Contact Theory

When different social groups make contact with each other, especially when the contact is facilitated and cooperative, prejudice between the groups is reduced.
Contact Theory Overview

- Requires contact with another social group
- Studied for a long time (since 1934)
- Extremely reliable
- Effects are sometimes small
Samples
Methods of Implementation

Usually involves long-term contact

Examples:
- Integration of special needs students into other classes
- Interracial college roommates
- Employing a worker with a disability in a school
- Enrolling in a racially heterogeneous course [MW17]
Experimental Example

- Teenagers participated in 2- to 3-week Outward Bound courses and responded to questions about their tolerance for members of other racial groups [MW17]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Composition</th>
<th>Average racial tolerance response (out of 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homogenous</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allport’s Conditions

Shown to improve effectiveness of contact, but are not necessary.

Conditions:
- Working toward a common goal
- Cooperation between groups
- Equal status among participants
- Support or facilitation from an institution (this is most important) [MW13]
Other Important Conditions

- Reduction of anxiety
- Empathy
- Taking the perspective of the other [MW11]
- Common identity may be fostered through contact with another group [MW17]
For Whom Is Contact Effective?

- Contact reduces prejudice for both majority and minority groups [MW15].
- Effects are stronger for majority groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group studied</th>
<th>Average correlation between contact and prejudice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minority status</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority status</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Broader Effects

- Contact with an outgroup may reduce prejudice toward the entire group [MW13].

- Reduced prejudice due to contact may reduce prejudice toward other groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group studied</th>
<th>Average correlation between contact and prejudice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People with whom contact is made</td>
<td>-0.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire social group to which people belong</td>
<td>-0.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social groups</td>
<td>-0.190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Takeaways

- Contact can reliably reduce prejudice between groups
- Contact is best when it makes use of time, goals, cooperation, equality, support, and empathy
- The reduction of prejudice from contact may be generalized outside of the immediately present groups, though the effects are not as strong
- The effectiveness of contact is not as strong for minority group members