

Purpose of the project

This project aims to determine how the association between intergroup contact and outgroup-directed attitudes depends on time. While other areas of science (e.g., biology or chemistry) are very precise in specifying the timeframe in which their phenomena of interest occur, academic psychology does not give this issue much thought. By attempting to determine how long it takes for intergroup contact to improve outgroup-directed attitudes, and how durable such changes are, this project may serve as a step toward filling this gap.

Description of the studies

The project involves studies located in four research lines. Line 1 consists of a longitudinal survey with three online measurements. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of four groups differing in the length of the interval between the adjacent measurements (1, 3, 6 or 12 months). The purpose of the study is to check whether various types of dependent variables (e.g., positive behavior and emotions toward the outgroup) differ in the amount of time intergroup contact needs to affect them. Line 2 will feature three experimental studies focused on the consequences of indirect (i.e., not involving “face-to-face” interactions in close physical proximity) contact. Among other things, we will seek to identify factors that inhibit or accelerate the decay of vicarious (i.e., involving the observation of intergroup interactions) contact effects. In Line 3, we will conduct an experiment to check whether respectful virtual contact between representatives of two sides of a political divide, during which divergences and similarities between the groups are discussed, results in a sustained decline in prejudice against the opponents. In Line 4, two studies with intensive measurement design will be conducted to determine whether the effects of spontaneous intergroup contact outside the laboratory environment are similar to those observed in controlled experimental conditions. In these studies, participants will be asked to download a mobile measurement app to their smartphones. Through this application, we will collect data on participants’ intra- and intergroup interactions for seven consecutive days.

Justification for pursuing the research topic

This project was motivated predominantly by the lack of systematic reflection on the role of time in determining intergroup contact effects. Although the number of longitudinal studies on intergroup contact has visibly increased over the past five years, when designing such studies, researchers are not guided by any theory, but by other, non-substantive reasons such as intuition, tradition, convenience, or funding availability. There is also very limited knowledge about reasons for which some individuals bounce back to their pre-contact attitudes. This project aims to fill these gaps. Changes in the contemporary world are another reason for pursuing the present topic. At the time of increased migrations due to wars, climate change or poverty, it seems crucial to learn what factors facilitate peaceful co-existence in increasingly diverse societies. One such factor is intergroup contact.

Key outcomes of the project

Better understanding of the role of time in shaping intergroup contact effects will be the main outcome of the present project. Conducting the studies we propose will allow to a) determine the time required for the occurrence of contact-induced changes in outgroup-directed emotions, beliefs and behaviors, b) specifying at what stages of intergroup relationships contact has the greatest impact on negative and positive attitudes towards the outgroups, c) test the durability of direct and indirect contact effects, d) to determine the individual differences that facilitate the return to pre-contact attitudes. In addition, we will formulate guidelines for researchers planning to conduct longitudinal studies on intergroup contact. Next, the current project will result in at least five manuscripts that will be submitted to JCR journals. One doctoral dissertation and several master's theses are also planned. Finally, the project will result in materials (e.g., recordings) and information useful to practitioners involved in anti-discrimination education.