

# Encounter of a racially mixed group with stressful situations

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**Abstract:** *This conceptual article focuses on the dynamics of ethnically/ racially mixed groups in the encounter with a highly stressful situation. To inform the understanding of groups at the intersection of stress and racially mixed group composition, stress and group work literature is critically reviewed and analyzed. Anchored in theoretical, clinical and empirical literature about small groups as microcosms of societal structure and power relationships, specifically as it relates to race and ethnicity, group processes that occur when an ethnically/racially mixed group experiences a stressful event are discussed.*

*The challenges that such an experience poses to the group are presented and illustrated by the use of anecdotal examples from the author's national and international experience as a social work practitioner, educator and trainer. Implications for practice and directions for future research are offered.*

**Key words:** *racially mixed group; group composition; group coping; stressful encounter; groupwork*

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## **Introduction**

That race can affect group interaction, dynamics and performance and create in-group dichotomies has been documented extensively in the literature (Goar & Sell, 2005; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis predicts that increased interaction between members of minority and majority groups is associated with a decrease in the degree of mutual prejudice and increase in cross-racial social bonding.

However, research of the effects of mixed race composition on group functioning has produced inconsistent results (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Some studies indicated the enhancement of cooperative approach to work, information sharing, flexibility, thoughtfulness, intellectual engagement, academic motivation, development of social skills creative problem solving and decision making (Binder, Zagefka, Brown et al., 2009; Brown, Eller, Leeds & Stace, 2007; Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999; Phillips, Mannix, Neale & Gruenfeld, 2004; Sommers, 2006). Other studies found that it may incite inter-group bias and interpersonal conflict, negatively affect group communication, decrease group cohesion and lead to undesirable outcomes such as poor performance and lower satisfaction of group members (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams & Neale, 1996; Hein & Moore, 2009; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Maznevski, 1994; Peled, 1996). Pearson et al. (2008) suggested that 'even brief interactions with members of racial or ethnic out-groups can be not only awkward but also cognitively and emotionally taxing for members of both minority and majority groups' (p. 1272). Furthermore, efforts to promote positive interactions may achieve just the opposite and create negative inter-group experiences (Plant, 2004; Vorauer & Turpie, 2004).

The effects of intergroup contact have been documented to be moderated by other factors such as group members' perspectives on cultural diversity, the longevity of the group relationships, the nature of the diversity and of the task, and specifically intergroup anxiety (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Sommers, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

Empirical and clinical knowledge relative the encounter of groups and stress focused on three aspects: (1) the use of groups to process individual traumatic experience; (2) diverse types of internal tension

in groups that may occur naturally as part of group development such as the tension between the needs and wants of the individuals and the group as a whole; (3) inter-racial tensions and the effects of the social context on small groups (Nuttman-Shwartz & Shay, 2006). However, with few exceptions, discussion of encountering a stressful event by the group, particularly by a racially/ethnically mixed group, is scarce in the professional discourse (Sagy, Steinberg & Diab, 2006). It has been recognized that encountering a highly stressful event may affect individuals, families, groups and communities (Harvey & Bryant, 1999; Löckenhoff et al., 2009; Shore, Vollmer & Tatum, 1989; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Nevertheless, the effects of such an encounter on groups have been addressed mostly in early group literature. It has been suggested that group members' basic assumptions and group cohesiveness, affect, atmosphere, mutual expectations and communication patterns may be impacted (e.g. Mallinger, 1981; Torrance, 1954).

However, there is paucity of discussion of possible effects of group composition, specifically from a racial perspective, on the reaction to stressor events. The growing diversity of mixed groups in educational, employment and social environments world-wide increases the opportunities for mixed groups to face stress. Better understanding of the processes, dynamics and outcomes of such encounters can guide the development of effective strategies to facilitate the coping of mixed groups with the stressors.

To address the aforementioned gap in knowledge, this article focuses on the encounter of mixed race groups with a highly stressful situation, the effects on group dynamics and strategies for addressing them. It includes three parts. First the mixed race group as a microcosm is discussed; second, the aspects of facing a stressful event by racially mixed groups is examined and illustrated by anecdotal practice experiences; finally, strategies for effectively addressing groups' reaction to the stress and potentially fostering growth are offered.

## **Mixed race groups as microcosms**

Small groups are microcosms of social structure and power relationships that are evident in the wider society (Brown & Mistry, 2005). While groups vary in numerous aspects such as their purpose, structure, dynamics, leadership and power relationships, some general processes are universal. One such etic characteristic is that members enter the group with their own interpersonal perception and concerns relative to social interactions (Shelton, 2003) as well as their social frames of reference (Shapiro, 1990), which can be evoked by the group experience and color their relationships. Thus, societal inequalities and inter-group attitudes are reflected and reproduced in the interactions of smaller groups (Goar, 2007).

One dimension of the societal structure, which is manifested in small groups, is race and ethnicity and the interpersonal relationships of members reflect their racial/ ethnic identity. That one's identity is based, in part, on membership in significant social categories such as racial and ethnic affiliation has been documented extensively (Helmes, 1994; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Tajfel, 1981). At the core of ethnic identity is a sense of self as a group member that develops over time through an active process of investigation, learning, and commitment (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Such sense of belonging enhances strong attachment and a personal investment in a group. For example, Wardi (1992) documented the self perception of holocaust survivors of their role as memory carriers and of their offspring as the continuation of and replacement for the family members who were killed. Similarly, Sichrovsky (1988) used personal narratives to document the experience of children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators, the burden of guilt many of whom carried for their parents and the strategies that they employed to escape the stigma of their collective identity including developing alternative identities.

The degree to which individuals express their racial-cultural identity varies under different circumstances 'depending on the salience and meaning of that identity in the context within which he or she is operating' (Ely & Thomas, 2001, p. 231). For example, the behavior of those who are traditionally in a minority status is influenced by the degree of proportional representation of their group in their environment and by their immediate social environment (Ely &

Thomas, 2001) as well as by group status and group size (Jackson, 1999). Thus, Vo-Jutabha and colleagues (2009) found differences between Vietnamese adolescents who lived in ethnic enclaves and those who did not. Minority group members who are positioned in the solo status i.e. being the only members from their group (MacDonald, 2006; Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002) may feel frustrated when they are perceived as representatives of their group (Hopkins, Greenwood & Birchall, 2007). Similarly, in the US 'part of the black person's frame of reference is that they experience living each day in a racist society controlled by white people, and the white person's frame of reference takes for granted their superior status and power as a white person in relation to black people and all those from minority ethnic groups' (Shapiro, 1990, pp. 135-136). However, the same individuals in an African context, where they are part of the majority, may react differently in similar situations. My own personal experience suggests that Israeli immigrants in the US tend to adopt different ways of behavior, expression and relationships within their 'national' enclave than when they are with non-Israeli friends and colleagues.

Racially-mixed groups create an arena for the encounter between individuals with diverse ethnic/racial identity. Inter-group interactions between racial or ethnic majority and minority groups are often stressful for members of both groups (Pearson et al., 2008). For example, the interaction between ethnically and racially diverse sub-groups may become a representation of historical relationships between the social groups of which they are members. Personal encounters become a confrontation between Blacks and Whites, Jews and Christians, Latinos and Asians, Arabs and Jews rather than between Jane and Ivory or Roger and Juan.

Thus, because of their hypervigilance based on life long experience of discriminatory attitudes, members from minority groups tend to be sensitive to any signs of discrimination whereas majority group members may act out fears and discomfort of which they may not even be fully aware (Pearson et al., 2008; Shelton, 2003). Magnified sensitivity to even the slightest non verbal clues may lead to overreaction on both sides. Acts which in a homogenous group would be interpreted as mere selfish or inconsiderate such as taking a disproportionate large portion of a cake or choosing the most comfortable seat by a majority group member may be filtered through the racial/ethnic lens and interpreted

as a racist act. For example, when they are in a mixed Jewish-Arab group, the 'antennas' of Israeli Arabs, who belong to a minority group that has been subjected to discrimination, are raised for any anti-Muslim comment as are those of Jewish members to what may be seen as implying support of terrorism.

Furthermore, the collective membership of the individual may significantly affect differential interpretation of behavior, attitude toward it and consequently interpersonal interaction with members of the in-group as compared to the same behavior directed at out-group members (Rahimi & Fisher, 2002). For example, Shelton (2003) found that Whites' wish to appear as non-prejudiced and fair-minded and Blacks' concerns that they will be the target of prejudicial treatment affected the mutual relationships, the degree of anxiety and of joy in the interaction.

Because of the effects that mixed groups may have on their members, arguments have been made for racially unmixed groups (Brown & Mistry, 2005; Davis & Proctor, 1989). Specifically, there is evidence that 'for many purposes an all-black or ethnic-specific group is both preferred by black members, and more productive, certainly when issues of racial identity, racism and culture are central to the task' (p. 137). Thus, we witness all-black groups such as black-caucuses in colleges and universities, professional organizations of black social workers, accountants, engineers and schools educators and the campaign to create black sections in the Labor Party in Britain.

### **Racially mixed groups' encounter with stressful situations**

The self definition and expression of the racial/ethnic and social aspect of identity is dynamic such that ethnic identity changes over time and context and at different times individuals use different labels to self categorize their racial/ethnic (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). What particular identity is claimed can depend on how one is seen by others as well as situational cues (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Phinney & Ong, 2007). When a particular affiliation becomes salient, certain aspects of individual identity tend to take center role in shaping the response to a situation (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Exposure to a stressful event is one factor that may determine which identity becomes dominant at a particular time. Specifically, encountering a racially meaningful stressor event intensified participants' racial identity. When such a stressful event is historically anchored in one's racial/ethnic affiliation, it may bring to the forefront the ethnic identity as dominating one's cognitive processing of the event, emotional reaction to it and behavior. Thus, in a visit to a concentration camp, a secular Jew, who under normal circumstances does not observe any dietary rules, fails to attend religious ceremonies or celebrate religious holiday, may experience an intensification of her or his 'Jewishness' and manifest an emotional reaction based on group membership rather than personal identity. Similarly, in a visit to the slave castles in West Africa, where in what is conceptualized as the *Maafa* (a Swahili term for disaster referring to the Holocaust of Enslavement), an estimated 9.4 to 12 million blacks were imprisoned in inhuman conditions, abused, tortured and eventually traded for slavery in America (Lovejoy, 2000), African-Americans of slavery ancestry may experience an intensification of their Black identity.

Such a powerful experience of facing the history of their people and reconnecting to their roots, may galvanize Black's racial affiliation as a dominant component of their identity, intensify their identification with the suffering of their ancestors, force them to revisit the 'ghosts' of being decedents of slaves and become the engine of behavior at that particular situation. A similar dynamic may occur to Japanese on a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, which commemorates the victims of the atomic bomb in World War II. Such a visit may ignite feelings of sadness, anger and connectedness to one's heritage of being victims of an atomic bomb, which is part of the Japanese legacy as evident by comment posted on visitors' websites.

While potentially emotional and painful to all, particular stressful events may be more traumatic for some individuals. Thus, for descendents of the victimized racial group, such an encounter may kindle the emergence of ethnic memory, reconnecting with the past and revitalizing it in the present and often means wrestling with 'ghosts' (Alund, 1997). Blacks, Jews or Japanese may identify with the suffering of the cruelty of slavery, the Holocaust or the atomic bomb while Whites, Germans and Americans may feel being blamed for sharing the skin color and/or nationality of the oppressors and helpless because there is

nothing they could do to change the situation. For example, although I knew all along that my grandparents were exterminated in a death camp, actually seeing the sight on a visit to the Auschwitz death camp, made my family legacy vivid and concrete. Standing in front of the crematorium gave me a new sense of knowing on a deeper real level what it was like for my great grandmother. I could visualize them being beaten, abused, raped, tortured, bleeding, and starving. I could actually see the picture and it evoked in me a lot of pain and anger.

When various group members act from their ethnic/racial identity in the encounter with a stressful event, the dynamic of the group may change. For example, on the morning following the terrorist attack on 9/11 a group of graduate students from communities that suffered numerous casualties attended a research methods course. Ignoring the planned content for the class, students started to process their experience. The dominant themes were shock, anxiety and anger relative to 'what they did to us, to America'. While considerable sorrow and uncertainty dominated and mutual empathy was expressed, sub-groups started to gradually become evident with some students of Irish origin reminiscing about national related traumatic events and several Jewish students uniting mostly around anti-Muslim feelings.

Specifically, an exposure to the racially-colored stressful event in the context of a mixed group may activate the unfinished business of race relationships and both sides may become trapped in the prison of their own ethnic/racial affiliation, which emerges as a dominant definer of their perception by the others irrespective to their personal beliefs and values; i.e. they are viewed as a White rather than as Amy, a Japanese rather than Akio, a German rather than Heinz or a Black rather than Tania.

Because each group relives the experience of their 'tribe' and feels compelled to demonstrate their loyalty to their ancestors, the divide along racial lines and the animosity between the two groups is exacerbated (Binder, Zagefka et al., 2009; Brown & Mistry, 2005). While both black and white group members may recognize rationally that the latter bear no responsibility for the historical evil and oppression done during slavery, on the emotional and unconscious level the Black may view the Whites as representing the aggressors and react to them with anger and distance whereas the Whites may feel being blamed and attacked merely for being who they are as well as the burden of

collective guilt, and yet helpless leading both groups to experience a cognitive-emotional consonance. The self-digging in the racial/ethnic identity as the dominant modus operandi in the face of a stressful situation may incite polarization and splitting, and, tensions 'curbed' underground float to the surface.

The use of splitting when group members feel helpless has been documented specifically in clinical groups. For example, Weinberg, Nuttman-Shwartz and Gilmore (2005) posit 'Having felt helpless under traumatic conditions, they [group members. R. B.] make special efforts to gain control over their environment and relationships. This might be perceived as manipulative or controlling when it occurs in the group and can result in group conflicts and emotional turmoil, especially since many members may be using this defense simultaneously... Massive projections are common, such as ascribing evil intentions to innocent acts. Splitting occurs when members are perceived as either 'good' or 'bad' ' (pp. 195-196).

The splitting tends to begot projection of wrath at the suffering inflicted on one's people on other group members who become representatives of the aggressor. Thus when a group of descendents of slaves and oppressors, Jews and Germans, Japanese and Americans, Israelis and Palestinians face a stressor event, the group tends to become polarized.

## **Addressing stress-related reactions in mixed groups**

To address the challenges described above and help group members develop effective strategies of coping with stressful events in the context of mixed groups as well as potentially perceive benefits from them, both cognitive and emotional processing are critical vehicles. To foster such processing, two bodies of knowledge need to be combined, i.e. principles for conflict resolution and strategies relative to coping with trauma as they are related to groups.

### **Conflict resolution literature**

Conflict resolution literature has offered extensive evidence that providing opportunities for social interaction and controlled contact in a

safe environment is effective in reducing inter-groups prejudice, mutual antipathies and hostility and building trust; thus decreasing conflict (Mallett, Wilson & Gilbert, 2008; Maoz & Ellis, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). For example, applying Kurt Lewin's force field approach to using groups to break 'social habits', reexamine stereotypes and adopt new perceptions and behaviors, Bargal (2008) developed workshops for Jewish and Arab Israeli youth. The workshops are designed to bring together members of social groups that are part of a conflict and create conditions that are conducive to the development of mutual familiarity and a dialogue relative to the roots and manifestations of the conflict. The groups become 'cultural islands', in which creation of rapport is encouraged to allow the development of trust that enhances sharing and 'unfreezing' of biases relative to group members of a different ethnic cultural background. Such an atmosphere paves the road to a dialogue in which members can revise their social and self-perceptions so that they can perceive people and social events 'in a way that reaches beyond common stereotypes or false notions' (p.46). Developing such mutual understanding can help unite the group and equip it to be better prepared for addressing future stressful events.

To create conditions for such a dialogue, societal, structural and psychological barriers to inter-group contact need to be removed and mutual pre-conceived expectations need to be aired and clarified (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). The anticipation of interactions with members of other groups has been documented as characterized by a higher level of stress than with one's own (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996; Pearson et al., 2008). Mutual perceptions and emotions may present barriers to a productive dialogue (Richeson & Shelton, 2007) and lead to minimization of interest in seeking and sustaining inter-group contact (Shelton & Richeson, 2005) and promote disengagement with groups of the 'others'. Thus, Pearson and colleagues (2008) provided evidence of the fragility of inter-group relations compared to intra-group relations. Such fragility must be addressed effectively. However, providing opportunities to reflect on those perceptions can pave the road to collaborative coping with external stress. For example, a director of a BSW program in northern Israel, which emphasizes cultural sensitivity and processing of ethnic prejudice, reported that Druze, Muslim and Christian Arabs students were able to express mutual concern for each other's relatives during the 2009 armed conflict. Jewish students

expressed worry for relatives of their Arabic classmates under fire in Gaza and Arab students expressed caring about relatives of their Jewish classmates who were in combat (Yael Geron, personal communication, July 2, 2009).

It has been found that preliminary pre-group preparation is of outmost importance to help reduce the tendency to focus on differences from out-group members and underestimate similarities (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). Initial meetings within racially homogenous groups prior to heterogeneous groups meeting, and if feasible prior to the encounter with the stressful event, can help alleviate at least part of the potential tension and pave the way to productive communication and collaboration. Thus, in a study of the interaction between Blacks and Whites, Shelton (2003) found that whites who were instructed prior to the interaction to be concerned about appearing prejudiced and try not to be prejudiced were more liked by the Blacks counterparties than those whose sensitivity was not enhanced by such instruction. Similarly, Bargal (2008) reported the importance of separate meetings of Arab and Jewish in their home territories in groups led by prospective facilitators of the same nationality.

While meetings designed for the processing of stressful experience in groups that are racially/ethnically mixed are very useful, they may often be colored by intense emotions, stormy atmosphere and transference. Emotional, cognitive and behavioral focused strategies may help ameliorate such emotions and allow the group to unite and collaborate. Anecdotal clinical experience has shown the importance of emotional and cognitive processing leading to the ability to work together, for members of different racial background to express their experience, reaction and interpretation of their experiences and for other members to be open to hear it. Sometimes such sharing may take an accusatory nature, requiring each racial sub-group to exercise patience. The role of a facilitator is to help identify the emotional motivation for statements and understand the pain being manifested. A great degree of containing ability is required to allow the expression of the feelings in order to come to terms with realities (past and present) that are unchangeable as well as provide a role model for other group members.

### Trauma literature

Trauma literature has shown that groups can be effective in helping individuals cope with stress and trauma by providing protection and support, depathologizing, normalizing and universalizing reactions, instilling hope, sharing practical information and exposing to role models, thus offering members opportunities to process their experiences in a safe context to share, reflect and grow through interactions with who share similar experiences (Berger, 1996; Foy, Unger & Wattenberg, 2004).

Stress and coping theories and empirical findings suggested that the values and norms of the social environment of group members as well as its external environment can affect the way in which the group conceptualizes, interprets and processes stressful events that it encounters, shape acceptable ways to react to such events and guide the process of reorganization and restructuring the group's assumptive world such as members' inter-racial expectations.

The question arises how the combination of the aforementioned knowledge can be translated into effectively addressing groups' reaction to the stress and potentially fostering growth in racially mixed groups.

Because creating a safe space and supportive environment has been identified as critical both in conflict resolution and stress literature, this should be the first guiding principle in any effort to help mixed-race groups to cope effectively with a stressful experience. While providing such a space is important in all groups, it is crucial in mixed groups. Allowing group members to feel safe can be achieved by a balanced racial composition of group members and group leadership. Such make up of the group will also free members of racial minorities of the uncomfortable solo status. For example, participants in a training group for social work students who were exposed to stressful experiences indicated that the diverse racial/ethnic group composition had emotional and cognitive benefits. Emotionally, they felt encouraged to express their reactions and feelings; cognitively, they were able to gain both insider's and outsider's perspective of the situation. Furthermore, participants reported that because the group leaders were of different racial/cultural backgrounds they could serve as relevant role models as well as sources of support.

Second, if possible, preparatory training should be offered *before* the group actually encounters an anticipated stressful event. Practice

experience suggests that at the 'heat' of the actual encounter with a stressful situation, there is a tendency to gravitate toward familiar patterns of reaction rather than learn to adopt new modes. Potentially beneficial components of such preparation are information about the 'other' group, the anticipated nature of the stressor event (this may not always be known or feasible), typical reactions that it tends to trigger and potential effects on individuals and the group dynamic, strategies for conflict resolution and techniques for stress management as well as psycho-education about the possibility, nature and process of PTG. High level of preparedness and clear information have been documented as helpful in coping with stress (Lahad, 2005). Such preparation can neutralize some negative reactions to the stressor event, facilitate participants' ability to productively cope with it and enhance group solidarity and cohesiveness.

Third, because interactions in mixed-race groups often carry emotionally loaded connotations, facilitators need to be very sensitive to the use of language, sequencing of content and of speakers as well as attending to the emotional tone of the group. Specifically, avoiding language that is not neutral and taking over the conversation should be avoided. For example, in a training program for social workers the white group facilitator was challenged by an African-American participant for using the phrase 'it is not a black of white matter' to describe an ambiguous issue.

Finally, the posttraumatic (PTG) model offers a promising direction for addressing group's encounter with stress and fostering growth in groups. According to this model, growth of individuals or systems (i.e. families, groups or communities) occurs as a consequence of cognitive-emotional processing triggered by a stressor event. For growth to occur, the event needs to be disruptive enough to challenge core assumptions about the self, the world and the future. Reorganization of the assumptive world, including attitudes, values, identities, roles and relationship in an effort to process the event opens possibilities for change and growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

While most PTG literature to date focused on individuals, the applicability of the model to human systems of any size has been discussed (Bloom, 1998; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Waller, 2001) and illustrated relative to family systems (Berger & Weiss, 2008). To date, there is scarcity of knowledge regarding PTG in groups and the

available data has focused on personal growth following participation in groups therapy (Lechner, Stoelb & Antoni, 2008). Extending the principles of family PTG to groups can help us understand the dynamics of racially mixed groups encountering stressor events and inform the development of effective interventions. Three main domains have been identified as the foci for fostering PTG in families: Family identity and legacy, member's relationships with each other and with extended family and friends, and the family's belief system and priorities in life (Berger & Weiss, 2008). The same can be expanded to groups to foster the emergence of group integrity as perceived by its members, transform relationships, resolve past conflicts and create a shared meaning of experiences.

Several strategies can be effective in enhancing such changes. First, opportunities for mourning past painful experiences such as those related to racial discrimination should be developed. Such experiences are often overlooked or rejected by the broader society, leaving those who lived them 'stuck' with their anger and frustration. Because the mixed group is a microcosm representation of society, an opportunity to address these experience in the context of such a group, can help the individual achieve personal growth. It is important to move from the too often 'who suffered more', accusative 'who is right' and the roles of the oppressor vs. victim affiliation to mutual recognition and processing of each individual's pain, which may involve having to express and listening to unpleasant content.

Second, encouragement for examining the relational processes in the group and of verbal and/or nonverbal interactions, transactions, and communications to make meaning, change prior beliefs and values as well as redefine group's basic concepts. The question whether beliefs can be systemic and if a mutually constructed and shared 'group perception' and interpretation by the unit as a whole exists beyond the collective perceptions of its members has been debated (e.g. Carron, Brawley, Eys, et al., 2003).

Third, the possibility of growth from adversity should be recognized and accepted while exercising patience and refraining from imposing expectation for PTG to occur because recognizing growth is often a long process. Leaders should listen carefully to identify and highlight statements that indicate group members' potential for positive change and cultivate them; however, no pressure should be put on group

members to achieve change before they indicate that they are ready to move toward it.

Fourth, exposure to role models such as individuals who struggled with similar stressful situation and were able to find benefits from the struggle can foster growth. Thus, if the group includes members with relevant experience, they may become informal leaders and mentors to others in the group.

Finally, using creative means of expression such as theatre and non-verbal intervention strategies e.g. storytelling, music, drawing, collage sculpturing and theatre may facilitate PTG in racially-mixed groups. Because issues relative to stress in such groups are often emotionally loaded and because expressive arts offer group members a way to explore their feelings and connect with other group members in a nonthreatening manner (Newsome, Henderson & Veach, 2005; Rogers, 2007) the use of such means is anticipated to enhance the process of PTG.

To further enhance the identification of factors that determine the ways in which mixed race groups cope with external stressor events and the processes involved to inform the development of effective models to address the challenges involved and enhance transformation of individuals as well as of the group as a whole, more empirical research is necessary. Studies should focus on questions relative to typical group dynamics that operate in the encounter of a racially mixed group with diverse stressful events, the trajectories that groups follow to achieve effective resolution of conflict and the outcomes of various mechanisms. These issues should be examined empirically in the context of different racial composition, relative to diverse stressor events and under varying circumstances. Special attention should be given by researchers to the identification of strategies for effectively addressing groups' reactions in ways that reduce tension and friction, enhance collaboration and facilitates growth of groups and their members from the struggle with the stressor events.

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