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Review

Recent advances in intergroup contact theory☆

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ABSTRACT

Recent advances in intergroup contact theory and research are reviewed. A meta-analysis with 515 studies and more than 250,000 subjects demonstrates that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice (mean $r = -.21$). Allport's original conditions for optimal contact – equal status, common goals, no intergroup competition, and authority sanction – facilitate the effect but are not necessary conditions. There are other positive outcomes of intergroup contact, such as greater trust and forgiveness for past transgressions. These contact effects occur not only for ethnic groups but also for such other groups as homosexuals, the disabled and the mentally ill. Intergroup friendship is especially important. Moreover, these effects typically generalize beyond the immediate outgroup members in the situation to the whole outgroup, other situations, and even to other outgroups not involved in the contact. They also appear to be universal – across nations, genders, and age groups. The major mediators of the effect are basically affective: reduced anxiety and empathy. And even indirect contact reduces prejudice – vicarious contact through the mass media and having a friend who has an outgroup friend. Of course, negative contact occurs – especially when it is non-voluntary and threatening. Criticisms of the theory and policy implications are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Social psychology has in recent years made major advances in understanding the complex dynamics of intergroup contact. Intergroup contact is obviously a central topic for both researchers and practitioners in the field of intercultural relations. What was originally a modest "contact hypothesis" put forward by Allport (1954) has now developed into a full-blown theory of considerable complexity. And the number of research investigations on the topic has increased rapidly – especially recently – as shown in Fig. 1. This paper provides an overview of these advances in our understanding of intergroup contact.

Popular opinion about intergroup contact is split. Some hold that contact between groups only causes conflict; "good fences make good neighbors" is their contention. Others believe intergroup interaction is an essential part of any remedy for reducing prejudice and conflict between groups. So this intensively studied area of social psychology is marked by controversy and is directly relevant for such policy issues as school desegregation and affirmative action.

2. A brief history of the theory

The newly emerging discipline of social psychology of the 1930s and 1940s soon began to study intergroup contact. This interest followed from the field's focus on intergroup relations and interaction between people within a social context.

Observations of racial conflict drew interest in contact. One of the worst race riots in U.S. history occurred in Detroit in 1943. But while Black and White mobs raged in the streets, Blacks and Whites who knew each other not only refrained from violence but often helped one another. Automotive workers and university students continued to work and study side-by-side. Families hid neighbors of the other race from threatening rioters. And those Blacks and Whites who were close friends were especially protective of each other (Lee & Humphrey, 1968).

Following such observations, researchers often exploited field situations of unfolding intergroup change. Later studies investigated black-white contact under more favorable conditions. After the desegregation of the Merchant Marine in 1948, genuine bonds developed between black and white seamen on the ships and in the maritime union (Brophy, 1946). Consequently, the more voyages the white seamen took with blacks, the more positive their racial attitudes became (Fig. 2). Similarly, White police in Philadelphia who had worked with Black colleagues differed sharply from other White policemen on the force (Kephart, 1957). They had fewer objections to Blacks joining their previously all-white police districts, teaming with a Black partner, and taking orders from qualified Black officers. Likewise, Allport and Kramer (1946) found that the prejudiced attitudes toward minorities of White students at Dartmouth College and Harvard University diminished directly to the extent that they had had equal-status contact with the minorities (Fig. 3).

But there is a potential problem of selective effects and causal direction in these early studies. It could have been that the more tolerant white seamen at the outset signed on for ships with black seamen, that more tolerant White police initially chose to work with Black colleagues, and that White students who had had equal status contact with Blacks were already more tolerant before the interracial contact. This problem of causal direction must always be kept in mind when judging intergroup contact results. Did the contact cause the reduced prejudice, did the more tolerant seek the contact, or both? Recent longitudinal research reveals that both causal paths operate with roughly equal strength (Binder et al., 2009; Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, & Sears, 2008).

In 1947, the Social Science Research Council asked Robin Williams, an eminent sociologist at Cornell, to review what was known about group relations. In his report, Williams (1947) presented the initial formulation of intergroup contact theory. He correctly stressed that many variables influence contact's effects on prejudice.

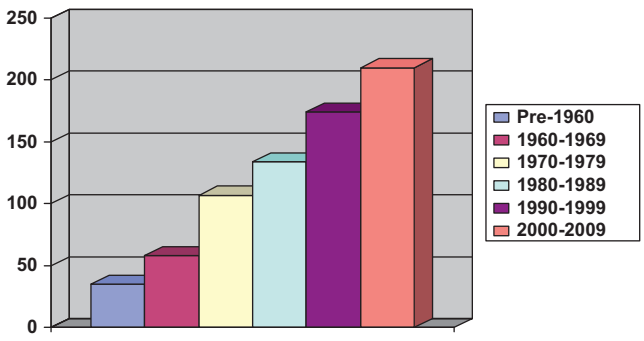

Fig. 1. Intergroup contact studies by decade.

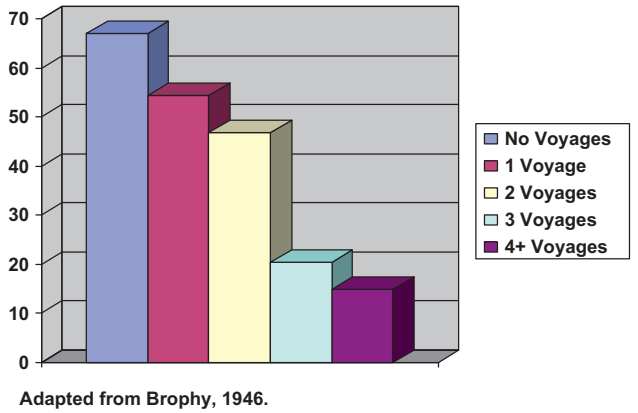

Fig. 2. Prejudice percentages by interracial voyages.

By 1950, research tested the theory more rigorously. Major studies comparing racially segregated and desegregated public housing projects by New York City researchers provided the strongest evidence. This work marked the introduction of large-scale field research into North American social psychology. In the most notable example of this work, Deutsch and Collins (1951) interviewed White housewives across different public housing projects with a design that Campbell and Stanley (1963) later labeled "quasi-experimental." Two housing projects in Newark assigned Black and White residents to separate buildings. Two comparable housing projects in New York City desegregated residents by making apartment assignments irrespective of race or personal preference. The authors found that White women in the desegregated projects had far more optimal contact with their Black neighbors. Moreover, they held their Black neighbors in higher esteem and expressed greater support for interracial housing. Later housing research obtained comparable findings for both Black and White residents (Wilner, Walkley, & Cook, 1955; Works, 1961).

Armed with Williams' initial effort and the rich findings of the New York studies, Allport (1954) introduced in his influential volume, *The Nature of Prejudice*, the statement of intergroup contact theory that guided research on the subject for five decades. He noted the contrasting effects of intergroup contact – usually reducing but sometimes exacerbating prejudice. To explain these findings, Allport adopted a "positive factors" approach. Reduced prejudice will result, Allport held, when four positive features of the contact situation are present: (1) equal status of the groups in the situation, (2) common goals, (3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) the support of authorities, law or custom.

3. Does intergroup contact typically reduce prejudice?

Early reviews of the vast contact research literature reached conflicting conclusions regarding the likely effects of intergroup contact. Numerous reviews showed general support for contact theory, suggesting that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice (Cook, 1984; Harrington & Miller, 1992; Jackson, 1993; Patchen, 1999; Pettigrew, 1971, 1986, 1998). However, other reviews reached more mixed conclusions (Amir, 1969, 1976; Forbes, 1997, 2004). Stephan (1987) acknowledged that intergroup contact has the potential to reduce prejudice, but he emphasized the complexity involved in the link between intergroup contact and prejudice. For example, characteristics of the contact setting, the groups under

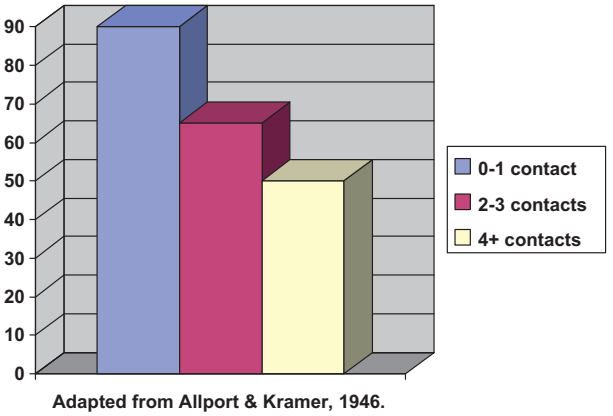

Fig. 3. Prejudice percentages by equal-status contacts.

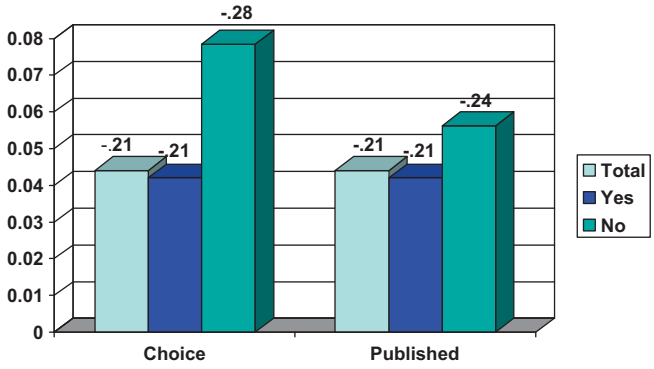

Fig. 4. Meta-analytic results: 515 studies, 713 samples, 250,000+ subjects.

study, and the individuals involved may all contribute to enhancing or inhibiting contact's effects (see also Patchen, 1999; Pettigrew, 1998; Riordan, 1978).

Additional reviews have been more critical regarding the potential for contact to promote positive intergroup outcomes. Ford (1986) examined only 53 papers on contact from six journals. He found support for the contact hypothesis to be at best "premature," and that the research presented in these papers was "...grossly insufficient in representing the various settings of daily life" (Ford, 1986, p. 256). McClendon (1974) suggested, "Contact research has been rather unsophisticated and lacking in rigor" (p. 47) and concluded that this body of work "would not lead (one) to expect a widespread reduction in prejudice" (p. 52).

Such conflicting views regarding the effects of contact have led some social psychologists to discard contact theory. Indeed, as Hopkins, Reicher, and Levine (1997) assert, some believe that "...the initial hopes of contact theorists have failed to materialize..." (p. 306).

Three major shortcomings of these past reviews account for these divergent conclusions: [1] Their incomplete samples of relevant papers, [2] their absence of strict inclusion rules, and [3] their non-quantitative assessments of contact effects. None of these reviews attempted to encompass the entire relevant research base; they averaged less than 60 research articles each out of the many hundreds of studies that comprise the contact research literature. And without strict inclusion rules, these reviews employed sharply contrasting definitions of intergroup contact. For example, some reviews included studies that used intergroup proximity, rather than established contact, as the independent variable. Finally, none of these reviews employed fully quantitative assessments of contact effects. Instead, authors of past reviews have tended to offer subjective judgments of the contact–prejudice relationship based on their own readings of a small subset of the research literature. Quantitative approaches to research synthesis are to be preferred, as they provide a means for examining replicable patterns of effects across the full accumulation of relevant studies (Johnson & Eagly, 2000; Rosenthal, 1991).

A half-century after Allport introduced the intergroup contact hypothesis, an effort was made to obtain a definitive answer to the central question – does intergroup contact typically reduce prejudice? Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) set out to correct for the earlier problems with a major meta-analysis that combined the results of all the studies of the 20th century, published or unpublished, on intergroup contact that could be located. This effort amassed 515 studies with more than 250,000 subjects from 38 nations and obtained a mean correlation (r) between contact and prejudice of −.21. Ninety-four per cent of these studies report a negative relationship between contact and prejudices of many types. That is, greater contact is routinely associated with *less* prejudice. And these effects are significantly larger for majority groups (mean $r = -.227$) than for minority groups (mean $r = -.175$) (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005a).

But we can accept these findings only after three alternative explanations are examined. First, as we have noted, there is the participant selection problem. The meta-analysis tested it by rating the studies by how much choice the subjects had in having the contact. No choice eliminates the possibility of a selection bias. In the histogram of Fig. 4, we see a significantly larger effect (mean $r = -.28$) for those samples in which the subjects had full choice than for those where the subjects had no choice (mean $r = -.20$) – just the opposite of what we would expect from a strong selection bias. (Fig. 4's y-axis records the percentage of variance accounted for by each correlation.) Thus, we are reassured that our basic finding that intergroup contact diminishes prejudice cannot be explained away by a selection bias of who has or does not have intergroup contact.

Second, there is the publication bias problem. Published studies often form a biased subset of the studies actually conducted, as the statistical significance of a study's results influences the probability of it being submitted and published by a journal. Thus, there is the danger that only contact studies with positive results get published. There are now numerous ingenious methods to test for such a publication bias, and they did not signal such a bias in the contact meta-analysis. Fig. 4 shows that the unpublished samples actually have a significantly higher correlation (mean $r = -.24$) than the published (mean $r = -.20$) indicating that our overall finding cannot be explained by publication bias.

A third threat to validity concerns the quality of contact research. If less rigorous research were largely responsible for the relationship between contact and prejudice, we would hesitate to accept it as established. But if the more rigorous studies produce stronger contact effects, it would lend credibility to the results.

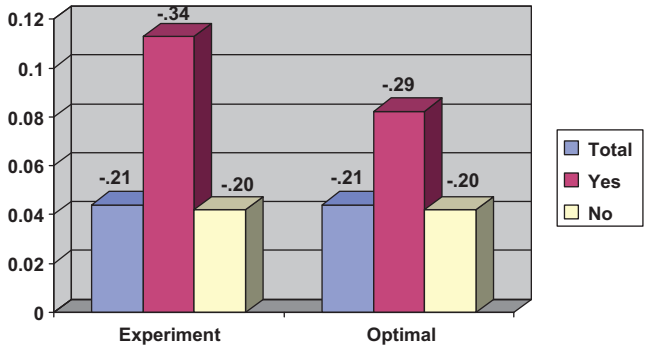

Fig. 5. Experimental contact effects and Allport's optimal conditions.

The contact meta-analysis shows the opposite trend. More rigorous and recent research yields higher mean correlations – with experimental studies producing the highest mean correlation of −.33 (Fig. 5). Many other measures of methodological rigor, such as solid control groups and reliable measures, show the same trend: the more rigorous the study, the more robust the relationship between contact and decreased prejudice.

4. Testing Allport's key situational conditions

The meta-analysis also revealed that Allport's optimal contact conditions facilitated, but were not essential to, the decrease in prejudice. In Fig. 5, we see that those samples that were rated as having most of Allport's optimal conditions have significantly greater prejudice reduction effects (−.29) than those without these conditions. But note that even when Allport's conditions are *not* met, intergroup contact on average still diminishes prejudice (−.20).

5. Contact's effects on many different dependent variables

Moreover, many types of intergroup prejudice have been studied and found to be lessened by contact – subtle as well as blatant prejudice, implicit association as well as direct measures. There is, however, great heterogeneity in effect sizes, with such affective measures as liking revealing significantly larger effects than such cognitive indicators as stereotypes (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b). In short, we may come to like the outgroup even while our stereotypes of the outgroup persist.

Many dependent variables beyond prejudice are also related to intergroup contact. These additional outcomes include reduced anxiety, individual threat, collective threat and ingroup identification together with enhanced empathy, perspective taking, outgroup knowledge, intergroup trust, forgiveness, job attainment and satisfaction, and perceptions of outgroup variability. Note that all of these are positive contact effects (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Social sciences other than social psychology and sociology, using diverse methods and measures, have also uncovered a variety of contact effects. For instance, in political science, Mutz (2002) has demonstrated with both national survey data and experiments that contact with those who harbor dissonant political opinions fosters political tolerance. Observe that this work has greatly expanded our understanding of the intergroup contact process by greatly expanding the range of contact's effects across both cognitive and affective domains.

6. Contact's across many target groups suggests a mere exposure effect

These positive effects emerged not only for racial and ethnic target groups for whom the original theory was devised, but also for other, often stigmatized groups – such as homosexuals, the disabled and the mentally ill (Fig. 6). This wide applicability suggests that contact effects may be linked to such basic processes as the "mere exposure" effect. Experimenters have repeatedly shown that greater exposure to targets, in and of itself, can significantly enhance liking for those targets (Bornstein, 1989; Harmon-Jones & Allen, 2001; Lee, 2001; Zajonc, 1968). Moreover, studies with social targets show that the enhanced liking that results from exposure can generalize to greater liking for other related, yet previously unknown, social targets (Rhodes, Halberstadt, & Brajkovich, 2001). Work on the relationship between exposure and liking indicates that uncertainty reduction is an important mechanism underlying the phenomenon.

7. The special importance of cross-group friendship

The contentions of intergroup contact theory are further supported by the special importance of cross-group friendship in promoting positive contact effects (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Friendship invokes many of the optimal conditions for positive contact effects: it typically involves cooperation and common goals as well as repeated equal-status

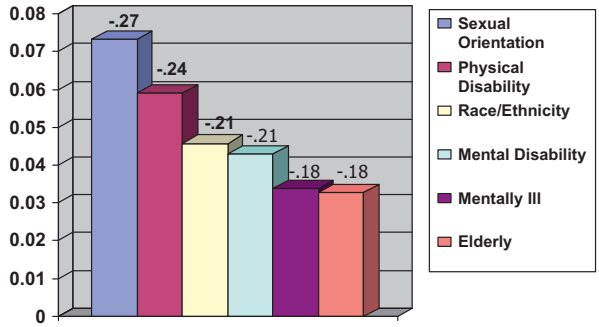

Fig. 6. Intergroup contact's reduction of prejudice across six target outgroups.

contact over an extended period and across varied settings. Friendship also facilitates self-disclosure; and self-disclosure is an important mediator of intergroup contact's positive effects.

Contact theorists have long stressed the role intimacy plays in reducing prejudice. Moreover, such friendships lead to strong, positive attitudes toward the outgroup that are especially accessible and resistant to change (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, & Christ, 2007).

Consider, too, research conducted in Northern Ireland (Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006). It found that intergroup friendship engendered forgiveness and trust of the other religious group. Indeed, this dramatic effect was especially strong among those Catholics and Protestants who had suffered personally from the province's sectarian violence – quite the opposite from what conventional wisdom might expect.

8. But do these established effects generalize?

If contact effects do not generalize beyond the immediate situation, then intergroup contact is obviously of limited value for social policy. Consequently, social psychologists have sought to understand whether intergroup contact effects generalize to the entire groups involved, to new situations, and even to outgroups not involved in the original contact situation.

The meta-analysis found that contact effects typically do generalize to the entire groups involved (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011). If the groups remain aware initially of their group identifications, generalization occurs. Since this is typically the case, this finding suggests that most intergroup contact involves an effective degree of group categorization (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Participants come to like the outgroup members, and this generalizes to more acceptance of the outgroup itself. And, as we have noted, prejudice reduction is not the only indication of this outgroup acceptance; greater trust and a more differentiated view of the outgroup – some you like, others you do not like – also often emerge.

Contact effects from one contact situation also typically generalize to new contact situations. And several studies have shown that reduced prejudice against one outgroup can even generalize to other outgroups that were not involved in the original contact (Pettigrew, 2009). Thus, Germans who have had positive contact with Turks not only reveal more favorable attitudes of Turks but also of West Indians – a group that is not in Germany (Pettigrew, 1997).

How could this happen? One proposal involves *deprovincialization*; that is, coming to like and trust an outgroup makes you less provincial about your own group. This new view of your ingroup may open you up to accepting other outgroups – even those with whom you have never had contact. This type of broad generalization may require some degree of similarity between the two outgroups.

9. How universal are these contact effects?

Are these intergroup contact effects limited to particular categories of people – the young, or females or Americans? The straightforward answer is "no." The meta-analytic findings reveal a remarkable universality of intergroup effects. Thus, the mean correlations across age groups only vary between −.20 and −.24. Similarly, the mean correlations for separate samples of females and males are −.21 and −.19 respectively, though most samples included both gender groups. Moreover, we do not observe wide discrepancies in mean contact effects across the 38 nations in which intergroup contact research has been conducted. Across six geographical groupings, the mean correlations only vary between −.21 (the U.S. and Europe) and −.26 (Australia and New Zealand).

10. When and how do these contact effects occur?

We have seen how Allport's optimal conditions specify *when* intergroup contact is likely to have its most positive effects. His situational specifications all moderate the contact and prejudice relationship. Later research has uncovered additional moderators. Thus, prejudice is more likely to be diminished when the intergroup contact is not superficial and group salience is sufficiently high.

To answer *how* intergroup contact generally has positive effects, separate meta-analyses have been conducted on the three most-studied mediators: increased knowledge, anxiety reduction and enhanced empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Allport's original idea was that contact led to greater knowledge of the outgroup, and this cognitive change in turn lessened prejudice. But research shows that knowledge is a minor mediator. More important are two broad classes of largely affective mediators. One type involves positive predictors of prejudice that optimal contact reduces; the other involves negative predictors of prejudice that optimal contact increases. Physiological evidence shows that positive intergroup contact alleviates anxiety over interacting with outgroup members (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). This decrease in anxiety in turn relates to decreased prejudice. Other negative emotions, such as fear, anger and particularly threat to the ingroup, can also serve as mediators that intergroup contact alleviates.

Positive contact also enhances empathy for the outgroup and adoption of the outgroup's perspective. One begins to sense how outgroup members feel and view the world. This increase in empathy and perspective taking diminishes prejudice. Intergroup contact can also increase other mediators that decrease prejudice – such as positive intergroup emotions.

11. Indirect contact effects

Intergroup contact can also trigger a process of indirect effects. Studies in Italy, Germany, Northern Ireland and the U.S. demonstrate that simply having ingroup friends who have outgroup friends relates to diminished prejudice (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Pettigrew, Wagner, Christ, & Stellmacher, 2007; Wright, Aron, & Brody, 2008; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). In short, the friend of my friend is my friend.

This phenomenon is partly a result of changing norms. Seeing your friend have close contact with an outgroup person helps to make it normatively acceptable. But the changed attitudes produced by indirect contact are not as strong as those from direct contact – that is, the new attitudes from indirect contact are not held with the same degree of certainty and can be changed more easily (Turner et al., 2007). Nevertheless, indirect contact effects are important for those who live in segregated areas and have no outgroup friends; and it may act to prepare them for later direct contact.

12. Negative intergroup contact effects

Not all intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Some situations engender enhanced prejudice. Such negative intergroup contact has received less research attention, but renewed consideration to the issue has shed light on this phenomenon. Negative contact typically involves situations where the participants feel threatened and did not choose to have the contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). These situations frequently occur in work environments where intergroup competition exists as well as in situations involving intergroup conflict.

Consider a tense check point on the Palestinian West Bank. Neither the Israeli soldiers nor the Palestinian civilians passing through have chosen to be in this situation. And both parties are understandably threatened. The soldiers fear the possibility of a suicide bomber or other attacks upon them. The Palestinians fear humiliation and violence from the gun-toting soldiers. No intergroup contact theorist has ever thought such stressful contact would do anything but worsen intergroup relations.

But this raises an important question. Given the existence of these negative contact situations, why does the meta-analysis on intergroup contact report such overwhelmingly positive effects? Several factors explain this apparent puzzle. First, surveys with probability samples demonstrate that respondents report far more positive than negative intergroup contacts (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). These results may seem surprising since negative intergroup encounters are often publicized, while the more numerous positive encounters go unrecognized or are not viewed as newsworthy. But this finding helps to explain why contact leading to increased prejudice is so relatively rare in the research literature.

Second, the effects of negative intergroup contact are moderated by whether the participant has entered the contact freely (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). When the contact involves voluntary contact, the effects of negative contact are far smaller than when the contact involves involuntary contact – again suggesting the key importance of threat.

Third, not surprisingly, those who have lots of intergroup contact tend to report both positive and negative contact. And these respondents tend to reveal less prejudice comparable to those who report only positive contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Given these factors, the role of negative intergroup contact may not be as crucial as some critics have assumed.

13. Criticisms of intergroup contact theory

Some critics of intergroup contact theory seem not to understand the theory. They mistakenly believe that intergroup contact theory simply predicts positive outcomes under all conditions. But important criticisms have been leveled by more informed critics (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). For instance, Forbes (1997, 2004), a Canadian political scientist, acknowledges that intergroup contact often lowers prejudice at the individual level of analysis; but he holds that it fails to operate at the group level of analysis. Hence, he argues that contact can cure individual prejudice but not group conflict. Social psychologists take issue with Forbes' distinction. If reductions in prejudice generalize broadly from intergroup contact, the group level of analysis is necessarily involved.

Many critics are from nations, such as Northern Ireland and South Africa, that have witnessed intense ethnic conflict in the past. They raise two points that compel a broader perspective in considering the role of intergroup contact in reducing intergroup tensions. First, they often hold that separation is an effective means of reducing intergroup conflict – even though

it greatly restricts intergroup contact. But walls and segregation have historically failed. Consider the repeated failures of "fences" from the Great Wall of China and Scotland's Hadrian's Wall to the modern examples of the Berlin Wall, the Green Line of Cyprus, and Israel's new West Bank Wall. "Good neighbors" hardly resulted from any of these prominent experiments with "good fences." And we can expect the same result from America's own developing wall on the Mexican–U.S. border – an ineffective barrier on a 2000-mile frontier that many Mexicans rightly regard as an insult to their national dignity.

More importantly, critics focus on the problem of establishing effective intergroup contact in the first place after centuries of intergroup strife – "the leading-the-horses-to-water problem." This point, of course, raises a separate issue that intergroup contact theory was not initially designed to address. Yet the criticism is well-taken. To be relevant for social policy, intergroup contact theory must be expanded to include how to bring past adversaries together in optimal contact situations. Future work on contact must concentrate on this issue.

A third type of criticism also acknowledges that intergroup contact typically diminishes prejudice (e.g., Reicher, 2007). But these critics regard this process as dangerous, because it might delay needed social change. They hold social conflict to be essential for social change. Consequently, they are concerned that reducing the prejudice of the less powerful will deter their willingness to initiate the conflict necessary for social progress. It is difficult to rise up against friends. Indeed, research bear out this concern (e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Minority members with the most positive contact with majorities indicate less willingness to work for social change.

Recall, however, that contact's effects are far greater for majorities than for minorities – which mitigates this phenomenon. Nor is conflict required for all social change. Moreover, contact also has two counter effects. First, intergroup contact improves the attitudes of members of the advantaged group toward the disadvantaged and intergroup policies for change. These effects weaken their resolve to maintain the discriminatory status quo; and they can even lead advantaged group members to join as allies in the collective actions of the disadvantaged.

Intergroup contact can also operate to heighten a minority's sense of *group relative deprivation*. This sense that your ingroup is being unjustly deprived occurs when contact provides the opportunity for minorities to learn what the majority possesses that is denied them. This process develops the sense of group relative deprivation that is strongly related to protest for change (Smith & Pettigrew, 2011; Walker & Smith, 2001). In the U.S. in the 1960s, it was the better-educated young African Americans who had had the most interracial contact who led the Civil Rights Movement (Mathews & Prothro, 1966; Pettigrew, 1964; Searles & Williams, 1962). They had the resources, and their interracial contact gave them the necessary knowledge of the White world and its weaknesses to lead the protest effort. They also were more likely to know White allies who would join the cause. In Canada, the more Inuits experience contact outside of their isolated community, the more they perceive the systematic discrimination their group faces (Poore, Gagne, Barlow, Taylor, & Wright, 2002). In South Africa, Durrheim and Dixon (2010) found that South African Blacks' contact with upper-status Whites relates to *less* sympathy for Whites. Intergroup contact also allows the minority to gauge majority weaknesses that can be exploited through minority mobilization. Dixon et al. (2010) add a fourth process that is highly relevant in multi-group societies. Contact *between* minorities can help unite them so that they can mount a stronger protest with an improved chance for success. Research that simultaneously studies all of these complex processes is a needed next step.

We conclude that contact can weaken a minority's motivation for protest. But it is an incomplete description of the complex relationship between intergroup contact and efforts for social change. The unambiguous distinction made by Wright and Lubensky (2009) between collective action participation and such "prejudice reduction" approaches as intergroup contact is too sharply drawn. As with most social phenomena, the two approaches are intricately entwined. Some contact outcomes further mobilization, others counter it. And mobilization itself will in turn influence intergroup contact – increasing it with outgroup allies and decreasing it with outgroup opponents.

14. Policy implications of intergroup contact theory

Specialists specifically deny that intergroup contact is a panacea for intergroup conflict (Hewstone, 2003). But it is clear that cross-group contact is an essential, if insufficient, component for lasting remedies. Strict segregation between groups, limiting positive intergroup contact, has failed around the globe. From the southern United States, Northern Ireland, and Israel to India and South Africa, intergroup separation guarantees smoldering resentment and eventual conflict. But with increased intergroup contact in some of these regions – such as the American South, Northern Ireland, and South Africa – we are beginning to see the slow unwinding of centuries of conflict. Indeed, some of the most dramatic research findings in support of contact theory have come recently from these changing areas of the world.

Active structural remedies to achieve equal group access to high-quality education, good jobs, and comfortable housing are called for around the world – and note that these remedies generally involve intergroup contact in multi-group societies worldwide. For the United States, this means that desegregated schools, affirmative action and other structural means for promoting diversity are clearly indicated.

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