



Editorial

Dynamic processes in intergroup contact

In recent years, interest in intergroup contact has intensified, leading to a number of advances in intergroup contact *theory*. Among those expansions are studies on cross-group friendship, mediators, and moderators of contact effects, and the analysis of intergroup dyadic interactions (for recent overviews, see Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011).

The contact research literature has, however, suffered from a scarcity of longitudinal studies (Pettigrew, 2008), although in recent years some longitudinal studies have been published (e.g., Binder *et al.*, 2009; Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011). It is this *methodological* development, and associated theoretical sophistication, which we wish to highlight in the present special section. The idea of this special section goes back to the EAESP-SPSSI International conference on 'Intergroup contact: Recent advancements in basic and applied research', which we organized in Marburg, Germany, in August 2008. At this conference, a number of presentations focused on the dynamics of intergroup contact using a diverse set of sophisticated statistical techniques to handle longitudinal data. We therefore decided to accord this impressive new development in the field of intergroup contact research a high-profile outlet in the form of a special section of the *British Journal of Social Psychology*.

Our primary aim was to demonstrate how longitudinal studies are necessary to gain new insights into the complex dynamics involved in intergroup contact effects. Longitudinal studies are powerful tools to analyse both predictors and consequences of change in individual intergroup contact over time. In addition, by using cross-lagged analysis and other sophisticated statistical models, longitudinal analyses offer the researcher a closer insight into the necessarily dynamic nature of intergroup contact, as well as the causal structure of predictors, mediators, moderators, and consequences of intergroup contact. Thus, longitudinal analyses provide a unique opportunity to further advance both theory and research on intergroup contact (Christ & Wagner, *in press*).

The six papers in this special section clearly demonstrate the importance and necessity of longitudinal studies for a full understanding of the dynamics of intergroup contact. They present longitudinal studies using samples from different countries (Belgium, Finland, Malaysia, United States), using different methods (quasi-experimental designs, longitudinal surveys, experience sampling techniques) and statistical techniques (e.g., cross-lagged panel analysis, hierarchical linear modelling, latent-change models). The special section therefore reflects the new and impressive developments in longitudinal research on intergroup contact effects, and it provides

researchers with innovative new ideas for future research, as well as application of this work.

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