniture in public spaces such as benches or bus shelters can facilitate positive group interactions (Radice 2016).

Yet while urban spaces have physical locations and particular spatial configurations, space is always also a social product (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1991). Spaces are made meaningful by people's actions and behaviors. People's activities create and constantly re-create spaces (Peterson 2017). As a result, some spaces might appear more open and neutral; whereas others might be perceived as parochial, meaning that, in them, people know each other, express stronger forms of cooperative interdependence, and perceive themselves as similar coequals (Lofland 1989; Wessendorf 2014). Taking a social cognition approach, the SCM helps to elicit the different mechanisms through which different types of urban spaces can influence intergroup perceptions. As noted, the SCM posits that intergroup perceptions are shaped by the perceiver's knowledge about actual relations between groups. Warmth and competence stereotypes respectively are shaped by perceived group interdependence and status positions of groups within a particular social context. This article argues that different types of urban spaces shape how people perceive intergroup interdependence and respective status. First, spaces differ in the degree to which they facilitate interdependence between groups depending on whether a space is more public or more private. Interdependence perceptions are shaped in part by informational cues from the environment (Kohfeld 1989). Individuals tend to associate particular spaces such as the workspace, a library, or a public bus stop with certain appropriate norms of behaviors (Laurier and Philo 2006). These unwritten rules influence people's

expectations about the behavioral intentions of others and how they will interact. Abidance to “rules of conduct,” such as keeping one’s distance and being quiet in a local library, often even help people to feel at ease because they can predict the behavior of others (Harris 2003). Interactions at a public metro station, for example, are mostly fleeting and superficial with little perceived interdependencies (Valentine 2008). On the other side, a semipublic space, such as a neighborhood community center, is more likely to be associated with norms of cooperative behavior as people within this community center are typically believed to organize around common goals. One way to conceptualize urban space is, therefore, to look at the degree to which different types of urban spaces shape the structural interdependence across groups. Interdependence can range from low to high. High interdependence is the case when people are either in strongly cooperative or competitive relations with each other. Low interdependence is the case when people are in no significant relationship with each other. Arguably, urban spaces are more likely to affect the relationship between ethnic exposure and intergroup perceptions when they significantly shape interdependencies across groups. Spaces that facilitate cooperative interdependencies are more likely to lead to warmth perceptions while facilitating positive emotions and interpersonal behaviors. Spaces that facilitate rather competitive interdependencies might actually lead to colder intergroup evaluations as well as more negative emotions and behaviors. In contrast, spaces marked by weak interdependencies might do little to actually influence peoples’ preexisting warmth perceptions. Overall, interdependence between groups should increase from public to more private spaces (see Figure 1).

The second way that urban space influences perceptions of other social groups is by influencing perceived status relations. Borrowing from Allport (1954), the argument is that different types of urban spaces can be distinguished to the extent to which they facilitate equal status perceptions across groups. Structurally, urban spaces differ in the degree to which they are open or closed to particular status groups. Public spaces are in principle more open to a greater range of different social status groups than other semipublic spaces such as community centers or local gyms. The chance of encountering different status groups is, therefore, much higher in public spaces than in semipublic spaces (Piekut and Valentine 2017). Research shows that semipublic and institutional spaces are often governed by policies that implicitly or explicitly exclude certain sociocultural groups. Exclusionary barriers such as monetary fees, guest policies, or dress codes might structure certain spaces in a way that incidental contacts across groups are limited (Anicich et al 2021). Consumption spaces such as cafes, restaurants, or bars more or less explicitly cater toward particular sociocultural milieus (Ahn 2017). Socialization spaces tend to have more homogeneous status groups due to homophily mechanisms (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). As a consequence, population groups in spaces that are more private than public are more homogeneous in terms of their sociocultural and economic background. However, another mechanism through which spaces facilitate equal status perceptions is through familiarity. Most residents living in a certain neighborhood visit particular neighborhood locations daily or at least several times a

FIGURE 1
Types of Urban Spaces and Intergroup Perceptions



week. Due to the high chance of meeting familiar others in more private spaces, these spaces might feel more intimate, where people feel like they meet others like themselves (Peterson 2017). Private spaces are, therefore, more likely to induce equal-status perceptions across groups than are public spaces. Spaces that facilitate equal-status perceptions are likely to also facilitate greater competence perceptions. In contrast, spaces with unequal status groups are less likely to facilitate competence perceptions. However, as we already noted, competence perceptions are likely to be secondary to warmth perceptions.

Overall, different urban spaces can conceptually be distinguished in terms of the degree of perceived interdependence and perceptions of similar status positions that they facilitate across individuals and groups. In the following section, we discuss different types of spaces and how they relate to intergroup perceptions by shifting perceptions of group interdependence and status.

Public spaces

The term *public space* mainly refers to open, publicly usable spaces. Public space typically refers to a city’s streets, its parks, public transport stops and stations, squares, green spaces, and playgrounds (Lofland 1973, 19). Much of the academic debate on interethnic encounters in public space can be reframed as a debate on the kind of social interdependence that public space fosters. By allowing people to freely associate and mingle with each other public spaces have long

been believed to encourage urban civic cultures and positive interdependencies (Duyvendak and Wekker 2015). These forms of positive interdependencies were believed to be expressed in everyday public encounters, for example, in small acts of kindness and civility in everyday life such as holding doors open for strangers or sharing seats (Laurier and Philo 2006).

More recently, however, scholars have started to question the idea that public spaces necessarily facilitate positive interdependence. Scholars have pointed out that modern public spaces typically lack any viable interdependence structures. While public spaces are often used by a range of different groups, these spaces do not necessarily facilitate any lasting interactions across these groups (Holland et al. 2007). Simply no reason exists for people to interact in public places, and people can usually manage well without cooperating. Research has argued that urban spaces often provide only “illusory contact” with other groups (Wessel 2009). Public streets in larger cities have especially been described as spaces of transit that produce no actual connection or exchange between strangers (Amin 2002). Ethnographic observations show that interactions in public space are often constructed around general rules of civic inattention toward others (Wessendorf 2014). Civic inattention refers to disinterested forms of interaction in which the individual implies that she or he has no reason to suspect the intentions of others to be good or ill (Goffman 1963). For that reason, public spaces may have in general little influence on perceived interdependencies between individuals and groups at a local level. Arguably, encounters in public space would then in themselves not necessarily change people’s warmth or cold perceptions. Indeed, quantitative studies have demonstrated that ethnic exposure in public space does not directly lead to worsened or improved social relations and attitudes (Laurence 2014; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010). Instead, research suggests that interpersonal contacts and positive interdependence moderates the relationship between ethnic exposure and intergroup perceptions (Ramos et al. 2019; Stolle et al. 2013). Public spaces, however, rarely facilitate interpersonal contacts and positive interdependencies. Warmth perceptions in public space are therefore more likely influenced by peoples’ preexisting group stereotypes that are rooted in group relations.

The effect of public spaces on the relationship between ethnic exposure and status perceptions is likely weak as well. Public spaces tend to be marked by a greater degree of structural openness to a variety of different social status groups. The probability of encountering familiar others on a regular basis is lower than in other types of spaces, which is why perceptions of familiarity and equal status are likely lower.

Semipublic space

Semipublic or parochial spaces are open to the public as well but have a certain private character to them (Wessendorf 2014). This private character relates to changes in control and behavior, with semipublic spaces possibly imposing stricter rules regarding behavior than purely public spaces might do (Peterson 2017). Most neighborhoods have a variety of semipublic (i.e., parochial) spaces such as corner shops, cafes, restaurants, libraries, community centers,

schoolyards, or sports clubs. These spaces are zones for intercultural encounters and have also been referred to as “micro publics” (Amin 2002), and they are deemed important because they offer greater opportunities for interdependence and equal status relations.

Some of these semipublic spaces, such as cafes, bars, restaurants, or shopping streets, have been labeled *consumption spaces*. Consumption spaces have been described as akin to modern market spaces, providing a setting where strangers have a particular reason to interact with each other (Ahn 2017). To have a conversation with a stranger, a person usually needs a “trigger,” as strangers usually do not simply approach each other to interact. The usual mutual “invisibility” of strangers in urban spaces dissolves in the market situation (Nassehi 2002, 228). Social contacts between unknown individuals occur therefore more consistently within consumption spaces than in public space (Jacobs 2016). These contact situations usually follow certain institutionalized behavioral rules as people enter reciprocal arrangements with other customers (Ahn 2017). For example, people mostly wait their turn or one might ask another customer to hold one’s place in line for a few moments. In some places, talking to strangers seems to be the norm (e.g., in Philadelphia’s indoor market; Anderson 2011, 34). Acquaintances can develop more easily than they do with people one occasionally encounters on a public street (Laurier and Philo 2006). Thus, although these spaces are semipublic, they might foster a greater degree of perceived interdependence with other individuals and groups.

Semipublic spaces also shape status perceptions. Consumption spaces, for example, are often more exclusive than public spaces in the sense that they tend to target particular socioeconomic milieus. As such, groups sharing the same consumption space are likely to perceive each other as more similar in terms of their socioeconomic status. Studies show that a sociocultural group can sometimes dominate a certain semipublic space, such as a café, and thereby exclude other groups from entering the space. In these cases, more negative interdependencies between groups are likely (Ahn 2017).

Consumption spaces in particular have been dismissed by proponents of the McDonaldization theses (Ritzer 1992) as globally commercialized spaces with uniform and standardized services. Recent ethnographic studies, however, show that standardized consumption spaces often generate mundane feelings of copresence and confident familiarity, which might facilitate perceptions of similarity and sameness (Peterson 2017).

Other semipublic spaces, such as local libraries, encourage visitors to engage in activities characteristic of a library, such as borrowing books or reading newspapers. Visitors of local libraries have been found to feel connected to other library users by realizing that they share a common space and participate in similar activities (Iveson and Fincher 2011). As such, semipublic spaces are likely to have a greater effect on equal status perceptions than are public spaces.

Work and educational settings, such as universities or schools, have been labeled institutional spaces (Piekut and Valentine 2017). Institutional spaces are typically marked by greater structural interdependence across individuals and groups than public or consumption spaces. Universities and schools often facilitate repeated interactions that also provide opportunities to get to know each

other more intimately. As such, institutional spaces often provide the context for positive interdependencies sometimes leading to long-lasting relationships that go beyond the immediate institutional space context (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2015). Similarly, workplaces tend to be structured around greater degrees of interdependence. Workers sharing a workplace typically are not completely free to choose their work tasks and colleagues. They usually have to cooperate with their assigned colleagues to achieve their work tasks and to maintain workplace efficiency (e.g., Mutz and Mondak 2006). Moreover, the cost of opting out of assigned positions and refusing to cooperate with colleagues is high in workplaces, as individuals might risk losing their jobs. Institutional settings are of course not free from competitive interdependencies. In the workplace, valuable resources, such as payments, are not equally distributed (Harrison and Klein 2007). Coworkers with lower socioeconomic occupations are more likely to be in competitive interdependencies because of their greater employment vulnerability (DiTomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancy 2007).

Status perceptions of other groups are also shaped by the institutional context. Most people sharing the same workspace or the same educational space generally have more in common than they would with strangers met on the street or in restaurants. Moreover, equality is often at least formality guaranteed by employer-worker agreements or university rules and equality laws. As long as status positions are not extremely unequally distributed, institutional spaces can therefore facilitate more equal status perceptions than public spaces and consumption spaces. Research from a quasi-experimental design with longitudinal data among American students shows that students who moved to and then lived in a more diverse campus indeed perceived more similarities among ethnic groups (Bai, Ramos, and Fiske 2020).

Socialization spaces, such as sport clubs, interest clubs, volunteer associations, or places of religious meetings, are likely associated with even greater degrees of cooperative interdependencies (Piekut and Valentine 2017). Socialization spaces are environments in which individuals are likely to cooperate around common goals. In these spaces, deep and enduring interactions between people who engage in shared activities and common goals can take place. Socialization spaces represent sites of purposeful, organized group activity (Amin 2002). Socialization spaces have also been conceptualized as “micro-publics” (Amin 2002), in which differences across ethnic, religious, class, and other boundaries are bridged and stereotypes broken. Moreover, most social relations are voluntarily initiated and predicated on an equal status than in institutional spaces. As such, intergroup perceptions in socialization spaces should tend toward greater positive interdependence and equal status perceptions than in public and consumption spaces.

Private space

Finally, another distinctive type of space is the private space. The private home is presumed to be a site of some of the most interdependent relations. It is the space where ties between friends and family members are fostered. Relations with family and friends are characterized by stronger attachment than the social

relations that operate in other types of spaces. Even in a highly diverse neighborhood, however, the private space is usually homogeneous with respect to ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics (Wessendorf 2014, 19). Research shows that relatively few people have interethnic ties across close friends and family members. Yet those people living in a mixed household more often develop interethnic friendships than do those living in homogeneous households (Muttarak 2014). The realm of the private facilitates strong interdependence as well as familiarity across members. As such, the private space is likely to have a greater effect on influencing the relationship between ethnic encounters and intergroup perception than other types of spaces.

Discussion

Today's cities are increasingly populated by people with diverse migration backgrounds who share various urban spaces in close proximity. However, these shared micro settings of urban encounters are largely neglected in social cognition research. Developing a framework to conceptualize the relationship between urban space and intergroup perceptions, therefore, has an integral role to play in how we think more clearly about the conditions under which exposure to ethnic groups can improve or worsen intergroup perceptions. From a social cognition perspective, various urban spaces can be distinguished to the degree to which they facilitate perceptions of interdependence and equal status. While every space is unique and forms a complex arrangement of different social and power relations, using urban space typologies might still help to uncover patterns and regularities across different types of spaces.

Methodologically, studying the effect of urban spaces on intergroup perceptions assumes contextual effects on intergroup perceptions. Any study on contextual effects needs to carefully distinguish between contextual and merely compositional effects. Compositional effects arise because people living, working, or visiting in ethnically mixed urban spaces may differ systematically in their characteristics from those who do not live, work, or visit in these spaces. For example, people without migration backgrounds who live in ethnically mixed neighborhoods may be on average younger or more economically vulnerable than those who live in ethnic majority neighborhoods. Moreover, people with certain characteristics might be more likely to self-select into particular urban spaces. For example, residents with a higher level of education are often more likely to participate in organizations at the neighborhood level, such as neighborhood, housing, and other social organizations (Crul, Steinmetz, and Lelie 2020). Research also shows that people who are generally more open to new experiences, or who are more tolerant of diversity, are more likely to actively seek out diverse spaces (Wessel 2009). People with a more negative orientation toward ethnic minority groups, in contrast, might be less likely to seek out urban spaces that are inhabited by diverse populations (Anicich et al. 2021). Positive perceptions and attitudes of residents toward racial and ethnic minorities in their neighborhood are often not the result of increased contact with these minorities, but

rather the reason why such residents choose to move into a racially and ethnically mixed area in the first place (Wessel 2009).

Although compositional and contextual effects can be distinguished analytically, in practice they are difficult to disentangle. The fact that people can and do choose their favorite neighborhood restaurants, bars, or cafes—and are not randomly assigned to them—creates a causal ambiguity that cannot be ignored. Thus, survey researchers need to consider the possibility of self-selection and reversed causality. To diminish this problem, survey researchers should introduce control variables that take into account people's inclinations to either actively avoid or seek out contact with diverse others. Randomized controlled experiments could also be utilized to overcome self-selection problems. Such experiments could study the effects of particular elements of urban spaces on intergroup perceptions. Researchers could make use of visual images or vignettes to experimentally expose people to certain conceptual dimensions of urban spaces.

Interaction effects may also exist between individual characteristics and urban space characteristics. Different people might be differentially affected by the same urban space because they have a need for varying degrees of interdependence and equal status. Some people might, for example, react more strongly to spaces that stimulate friendly and pleasant encounters. Spaces where acting “as if being friends” can help certain people to feel at “home” by creating imagined moments of friendship and intimacy across difference (Duyvendak and Wekke 2015). On the other side, spaces that stimulate shorter and more distant encounters might help other people to feel more comfortable with diverse others by allowing them to be “among others without being in a state of committed relations” (Holm 2013). Moreover, equal status seems to be a more important condition for low-status groups and individuals. High-status groups may even perceive equal status within the situation as a threat to positive distinctiveness (Koschate and van Dick 2011; Pettigrew 1998).

Overall, the effects of different types of urban spaces on intergroup perceptions can provide fruitful avenues for further quantitative and qualitative research. A focus on the types of urban spaces situates interethnic encounters in space, while providing conceptual tools to better understand the conditions that facilitate more positive or negative intergroup relations.

In times of increasing digitalization of social interactions, the overall relevance of actual physical proximity in urban space has been frequently questioned. Some scholars have argued that new forms of virtual online communication will result in the de-spatialization of human encounter (Graham 1998). Indeed, ever more new forms of communication take place in virtual spaces, providing important indirect, nonexperiential information sources about other groups (Cain, Citrin, and Wong 2000). Yet despite new developments in communications, new forms of communication are unlikely to replace all existing forms of face-to-face interactions. Humans are a highly sociable species, and the direct company of others seems to be fundamental to a human sense of existence and belonging. Virtual forms of interactions might in fact facilitate new demands for actual face-to-face interactions in urban space. The city as the urban context of encounters with diversity will, therefore, remain influential in shaping intergroup perceptions.

Last, given the possible influence of urban spaces on intergroup perceptions, what design and management policies should policy-makers adopt to create urban spaces that facilitate more positive intergroup perceptions? While intergroup perceptions are critically shaped by information sources outside the local environments, local planning frameworks are still important in that they shape how the reality of diversity is experienced on the ground. Urban planners and/or architects have come to advocate for designing urban spaces to promote increased contact between different social groups in public spaces such as parks and playgrounds (e.g., Fincher et al. 2014; Sandercock 2003). In practice, however, designed spaces rarely get used in the way they were intended. This is because positive interdependencies and equal-status relations are social dimensions of urban spaces that are difficult to implement by physical designs alone. Numerous urban researchers have shown that designed urban spaces sometimes often simply resegregate through people's practices (e.g., Holland et al. 2007). However, urban planners and local policy-makers can work toward designing urban spaces in a way that they are at least accessible for different groups while limiting exclusionary barriers. Spaces can be designed to facilitate the integration of routes and routines of different groups to increase chance encounters and improved familiarities across groups. By acknowledging that different urban spaces have different effects on intergroup relations, policy-makers and local residents are better equipped to create livable neighborhoods.

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