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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.

Highlights

• Meta-analysis on 515 studies finds intergroup contact reduces prejudice (mean $r = .21$).
• Allport's optimal conditions facilitate but are not necessary for the effect.
• Other positive effects emerge from intergroup contact including greater intergroup trust.
• Prejudice-reducing effects of intergroup contact appear to be universal.
• Major mediators of intergroup contact's effects are affective.



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Keywords

Intergroup contact; Indirect contact; Negative contact

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An earlier version of this paper was delivered by the first author at the Academy's meeting at the University of Hawaii, August 25, 2009, upon receipt of the Academy's Lifetime Achievement Award.

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