

Bridging Social Divides: The Role of Wise Reasoning in Improving Intergroup Relations

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Abstract

Intergroup conflicts spark negativity against opposing groups and fuel social divisions. To improve social cohesion across group differences, effective strategies that help group members deescalate conflict-related hostilities and improve intergroup relations are crucial. Increasing research on psychological wisdom addresses this issue. It offers new actionable insights that will help individuals form more positive attitudes and interactions during intergroup conflicts. In this article, we provide a timely, relevant, and practical review of the role of wise reasoning in improving intergroup relations. In particular, we draw from recent research to introduce the study of wise reasoning, and then we synthesize emerging empirical evidence to argue that wise reasoning helps improve intergroup relations via its effects on promoting cooperation, mitigating affective polarization, and encouraging respectful discourse. Further, we examine the benefits of wise reasoning to explore potential psychological mechanisms. Building on the evidence, we conclude with practical recommendations for more effectively improving intergroup relations to ultimately increase collaboration and solidarity across groups. We encourage more future research and interventions to investigate these promising avenues.

Keywords: conflict, intergroup relations, polarization, wisdom, wise reasoning, balance

Public Significance Statement

Conflicts between social groups pose significant threats to the unity and harmony in contemporary societies. To counteract these conflicts, developing psychological strategies that bridge social divides and improve social cohesion is crucial. In this article, we introduce the concept of wise reasoning, which involves a set of integrative reasoning approaches, namely humility, observer's viewpoint, perspective taking, evolving situations, and search for

compromise. We review evidence suggesting that wise reasoning promotes factors that help build social cohesion: improved intergroup cooperation, less polarized attitudes toward one another between groups, and more respectful disagreements. We also discuss potential psychological mechanisms behind this approach and provide practical suggestions for individuals and organizations.

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In the past decade, we have witnessed conflicts across a variety of social faultlines. From heightened disputes between political parties (e.g., Baldassarri & Page, 2021), intensified racial tensions surrounding police brutality and Black Lives Matter protests (e.g., Bowleg et al., 2022), to anti-immigrant and especially anti-Asian hate during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., Lui et al., 2022), intergroup conflicts spark negativity against opposing groups and fuel further social divisions around the globe (Halevy & Cohen, 2019). They present a critical challenge for communities to build social cohesion, which broadly refers to the *connectedness* and *solidarity* among members of different social groups (e.g., Manca, 2014). While it is important to acknowledge that improving social cohesion across groups necessitates systemic change, individuals' attitudes, choices, and behaviors matter. In every conflict, individuals affected are presented with an invitation to reflect on and decide whether and how they would respond to the situation. Do I engage? How should I engage? What an individual does directly shapes the relationships, dialogues, and norms around them, which has the potential to ultimately transform social divides into social cohesion.

To this end, recent psychology research on *wise reasoning* has offered new actionable insights that will inform individuals ways to build social cohesion. In this article, we seek to provide a timely, relevant, and practical review of the concept to contribute a useful resource for a broad audience interested in improving intergroup relations and propose directions that will meaningfully extend the literature. We draw from the most recent research on psychological wisdom to highlight the concept, emerging evidence, and utility of wise reasoning as a psychological tool to deescalate intergroup conflicts. In the following, we will first introduce

the concept of wise reasoning, and then we synthesize emerging empirical evidence to argue that wise reasoning reliably helps people across intergroup conflict situations foster factors that would contribute to social cohesion, such as increasing mutually positive intergroup attitudes and trust or reduced polarization (connectedness) and their willingness to coordinate, cooperate, and converse respectfully with one another (solidarity). Further, we examine the benefits of wise reasoning to explore potential psychological mechanisms. Building on the evidence, we conclude with practical recommendations for more effectively improving intergroup relations to ultimately increase connectedness and solidarity across groups and encourage more future work to investigate these promising avenues.

The Emerging Study of Wise Reasoning

Wisdom

For centuries, philosophers across cultures have been fascinated by the idea of wisdom. From Aristotle's *phronesis*, Socrates' writing about one's own ignorance (Benson, 2000), the Book of Solomon in the Bible, and the contemplation of change in the I Ching (Baynes & Wilhelm, 2011), wisdom is discussed as an important virtue that manifests in people's capacity to navigate challenging social problems and transform self-centered tendencies into actions that contribute to a greater good (Glück & Weststrate, 2022). In philosophies, wisdom is expected to foster harmony and improve balance among people (i.e., self- and other interests; Sternberg, 1998), and hence it naturally has the potential to improve relations among groups. In psychology, the empirical study of wisdom did not emerge until about three decades ago (e.g., Ardelt, 1997). In more recent years, the study has generated surging scientific interests and efforts in systematically conceptualizing and measuring wisdom to examine its real-world impacts (Baltes

& Freund, 2003; Brienza et al., 2018; Grossmann, Weststrate, et al., 2020; Staudinger & Glück, 2011).

While providing a comprehensive review of all studies of wisdom would go beyond the scope of this article, it is useful to acknowledge that the literature has offered varied conceptualizations of wisdom (see Dong et al., 2023). Some theories focus on individuals' insights into life in general. As an example, Sternberg theorized that wisdom involves using tacit knowledge to address challenges in life that entail conflicts between various domains or individuals with competing interests (Sternberg, 1998). Other theories focus more on one's personal experience. For instance, Ardelt (2003) conceptualized wisdom as a blend of personality traits comprising three major elements: the cognitive aspect involves seeking the truth of human existence, particularly in relation to intra- and interpersonal matters; the reflective aspect entails the capacity to consider multiple perspectives, including self-insight and self-examination; the affective aspect involves cultivating an empathetic and compassionate attitude towards other people. Interestingly, lay people's intuitive understandings of wisdom resemble scientific theories (Weststrate et al., 2016), and there are nontrivial similarities in views across different cultures worldwide (e.g., Grossmann & Kung, 2019).

Wise reasoning: A unified multidimensional construct

Building on these theoretical traditions, recent research has begun to study wisdom using a cognitive reasoning approach by focusing on the cognitions that enable people to solve practical problems (e.g., conflicts) in a dialectical and self-transcendent way (e.g., Grossmann et al., 2010), which propelled the development of the concept and study of wise reasoning (or WR). Brienza et al. (2018) first took an empirical approach to synthesize and clarify the potential dimensions of WR. They developed items that covered the key elements of wisdom-related

cognitions, which wisdom scholars have generally agreed upon (e.g., Bangen et al., 2013; Grossmann et al., 2020). Using factor analytic techniques, they identified five factors of the unified multidimensional construct of WR.: (i) *Humility* (recognizing one's limit in knowledge), (ii) *Observer's viewpoint* (looking at the bigger picture of the situation), (iii) *Perspective taking* (trying to understand situations from multiple perspectives), (iv) *Evolving situations* (accommodating for uncertainty and change in situations), and (v) *Search for Compromise* (integrating different interests in the resolution). These elements can be summarized in the *HOPES* acronym (e.g., Lapka & Kung, 2021). Two of the factors, 'evolving situations' and 'observer's viewpoint', together also form the idea of context-adaptability or 'contextualism,' referring to individuals' pursuit of pragmatic solutions that serve specific contextual problems.

Notably, although some dimensions of WR have been studied separately in different literatures in intergroup contexts (e.g., perspective taking, Todd & Galinsky, 2014), WR as an integrative construct has its unique value and strength. First of all, theoretically, the five dimensions are interrelated and may reinforce each other to work together. For example, a person who is more humble intellectually is also more open to opposing perspectives (e.g., Porter et al., 2022). This notion is also supported by the psychometric evidence that the five dimensions positively correlate with each other to a large degree, show strong model fit indices as an integrated construct, and show more consistent predictive validity as a whole versus taken as individual dimensions (Brienza et al., 2018). Second, in the context of conflict resolution, the holistic use of these strategies is more likely to result in positive outcomes. For example, it is not enough to only take different perspectives; in order to resolve conflicts, individuals often need to go further to seek compromise and integration of these different perspectives (e.g., Rahim & Magner, 1995). Because of the positive intercorrelations among the dimensions, a person's score

on wise reasoning reflects a more holistic and integrative engagement in these five reasoning strategies. A person high on wise reasoning is likely to engage in most dimensions to a large degree, which may help them achieve more adaptive conflict resolution outcomes.

Third, because WR involves multiple strategies that complement and reinforce each other, it may overcome some potential drawbacks or side effects of a single strategy. Take perspective taking, a dimension of WR as an example. Perspective taking is theoretically useful in fostering understanding between people with different backgrounds, but some research suggests that this strategy alone can be problematic in some contexts and for some people, such as members of minority groups (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). One potential mechanism through which perspective taking improves intergroup outcomes is self-other merging (Galinsky et al., 2005), which can be aversive and threatening to members of minority groups as victims of oppression (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Compared with taking the perspectives of the majority group, it might be more useful to ask members of minority-group members to share their perspectives. In contrast to the single dimension of perspective taking, research found that WR not only explained additional variance in outcomes over and above perspective taking, but also did not backfire among minority groups. The level of minority-group members' WR is associated with more positivity toward majority-group members (Brienza et al., 2021). Although more evidence is still needed to examine the effects of WR across group memberships in various contexts, this example emphasizes the importance of considering how WR as an integrative construct may benefit intergroup relations, beyond each of its dimensions.

A context-specific measure of wise reasoning

To empirically study the impacts of WR in intergroup conflicts, a proper measure is needed to accurately capture the construct. WR processes are likely to be context-specific: an

individual who thinks wisely in one intergroup conflict may not necessarily think wisely in another intergroup conflict (Grossmann, Dorfman, et al., 2020). WR is also temporally dynamic: an individual who thinks wisely in a personal conflict may not think wisely in an intergroup conflict (Grossmann, 2017; Grossmann et al., 2019). Accordingly, researchers have adopted a context-sensitive approach to develop a context-specific assessment of WR (Brienza et al., 2018). Briefly, the researchers adapted the event reconstruction methods (Kahneman et al., 2004; Schwarz et al., 2009) to ask participants to report their momentary reflections about specific states during conflict situations as they are experiencing or recalling them. Then participants answer a set of questions used to assess the five dimensions of WR. Importantly, as validation evidence suggests, this measure is relatively unaffected by social or cognitive biases. For example, compared with other global self-report measures of wisdom, this context-specific measure of WR was less related to social desirability (e.g., self-deception and impression management) (Brienza et al., 2018). Using this measure, a growing body of work has examined the role of WR in interpersonal and intergroup conflicts and revealed the potential benefits of WR in improving intergroup relations.

Wise Reasoning Improves Intergroup Conflict Outcomes in Three Aspects

Based on our literature review, WR has three major aspects of positive impacts on intergroup relations, providing the essential foundations for intergroup solidarity. These positive impacts include cooperative tendencies, reduced polarized feelings between groups, and respectful intergroup engagement. To summarize and illustrate these impacts, we examine relevant empirical evidence below with a focus on how wise reasoning helps bridge intergroup divides across various conflicts.

Fostering cooperative tendencies

In intergroup conflicts, a typical response for many is to compete with the outgroup so they can protect themselves or gain resources (e.g., reputation; De Dreu et al., 2014). Choosing cooperation, which ultimately facilitates more positive long-term intergroup relations, is difficult. This is because doing so requires people to balance the interest of their own group with the interest of the outgroup. Although direct evidence on the relation between WR and cooperation in intergroup contexts has just begun to accumulate, emerging research has highlighted that individuals' WR is associated with cooperative tendencies in interpersonal conflicts, which can serve as an important foundation for and generalize to intergroup cooperation.

Take studies using social dilemmas as an example. Social dilemma is broadly defined as a situation characterized by “a conflict between immediate self-interest and longer-term collective interests” (Van Lange et al., 2013). Cooperation in a social dilemma manifests in actions that give or contribute to the collective, or not take or consume from a resource, which could benefit both oneself and others (i.e., a greater good). In a classic commons dilemma task (or public good dilemma), people need to balance self-interest and others' interest to achieve an optimal outcome. More specifically, participants or teammates in the task need to decide whether to cooperate by leaving collective resources intact or to defect by capitalizing on resources. The payoff structure rewards self-interest, but group gains are maximized through cooperation (Van Lange et al., 2013). The threat of others' non-cooperative behavior could evoke self-protective behavior, leading to preemptive defection or resource hoarding (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981). When cooperation is tough like in these social dilemmas, WR helps individuals look at the bigger picture and search for integration of their own interest and their partner's interest. In a study, researchers asked participants to first respond to the measure of WR and then complete

adapted versions of these social dilemma tasks (Brienza et al., 2018). Results showed that those who had stronger WR also intended to overcome self-protection and choose cooperation, which could benefit both themselves and the collective.

The positive effect of WR on cooperation goes beyond hypothetical lab tasks. In the real world, people face challenges where they need to navigate conflicts due to competing interests. How individuals approach and resolve the conflict can differ. Based on classic studies on conflict management, the more prosocial and optimal approach would often require individuals to try to resolve the situation by benefiting both parties in the conflict (e.g., seeking an impartial mediator, trying to solve the problem together). The suboptimal approaches are those that only protect one's own interest, often at the expense of the other party (e.g., ostracizing the other party; see Rahim & Magner, 1995). In line with the findings from social dilemma tasks, research found that individuals with stronger WR also reported engaging in more collaborative conflict resolution behaviors in their own conflicts (Brienza et al., 2018). Similarly, a daily diary study found that participants' state-level WR was associated with more forgiveness in their interpersonal conflicts, which is a more cooperative strategy for resolving conflicts (Grossmann et al., 2016).

One may argue that WR is associated with cooperation only because it involves deliberate reasoning. However, deliberation per se is not always adaptive (e.g., Rand et al., 2012). It is *how* one deliberates that matters. WR is conceptualized as a qualitatively unique form of deliberation that directs people to deliberate wisely, rather than let their deliberations run wild (e.g. rumination) or simply support their own desired outcomes. Indeed, research has found that WR moderated the effect of deliberation on cooperation (Grossmann et al., 2017). They measured individual differences in WR, and used a public goods dilemma task to measure

participant's cooperation behavior. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: time delay, time pressure, and control. Those in the time delay condition were instructed to consider for at least ten seconds to consider their decision (i.e., deliberation); those in the time pressure condition had to decide within ten seconds; those in the control condition did not receive additional instructions. The results showed that deliberation, compared with the other two conditions, led to less cooperation among those who had weaker WR. However, this effect was attenuated and reversed in direction among those with stronger wise reasoning. Similarly, as new evidence suggests, wise reasoning helps orient people to more cooperative tendencies because it counteracts self-centered and deceptive deliberations (i.e., motivated reasoning; Kunda, 1990) to promote more virtuous and truthful thinking (Brienza et al., 2023).

Overall, our review of previous work suggests that WR helps facilitate more cooperative (vs. self-protective) strategies in resolving conflicts. This general cooperative tendency is important to foster more positive intergroup relations, though more research is needed to include the behavioral indicators of cooperation in intergroup conflict contexts (e.g., donation to the outgroup; Brienza et al., 2021).

Mitigating polarization

Another issue that undermines cohesion between people in intergroup conflict comes from people's natural tendencies to categorize themselves and others (e.g., Turner & Reynolds, 2012). This categorization process creates the psychological boundary between ingroups and outgroups, which gives rise to more negative attitudes toward their outgroups and more positive attitudes toward their ingroups, a phenomenon called affective polarization (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019). In addition, major societal events can make the values and beliefs of people with different social identities seem even more opposing. Everyday news and public discourse about those

events on social media could exacerbate intergroup conflicts. For example, during the United States Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage in 2015, the preexisting conflict between people who identify with the LGBTQ community and those who identify as heterosexual Christians became even larger (e.g., Wilkins et al., 2022). During social exchanges like this, intergroup harmony would be threatened if people cannot approach conflicts wisely.

Wise reasoning buffers individuals from the outgroup negativity due to social categorization and deescalate conflicts. To reduce polarization across social divides, it is important to foster a mutual understanding between people with different identities. This notion is supported by a series of studies about intergroup conflicts that were salient between 2014 and 2020 (Brienza et al., 2021). Participants were asked to reflect on stimulus materials related to the respective self-relevant conflict (e.g., news clippings about the conflict). After the reflection, all participants completed the WR measure that assessed the extent to which they engaged in WR during their reflections on the conflict. Besides, they made several evaluations of their ingroup and outgroup members (i.e., warmth and trust perceptions, feeling thermometer ratings). Ingroup attitudes were operationalized as participants' evaluation toward the group that they identified with, while outgroup attitudes were operationalized as their evaluation toward outgroup members. The discrepancy between these two evaluations was measured as polarization. Across seven studies (and an internal meta-analysis), in the contexts of various heightened real-world intergroup conflicts, such as the same-sex marriage debate in the U.S. and the immigration discourses in the US and the UK, individuals who engaged in stronger WR felt more positively toward members of outgroups. Importantly, this WR-positivity relation did not generalize to ingroup targets: those who had stronger WR did not feel more positively toward their ingroup

members. As a result, WR reduced polarization or the feeling gap between people's evaluations of their ingroups and outgroups.

Similar effects were found in a different intergroup domain in the context of the gender pay gap (i.e., the global phenomenon that women are economically disadvantaged relative to men) (Brienza et al., 2023). As recent research has shown, men were more likely than women to be skeptical of gender pay gap, likely as a result of motivated reasoning to fulfill self-centered or egocentric goals (Epley & Gilovich, 2016). However, men who engaged in stronger WR showed less gender pay skepticism, indicating more balanced attitudes in a personally relevant intergroup conflict issue (Brienza et al., 2023).

In sum, by helping people overcome intergroup bias, WR contributes to less polarized attitudes toward ingroup and outgroup members. This serves as a critical foundation to foster mutual understanding between people and groups with different identities, and can have important downstream consequences on intergroup relations (e.g., prosocial behaviors toward outgroup members).

Encouraging respectful engagement across social divides

Moving further along from feelings to interactions, would WR promote willingness to engage in more respectful conversations? Interacting with someone who holds different worldviews and values contradictory to one's own can be a challenging experience (Minson & Dorison, 2022). When engaging in such dialogues, there is a risk for the conversations to become hostile and uncivil, which is detrimental to social cohesion. To elicit respectful engagement, people need to signal their willingness to listen to and learn from the other side of the argument (Collins et al., 2022; Yeomans et al., 2020). Components of WR, such as being humble about their preexisting beliefs and being willing to consider alternative perspectives, should help

people with such difficult conversations by maintaining their interest in the other side's perspectives and treating the other person with respect—a notion supported by recent evidence.

Recent and ongoing research investigating how WR influences respectful engagement has shown promises of this study avenue. As documented in a preprint, a series of experiments examined the role of two core aspects of wisdom—balance and pragmatism (Puryear & Gray, 2021). Specifically, the balance aspect was defined as a metacognitive process that considers competing interests and views of different parties in a balanced and unbiased way. Within the framework of WR, balance is most directly related to the perspective taking dimension. In addition, the intellectual humility dimension is also a positive contributor to one's openness to learning about opposing views (Porter & Schumann, 2018). As for the pragmatism aspect, it was defined as seeking pragmatic or compromising solutions that can satisfy both party's interests in the context of a focal conflict. While pragmatism is most directly related to the search for compromise dimension of WR, the dimensions of 'evolving situations' and 'observer's viewpoint' should also help people better understand the broader context in order to come up with the most adaptive and pragmatic solutions.

In the experiments conducted by Puryear and Gray (2021), participants watched videos from an organization that aims to bridge divides on college campuses that are supposed to promote balanced pragmatism. After watching the video, participants rated their political opponents as more moral and rational, which further predicted willingness to engage in a respectful conversation with them. Puryear and Gray (2021) continued to examine whether using the balanced pragmatism aspect of wise reasoning could promote respectful cross-partisan engagement in divisive political issues among ordinary Americans. By simply instructing participants to focus on being balanced and pragmatic when talking about their opinions about

contentious issues, they increased the perceived morality and rationality of the statements from participants, which in turn improved raters' willingness to engage in respectful conversations with those participants. This study highlighted that WR is a useful framework for designing training programs that foster a more cohesive political environment. Future research should also further examine how WR could change people's perception of conversations about conflicts. For example, in the domain of interpersonal relationships, research has shown that WR is associated with a greater sense of meaning in the conflict (Peetz & Grossmann, 2021). It is possible that WR can also help individuals better make sense of political disagreements and foster meaningful conversations. In general, more research is needed to examine the role of WR in how people disagree with each other's views on sociopolitical issues (e.g., Yang et al., 2023).

Taken together, emerging research shows that WR improves intergroup relations in at least three main ways. Those who have stronger WR are more prosocial, unbiased, and respectful in intergroup situations, which in turn elicit more positive reactions from their outgroups and further improve intergroup relations. To clarify, these outcomes have been discussed individually but in reality, they may operate in parallel and reinforce each other, which makes understanding the underlying mechanisms of WR important. By revealing the mechanisms, we gain further knowledge about how to sustain and amplify (and avoid disrupting) the effects of WR in practice.

Exploring Underlying Mechanisms of WR in Intergroup Conflicts

Thus far, relatively little research has directly examined the mechanisms of WR. By connecting the existing WR findings with related research, we propose three potential mechanisms as starting points for future research and practice to consider.

Less adoption of a “we-versus-they” mindset

First, as suggested by social identity theory, intergroup conflict arises when people categorize themselves as a group member and others as not belonging to that group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The identification with group-based differences and adoption of categorizations may lead people to think of their ingroups and outgroups as “we” versus “they”. Even though group categories are socially constructed, people can still subjectively believe that group differences come from deep-rooted biological essences and that intergroup boundaries are impermeable, which can lead to lower trust and prosociality toward outgroups (Kung et al., 2018). In contrast to this “we-versus-they” mentality, WR encourages individuals to look at the big picture and understand different perspectives. This way of thinking helps people view the boundary between two groups as less clear-cut and even see the commonalities between people from different groups (Chao & Kung, 2015; Kung et al., 2018).

Such a cognitive mindset can manifest in the way people talk about conflict issues. In a study focusing on the international and interracial conflict during the Covid-19 pandemic, white American citizens who were prompted to use WR strategies in reflecting on their conflict with Asian or Chinese individuals used fewer third-person plurals (i.e., they, them) compared with those in control conditions (Brienza et al., 2021). Such reduction in third-person plurals – a possible indicator of adopting a more cohesive (vs. divisive) mindset that perpetuates intergroup biases (e.g., Perdue et al., 1990) – partially explained the effects of WR manipulation on participants’ less attitude polarization. By breaking the cognitive processes that categorize different social groups as fundamentally different and antagonistic, WR could reduce bias and improve intergroup cooperation.

More balanced pursuit of conflicting goals

Individuals constantly pursue and balance multiple goals in their lives. The context of intergroup interaction makes it even more challenging for one to negotiate multiple conflicting goals within themselves and with those from different social groups (e.g., competing needs for inclusion and differentiation; Brewer, 1991). It is important for individuals to achieve a balance between their goals, because when a particular goal becomes dominant, it can override other important goals and unleash behaviors that were previously restrained (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2021). In other words, motivational imbalance could result in extreme attitudes and behaviors.

In line with the wisdom theories that focus on one's capability of balancing competing interests (e.g., Grossmann, 2017; Sternberg, 1998), initial evidence in the wise reasoning literature suggests that individuals with stronger WR are also better at balancing the pursuit of competing goals. For example, Brienza et al. (2018) asked participants to rate the importance of influence goal (e.g., "having the other person listen to what you have to say") and adjustment goal (e.g., "go along with what the other person wants") during the conflict they reflected on. They found that those with stronger WR also reported more balanced levels of importance of these two goals. These two goals can be salient in intergroup interactions (e.g., Collins et al., 2022). On the one hand, when people only focus on the goal of influencing the outgroup members, they may come across as self-centered and biased, which can negatively impact the quality of intergroup interactions. On the other hand, if people fully accommodate outgroup members, they not only sacrifice their own interest but also hinder the outgroup members from learning from their perspectives, which is not beneficial for promoting mutual understanding in long-term relationships.

It is in this context of navigating competing goals and dialectics that WR facilitates a balancing act that helps promote sustainable intergroup cooperation and harmony.

Growth (vs. fixed) mindset: believing the intergroup relationship as malleable

Third, people's attitudes and behaviors in intergroup conflicts also depend on how they subjectively perceive the conflict. Given the same objective conflict, individuals can still vary on how they subjectively perceive it. In general, individuals differ in their mindsets of interpersonal (e.g., Hui et al., 2012) and intergroup relations (e.g., Cohen-Chen et al., 2014). While some people believe interpersonal/intergroup relations are more malleable (i.e., growth mindset), others tend to believe they are more unchangeable (i.e., fixed mindset). A growth mindset of conflictual relationships has important implications for intergroup outcomes. For example, Cohen-Chen et al. (2014) found that Jewish Israelis who had a higher growth mindset of conflict (i.e., those who believe that the nature of conflicts can be changed under certain circumstances) also were more hopeful about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which in turn predicted their more support for concession.

Theoretically, WR should relate to a higher growth mindset of conflicts because it helps individuals see the situation as uncertain and constantly evolving. In addition, as those with stronger WR are also more willing to embrace compromises that integrate multiple interests and perspectives, it should also be more natural for them to think of conflicts as less intractable. Indeed, Brienza et al. (2018) found that those who had stronger WR also tended to believe that interpersonal relations and social conflicts are malleable. For example, those who had stronger WR were also more likely to agree with the statement that "the degree of conflict between people can change over time." Although it has yet to be directly tested in the intergroup context, growth mindset of conflict seems to be one potential mechanism of the effects of WR. Alternatively, growth mindset of conflict may lead to improved intergroup outcomes through the use of WR. Future research should clarify the causal direction between the two constructs.

Although we mainly discussed growth mindset about conflictual relationships here, it is also important to acknowledge that other research also shows the benefits of growth mindset about social groups or individual characteristics. For example, the mindset that characteristics of a person due to ethnocultural differences are malleable (vs. fixed) led to more cooperation in interracial interactions (Kung et al., 2018) and support for more peaceful solutions in the longstanding Palestinian-Israeli conflicts (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2017; Halperin et al., 2011; Peleg-Koriat et al., 2020). Believing people can change in general protected women's and minority-group members' outlook when they confronted expressions of bias toward their social identities (Rattan & Dweck, 2018). Future research should test the potential role of WR in these processes. For example, does WR lead individuals to perceive social groups and individuals in conflict as more malleable, which in turn predicts more positive intergroup outcomes?

Overall, by connecting findings from different perspectives, we suggest that WR encourages individuals to adopt mindsets that are more cohesive, balanced, and growth-oriented, which may underlie its benefits in intergroup contexts.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

Lastly, we outline several implications and recommendations for real-world practice and interventions based on scientific evidence related to wise reasoning.

Capitalize the malleability of wise reasoning

A strength of WR for practice is that it is relatively variable within individuals. Although lay people may believe wisdom is malleable or fixed to different degrees (Grossmann et al., 2019), recent scientific findings have shown that there is substantive intraindividual variability in WR. The variability emerged both across time and situations (Brienza et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2017). The variability is good news because WR seems to be a strategy that can be proactively

enacted by individuals in specific situations. This is a very important strength in intergroup relation interventions because it can be difficult to immediately change the objective reality of many intergroup conflict situations in the real world. In that sense, how people could subjectively reason through these situations becomes more critical to intergroup peace and cohesion, and WR serves as one effective solution that policymakers could rely on. It is also imperative for practitioners to identify the intergroup contexts where WR is more or less likely to be activated and tailor interventions depending on the specific situational characteristics.

Design effective interventions to improve wise reasoning

As shown by prior research, a simple reflection instructing individuals to reason about intergroup conflicts in a wiser manner (e.g., considering the perspectives of different groups and seeking a solution to integrate them in a specific context) could elicit more balanced thoughts and behaviors that lead to immediate positive intergroup outcomes (Brienza et al., 2021; Puryear & Gray, 2021). This method seems promising for immediate intervention, but one particular challenge for people to use WR is the so-called “*Solomon’s paradox*”: individuals think more wisely about other people’s conflicts than their own (Grossmann & Kross, 2014). In the context of intergroup conflict, the major targets of interventions are usually individuals who belong to the two groups in conflict. Then, how can policymakers design effective interventions to boost individuals’ WR when they are involved in the conflict themselves? Research suggests that an effective tool to boost WR in self-relevant conflicts is *self-distancing*, a technique that involves reflecting on the conflict issue from an observer’s perspective (Kross & Ayduk, 2017). By mentally distancing oneself from the issue, one can engage in more constructive problem-solving because of lowered emotional reactivity and adopting a big-picture perspective.

There are different ways to induce self-distancing and help people focus less on themselves. From a language perspective, some research instructed people to use third-person language (e.g., he/she) vs. first-personal language (e.g., I/me) in reflection and found that people showed stronger WR about their personal conflicts (Grossmann et al., 2021; Grossmann & Kross, 2014). From a temporal perspective, Huynh et al. (2016) found that asking individuals to move away from a focus on the present to think about the future could elicit more WR-related outcomes in personally relevant relationship conflicts, such as considering multiple perspectives and searching for compromise. From a motivational perspective, Huynh et al. (2017) found that eudemonic motives (e.g., pursuing personal ideals and contribution to others), which is an others-focused virtuous motivation that may minimize one's self-focus, predicted stronger WR about one's personal conflicts.

Building on these findings, future research and practice in intervening in intergroup conflicts could help people reason more wisely by using these techniques to distance themselves from the conflict between their ingroups and outgroups.

Cultivate wisdom through education and mentorship

While wise reasoning can be increased by targeting interventions on individuals, educational institutions should also try to cultivate WR from a top-down approach to achieve more sustainable and developmental changes in how people approach social conflicts. For example, Huynh and Grossmann (2020) provided an initial framework for educators to design wisdom-fostering curricula that communicate messages that align with WR. Students could benefit from materials such include narratives with wisdom exemplars, stories that convey wisdom lessons, and activities that focus on how to enact situations that boost one's ability to reason wisely. In the meantime, teachers could also potentially gain wisdom through teaching

activities. Research has shown that being in an advisory position could increase psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010), which is a critical pathway to WR. In the intergroup context, researchers asked people to reflect on the contentious political issues during the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections in the US (Elnakouri et al., 2017). When people were asked to explain the issue to others (vs. reflect on the issue by themselves), they were more likely to engage in wise reasoning. Therefore, the educational system seems to be a great environment to design interventions that could foster WR for all parties involved. Mentors and mentees could work together to benefit from a collaborative process.

Conclusion

Escalating intergroup conflicts around the world present barriers to building communities where people can trust, appreciate, care for, and work with one another. In this paper, we highlighted wise reasoning as a promising psychological tool for individuals to approach intergroup conflicts in a more constructive way so that social divides may be transformed into more positive and collaborative relationships. Emerging research we reviewed has already demonstrated the effects of wise reasoning on factors that help build social cohesion: reduced affective polarization, improved cooperation, and more respectful discourse. We proposed that these effects occur because wise reasoning helps people see the connections (vs. separation) between social groups, the need for balance in the pursuit of competing goals in conflicts, and the malleability of intergroup conflicts and relationships. Finally, we outlined evidence-based recommendations for practice and interventions that aim to mitigate intergroup conflicts from a wise reasoning perspective. It is our hope that policymakers, educators, and leaders will leverage the power of wise reasoning to help foster more connectedness and solidarity between groups for a more inclusive society.

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