

Parasocial Contact's Effects on Relations Between Minority Groups in a Multiracial Context

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We introduce and examine the effects of parasocial contact between out-groups—or contact that occurs when someone observes a media portrayal of contact between members of two out-groups. Our study examines Hispanic people's perceptions of Black or Native American out-groups after observing positive contact between a member of one of those groups and a majority group (White) person. Based on social identity theory, we predict that parasocial contact between out-groups will exacerbate prejudice toward the Black out-group, relative to observing African Americans not interacting with the majority out-group. The study's findings, however, do not support our expectation. All forms of contact improved attitudes about African Americans, even when the stimulus materials featured Native Americans. Results are discussed in terms of the cognitive liberalization potential of contact.

Keywords: mediated intergroup contact, parasocial contact, multigroup context, social identity theory, contact theory

Direct face-to-face contact between groups improves intergroup attitudes and reduces intergroup bias, especially when group members have equal status and common goals and the contact is cooperative and supported by authorities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This type of contact reduces intergroup anxiety and increases out-group empathy, among other mechanisms (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Moving beyond direct contact, scholars have documented that some types of indirect contact—such as extended contact, imagined contact, and intergroup contact through the media—have bias-reducing effects similar to direct contact (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2009; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011).

The mediated intergroup contact hypothesis suggests that positive contact with out-group members via media contributes to improving intergroup relations. Mediated contact can expose millions of people to positive out-group characters and thus can be a highly efficient intergroup bias-reduction strategy (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Research on mediated intergroup contact has been limited to the two-group context, typically exploring contact between a majority group member and a single minority group. This research has also primarily operated from the majority group perspective, examining whether contact changes majority group members' attitudes toward the minority group. Indeed, these points apply more broadly to most intergroup contact research, mediated or otherwise.

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World cultures, including U.S. culture, are increasingly multicultural. The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) estimates that minorities will be the majority by 2042. With this change in population composition, relations among minority racial groups become increasingly important. Thus, we advocate more attention in contact research to exchanges between minority group members, including explorations of the effects of media contact on relations among minority groups. Our study explores media contact effects in a multiracial group context, exploring interminority relations from the perspective of a minority group media consumer. We investigate whether a member of one minority group (e.g., a U.S. Hispanic media consumer) exacerbates prejudice against a minority out-group (e.g., African Americans) when the Hispanic consumer sees members of the minority out-group engaged in contact with the majority group (i.e., Whites).

Mediated intergroup contact has been studied in two distinct forms, depending on whether the contact situation includes in-group members (Harwood, 2010; Park, 2012). Observing positively portrayed out-group members is called parasocial contact (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hews, 2005), while observing positive contact between in-group and out-group members is called vicarious contact (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). These two types of mediated contact can be considered under the umbrella term *parasocial mediated intergroup contact* (Park, 2012), but we believe the distinction is useful. Vicarious contact invokes social learning processes due to the involvement of another in-group member in the contact situation. Such processes do not pertain to parasocial contact, which only involves out-group members (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Moyer-Gusé, Dale, & Ortiz, 2019).

To illustrate our research focus, we work in the U.S. context with a majority group (Whites) and two minority groups (Hispanics and Blacks). From a Hispanic viewer's perspective, observing positive media portrayals of Whites or Blacks is considered parasocial contact (Schiappa et al., 2005). Observing positive contact between Whites and Blacks is also considered parasocial contact; however, this is a unique form of parasocial contact because it involves observing two out-groups (in this case, the dominant group and another minority group) interacting. We call this experience parasocial out-group-out-group contact, defined as occurring when minority in-group members (Hispanics) observe minority out-group members (Blacks) interacting with majority out-group members (Whites). We explore the effects of parasocial out-group-out-group contact on minority in-group members' attitudes toward the minority out-group, including examining two mechanisms potentially underlying such effects: social identity threat and intergroup emotions. To establish our research context, we turn to a discussion of the relative status of racial groups in the United States.

The U.S. Race Hierarchy and Intergroup Contact

High-status racial groups have high socioeconomic status, strong social power (i.e., ability to influence), and/or numerical superiority (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Based on these criteria, scholars broadly agree that White Americans are at the top of the U.S. racial hierarchy; Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians occupy the middle; and Native Americans are at the bottom (Song, 2004; Wegener, 1992). Asians have a socioeconomic advantage but a numerical disadvantage relative to Blacks and Hispanics, and they are often perceived as falling between Whites and other minorities (E. Oliver & Wong, 2003). Poverty rates in the United States are lowest among Whites (8.7%) and Asians (10.0%), followed by Hispanics (18.3%) and Blacks (21.2%), and finally Native Americans (26.2%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, 2018). Additionally, more

Whites and Asians than Blacks or Hispanics perceive themselves as belonging in or above the upper middle social class (World Values Survey, 2014). Native Americans rank low on demographics, with a population of only 0.7%, while Blacks and Hispanics are 12.2% and 16.7% of the population, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). We conclude that Blacks and Hispanics have similar social status—lower than Whites and higher than Native Americans. We offer empirical evidence for this later in the article.

Relations among minority racial groups—especially Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians—are often characterized by conflict (Gay, 2006; McClain & Joseph, 2013). Blacks are likely to see Hispanics and Asians as competitors for jobs, and Hispanics see Blacks and Asians as threats for housing and economic factors—all relative to perceptions of threat from Whites (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Many Asians and Hispanics see Blacks as less intelligent and more welfare-dependent than other ethnic groups (Johnson, Farrell, & Guinn, 1997). McClain et al. (2006) found that many more Hispanics than Whites had negative perceptions of Blacks' work ethic and integrity. Can intergroup contact change negative interminority relations?

Minority perspectives on intergroup contact have typically focused on the effects of interaction between a minority group and the majority group (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009) and occasionally on the effects of contact between two minority groups (Bikmen, 2011; E. Oliver & Wong, 2003). These studies find asymmetrical contact effects such that the positive effects of contact are larger for majority group members than for minority group members (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), largely due to minority group members' pessimistic views of racial equality and distrustful relations with the majority group (J. Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010). Bikmen (2011) finds the same pattern in contact between two minority groups such that contact improves intergroup attitudes more for higher-status minority group members than for lower-status minority group members. Thus, perceptions of relative social status among minority groups play a critical role in determining the effects of contact.

Parasocial Contact

Building on the parasocial interaction theory, Schiappa and colleagues (2005) suggested that observing positively portrayed out-group character(s) via media would develop parasocial interaction with the out-group characters. Parasocial interactions occur when audience members feel an intimacy with media characters that parallels real social interactions (Cohen, 2001; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Integrating the contact hypothesis and parasocial interaction theory, Schiappa et al. proposed parasocial interaction with out-group characters as a type of intergroup contact, and they dubbed it parasocial contact, predicting that such contact would yield similar effects to direct, real-world contact. Indeed, in their experiment, exposure to positive out-group characters resulted in increased homophily and attraction to the out-group characters (i.e., parasocial interaction) and more positive attitudes toward the out-group. While Schiappa and associates (2005) focused on homophily-related processes, other mechanisms also underlie the effects of parasocial contacts. For example, favorable portrayals of minority groups can change a negative stereotype by updating it to a new, more positive exemplar, thus improving attitudes toward the out-group (e.g., Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011; Ramasubramanian, 2015).

Mediated contact plays an important role in shaping views of other groups, especially in segregated contexts (Mastro, 2015). The propensity to interact with other racial groups in the United States remains low

(Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Sigelman, Bledsoe, Welch, & Combs, 1996). In such segregated situations, there is limited potential for face-to-face contact, and especially for optimal contact—which is equal status, cooperative, and positive, with common goals and institutional support (Allport, 1954). In contrast to such pessimism, a mass audience can encounter portrayals of other racial group members via the media, and the nature of the interactions they encounter can be easily tailored to meet specific conditions (Park, 2012). We extend previous mediated contact research to examine what effects accrue when members of one group witness media portrayals of contact between two other groups (what we term *parasocial out-group-out-group contact*).

Parasocial Out-Group-Out-Group Contact and Relations Among Minority Groups

A simple application of contact theory would lead to a prediction that positive parasocial out-group-out-group contact will improve attitudes toward minority out-group members through the mechanisms outlined earlier. Following Allport (1954), we define positive interaction to mean portrayal of intergroup interaction that is cooperative, equal status, and friendly. However, situations in which multiple groups interact raise new issues for contact research. Specifically, viewing interactions between two out-groups provides information to the viewer not just about the qualities of members of those groups but also about the nature of relations between those groups. For members of minority groups, we suspect that such information may be threatening when it suggests that other minority groups have a close relationship with the majority group. Seeing another minority group engaging in positive interaction with the majority group might send precisely that message. Thus, we predict that viewing positive interactions between majority and minority out-groups has negative intergroup consequences for minority group members' perceptions of minority out-groups. Our hypothesis is grounded in three processes, which we explicate here.

Positive Parasocial Out-Group-Out-Group Contact Enhances Perceived Status of the Minority Out-Group

When we observe contact between two groups, we see a microcosm of their intergroup relations. Outrage over incidents of police violence toward African Americans in the Black Lives Matter movement is not only because of the individual acts but also because those acts represent broader relations between the establishment (law enforcement, Whites) and the African American community. In a complementary manner, portrayals of positive (equal status, cooperative, friendly) interactions between majority and minority group members might be seen as illustrating such relations on a broader societal level. Drawing from social learning theory, viewing such interactions provides the possibility of symbolic learning that these two groups get along with each other and are of similar (or at least less unequal) status (Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011). Hence, we predict that a minority group will be seen as higher status when people are exposed to portrayals of positive contact between that minority group and the dominant group (relative to when they are not exposed).

Research examining participants in intergroup contact provides some (albeit indirect) empirical support for our prediction. In an experiment, students in a cooperative learning (i.e., positive contact) condition perceived the status of male and female students as equal, despite having entered the experiment believing in status differences between men and women (Petersen, Johnson, & Johnson, 1991). Similarly, Blacks who experienced positive intergroup contact with Whites were more likely to perceive that they would

be treated fairly in terms of sharing of welfare (J. Dixon, [Durrheim](#) et al., 2010). Saguy et al. (2009) argue that these kinds of effects occur because contact leads disadvantaged group members to have (false) optimism regarding their conditions relative to the dominant group. Hence, for participants in contact, positive intergroup relations can blur perceptions of power differentials between groups.

We are not aware of direct evidence for parallel effects among observers of contact, but the contact literature does suggest that observing contact (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997), including mediated contact (Joyce & Harwood, 2014), has effects that are similar to participating in contact. When a minority group member views positive, cooperative, and equal status contact between a minority out-group and the dominant group, therefore, one plausible effect is enhanced perceptions of the minority out-group's status as more similar to that of the dominant group.

Perceiving Increased Status of Minority Out-Groups Is a Threat to Minority In-Group Members

According to social identity theory, individuals are motivated to achieve positive self-evaluation through maintaining a positive and distinctive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory (and a wide range of supporting empirical evidence; see Hogg, 2016, for a review) suggests that positive social identity can be obtained by positive, in-group-favoring social comparison—or a more positive evaluation of one's in-group than of relevant out-groups. An increase in perceptions of a minority out-group's social status creates a negative social comparison for a minority in-group and thus poses a threat to minority in-group members' positive social identity. Such threat triggers attempts to regain in-group status, and intergroup bias (out-group derogation) is one strategy by which groups pursue such distinctiveness (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). We propose that positive parasocial out-group-out-group contact will result in increased bias against the minority out-group as part of an attempt to restore positive in-group social identity. To the degree this occurs, we predict that these processes will outweigh traditional parasocial contact effects, override parasocial intimacy, and thus change interminority relations for the worse.

Threats to Identity Are Most Salient When They Come From Similar Status Groups

Similarity between groups is critical in understanding social identity theory's predictions about intergroup social comparison (Tajfel, 1982). Just as we evaluate our own opinions or abilities by comparison with others who are similar to us (Festinger, 1954), so do we compare our in-groups to relevant out-groups, not all out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When a minority out-group has a substantially dissimilar social status from the in-group, parasocial out-group-out-group contact should not negatively influence perceptions of the minority out-group, because the out-group is not a relevant comparison. We expect to see effects only when the minority out-group is similar, and therefore relevant. Building from our earlier discussion of the U.S. racial hierarchy, we posit that Hispanics will perceive Blacks, but not Native Americans, to be a relevant status out-group. Therefore, viewing positive contact between Blacks and Whites will constitute a status threat for Hispanics, and the threat will drive more negative attitudes about Blacks. In contrast, viewing contact between Native Americans and Whites will not engender threat (because Native Americans are not a relevant status out-group), and hence viewing contact between Native Americans and Whites will not drive more negative attitudes about that minority out-group.

H1: Hispanics who encounter positive parasocial out-group-out-group contact between Blacks and Whites will have a more negative attitude toward Blacks than those who encounter parasocial contact with Blacks or a control group. However, Hispanics who encounter positive parasocial out-group-out-group contact between Native Americans and Whites will have attitudes toward Native Americans similar to those who encounter parasocial contact with Native Americans or a control group.

H2: The effect predicted in H1 of Hispanics' attitudes toward Blacks will be mediated by perceived threat to Hispanics' positive social identity.

If threat is a mediator, then emotions relevant to threat should also be mediators. Relevant emotions here are anger (a motivation to remove the threat) and fear (a motivation to avoid the threat; Frijda, 1987; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). Intergroup emotions theory holds that these emotions influence prejudice and discrimination (Dijker, 1987; Mackie, Silver, & Smith, 2004) by triggering behavioral responses that enable the individual to fulfill the motivation (Frijda, 1987). People with anger exhibit action tendencies that move against and oppose another person (or group), whereas fear is associated with a protection action tendency (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; C. Smith & Ellsworth, 1987). Relative status is critical in distinguishing these two action tendencies (E. Smith, 1993). If in-group members think their status is higher than the out-group, then they feel anger. If they think their status is lower than the out-group, then fear would be elicited. In this study, Hispanics (the minority in-group) and Blacks (the minority out-group) are assumed to have similar social status, so we propose that both emotions could be elicited. We propose:

H3: The effect predicted in H1 of Hispanics' attitudes toward Blacks will be mediated by anger and fear.

Method

Pilot Test of Assumption of Social Status Order

Our hypotheses assume that Whites rank highest, Blacks and Hispanics are in the middle, and Native Americans are lowest in terms of social status. Our literature review supports this assumption, but we ran a pilot study ($N = 82$ U.S. college students) to test the assumption. We asked participants to rank five racial groups according to social status. The relative rankings of the groups were compared using a Friedman test, which was significant, $Q(4) = 206.62$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons (using the Dunn-Bonferroni test) demonstrated that Whites ($M_{\text{rank}} = 1.09$) ranked significantly higher than all other groups. Asians ($M_{\text{rank}} = 2.43$) ranked higher than all the remaining groups. Blacks ($M_{\text{rank}} = 3.49$) and Hispanics ($M_{\text{rank}} = 3.82$) did not differ significantly in rank. Blacks were ranked significantly higher than Native Americans ($M_{\text{rank}} = 4.18$), while Hispanics were not. The pattern of mean ranks is very similar among the small subsample of this group ($n = 12$) who self-reported being Hispanic (White $M_{\text{rank}} = 1.08$, Asian $M_{\text{rank}} = 2.58$, Hispanic $M_{\text{rank}} = 3.33$, Black $M_{\text{rank}} = 3.92$, Native American $M_{\text{rank}} = 4.08$). Hence, the pilot test confirmed our assumption about the relative ranking of these groups and specifically supports the idea that Blacks and Hispanics are perceived similarly in terms of their status. The relative ranking of Blacks and Hispanics among the Hispanic respondents (relative to the entire sample) supports our contention that Blacks are the most relevant comparison group for Hispanics.

Main Study: Participants and Procedure

We recruited 600 Hispanic people over age 18 from Amazon Mechanical Turk to participate in an online experimental study in exchange for a small payment. To screen for ethnicity, we asked respondents to select the ethnicity with which they identified the most. Respondents were unaware that we were seeking Hispanic participants when responding to this question, and hence were not motivated to respond inaccurately. We checked respondents' Mechanical Turk ID and IP address to ensure that respondents did not retry this question to pass the ethnicity screening. Research on mediated intergroup contact generally shows a relatively small effect size, ranging from $r = .02$ to $.34$ (e.g., Mazziotta et al., 2011). Power analysis suggested a sample size of 432 for analysis of covariance ($f = .15$, 80% power, $\alpha = .05$). Of the 600 participants, 169 were dropped for reasons detailed below. The analysis was conducted with 431 cases (43.5% women, 91.6% 20 to 49 years old).

Our study involved a 2 (contact type: parasocial out-group-out-group vs. parasocial) \times 2 (minority out-group status: similar to Hispanics [i.e., Blacks] vs. dissimilar from Hispanics [i.e., Native Americans]) + 1 (control) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of these five experimental conditions. All participants except those in the control group read a news report describing out-group members engaging in a community activity and then answered questions concerning the mediator and dependent variables. Then participants were debriefed and told that the news story was not real. To encourage participants to read the manipulation stimuli, they were required to spend a certain amount of time reading, and we warned them of a postexposure test. Participants in the control group completed the measures without exposure to any stimuli.

Experimental Manipulation

The manipulated news story portrayed people engaging in voluntary work cleaning up a community. We manipulated how many groups, and which groups, were present in the story, resulting in four conditions: (1) the parasocial out-group-out-group similar status condition featured Whites and Blacks working together; (2) the parasocial out-group-out-group dissimilar status condition featured Whites and Native Americans working together; (3) the parasocial similar status condition featured Blacks working with one another; and (4) the parasocial dissimilar status condition featured Native Americans working together. Because news stories have the capacity to convey the reality of the event to participants, we used a news story to strengthen effects pertaining to perceptions of real-world social status (Appel & Maleckar, 2012). As mentioned earlier, we are interested in positive parasocial contact (i.e., positive portrayals of out-groups and intergroup interaction). Therefore, drawing on Allport (1954), our manipulation included a group engaged in positive and cooperative activity involving shared goals (cleaning the community) and featured positive interaction among the participants (including across group boundaries in the out-group-out-group conditions). The story included phrases such as "build lasting friendship" and "good team" to emphasize the idea of cooperative and equal status interaction. Positive outcomes of the activity were highlighted by sentences such as, "The community is much safer and cleaner, which is a big change from a year ago."

The manipulated story included a fictional newspaper masthead and a byline to enhance the realism of the materials. Participants received instructions that it was a story recently published by a newspaper.

The story was written by the researchers and edited by a former professional journalist. To control confounding variables, the word count, title, topic, and sources quoted were equivalent across experimental conditions. The stories included pictures to reinforce the manipulations (i.e., photos featuring racial group[s]) matching the manipulation) and to emphasize the notion of cooperative activity (i.e., photos of the people working together happily). The stimuli are available as an online appendix (see <http://bit.ly/contactnews>).

Measurement

Attention and Manipulation Check

Four attention check items scattered through the questionnaire asked participants to select a specific response option (e.g., "check 'strongly agree' for this question"). One item asked participants to recall the race of the characters in the news story. Respondents who failed any attention or manipulation checks were removed from the analysis. To check that the stimulus was perceived equally positively across conditions, we measured respondents' perceptions of the positivity of the interaction. Participants rated the interaction among people in the article as cooperative, superficial (reverse-scored), meaningful, friendly, and pleasant. These items were rated on an 11-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 11 (*very much*; $\alpha = .79$, $M = 8.78$, $SD = 1.65$). The four conditions did not differ, $F(3, 274) = 1.33$, $p = .27$.

Positive Social Identity Threat

The realistic threat subscale of the intergroup threat scale (e.g., Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999) assesses threat to the in-group's power and material resources. Participants in all conditions answered seven items for both target out-groups (Blacks and Native Americans) concerning how they perceived threats to their in-group's power and material resources relative to the out-group. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); for example, "Blacks [Native Americans] will get ahead economically at the expense of Hispanics." The scales were reliable (Black targets, $\alpha = .96$, $M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.53$; Native American targets, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.38$).

Emotion

Participants reported their anger and fear about both Blacks and Native Americans using items from C. Smith and Ellsworth (1987). Anger was measured with three items (anger, resentment, frustration), and fear was measured with two items (nervousness and being afraid). Both were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). The scales were reliable: Blacks (anger: $\alpha = .91$, $M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.38$; fear: $\alpha = .93$, $M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.59$); Native Americans (anger: $\alpha = .94$, $M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.03$; fear: $\alpha = .93$, $M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.04$).

Attitude Toward Minority Out-Groups

Racial attitude was assessed using a social distance scale. The scale represents a behavioral dimension of attitude and has been widely used (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). Five items

adapted from Brigham (1993) involved questions about participants' intention to stay away from Blacks (or Native Americans); for example, "I would rather not have Blacks live in the same apartment building I live in." The items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); Black: $\alpha = .89$, $M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.47$; Native American: $\alpha = .87$, $M = 6.04$, $SD = 1.19$). High scores were recoded to indicate less desire for social distance (i.e., a more positive attitude). Respondents in the experimental conditions first answered the attitudes questions about the group featured in the stimuli they viewed (Blacks in the similar status condition; Native Americans in the dissimilar status condition) before answering about the other group. In the control condition, the order of the Black and Native American attitudes measures was counterbalanced. To include the control group in factorial analysis, participants in the control group who first answered the Black attitudes measure were included with the similar (Black out-group) experimental participants, and those who first answered the Native American measure were included with the dissimilar (Native American out-group) experimental group. The control group participants only differed in the ordering of the measures.

Control Variables

Two control variables were included in all analyses: direct contact experiences and Hispanic identification. Both variables are associated with intergroup attitudes and perceptions of out-group threat (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Direct contact with minority out-groups was measured with single items asking how often participants have face-to-face contact with Blacks and Native Americans (Fujioka, 1999). This variable was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely*) to 5 (*very often*); contact with Blacks: $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.27$; Native Americans: $M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.20$. In-group identification was measured using the importance to identity subscale of the collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992)—for example, "Being Hispanic is an important reflection of who I am"—with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); $\alpha = .88$, $M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.45$.

Analysis and Results

We measured attitude toward Blacks and Native Americans across all conditions, and both measures were included in all factorial analyses as a within-subjects factor. This allowed us to ensure that effects on attitudes toward a specific minority out-group are a result of a specific exposure to that out-group rather than simply exposure to any out-group.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Hispanics who encounter positive parasocial out-group-out-group contact (positive contact between Blacks and Whites) will have a more negative attitude toward Blacks than will Hispanics who encounter positively portrayed Blacks not interacting with Whites (parasocial contact) or a control group. We predicted weaker effects of parasocial out-group-out-group contact between Native Americans and Whites on attitudes concerning Native Americans. To test H1, we ran a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed design analysis of covariance with two between-subjects factors (contact type: parasocial contact vs. parasocial out-group-out-group contact vs. control; status of minority out-group in the contact scenario: similar status/Black vs. dissimilar status/Native American) and one within-subjects factor (attitude target: Blacks vs. Native Americans).

Results showed no significant three-way interaction, $F(2, 422) = 0.11, p > .05$. Therefore, H1 was not supported. The analysis did yield a significant unhypothesized two-way interaction between attitude target and contact type, $F(2, 422) = 5.48, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$. Simple main effects tests reveal that attitudes toward Blacks were more positive in the parasocial out-group-out-group condition and the parasocial condition than in the control condition (see Table 1). Attitudes toward Native Americans did not differ across contact types. This finding differs from our predictions in that we expected attitudes about Blacks to be more negative in the parasocial out-group-out-group condition. It also differs from our predictions because it includes attitudes toward Blacks evaluated by participants whose contact condition featured Native American portrayals. Broadly, the effect indicates that any form of positive parasocial contact with another cultural group (whether Black or Native American, parasocial or parasocial out-group-out-group) improves attitudes about Blacks.

Table 1. Covariate Adjusted Means for Attitude Toward Minority Out-Groups.

Target out-group	Parasocial out-group-out-group contact	Parasocial contact	Control
Blacks	5.83 _a	5.74 _a	5.28 _b
Native Americans	6.07 _a	6.05 _a	5.96 _a

Note. Means with different subscripts across rows differ significantly (post hoc between-subjects analyses of covariance, $p < .05$). $N = 431$.

Indirect Effects

Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted that the effect of contact type on attitude toward the Black out-group will be mediated by positive social identity threat and intergroup emotions (i.e., anger and fear). To test these predictions, we ran Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (model 4). Contact type had three levels and was dummy-coded with the control group as a reference group (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). We estimated whether the effect of parasocial out-group-out-group contact or parasocial contact on attitudes toward Black people, each compared with a control group, was mediated by positive social identity threat or intergroup emotions. We also tested mediation models in which the reference group was parasocial contact to estimate the mediation model comparing the two parasocial contact conditions. Finally, to isolate the effect of experimental stimuli, we conducted the analysis separately by out-group status condition: participants who were exposed to parasocial out-group-out-group contact or parasocial contact with Blacks (i.e., similar out-group status condition) and participants who were exposed to parasocial out-group-out-group or parasocial contact with Native Americans (i.e., dissimilar out-group status condition).

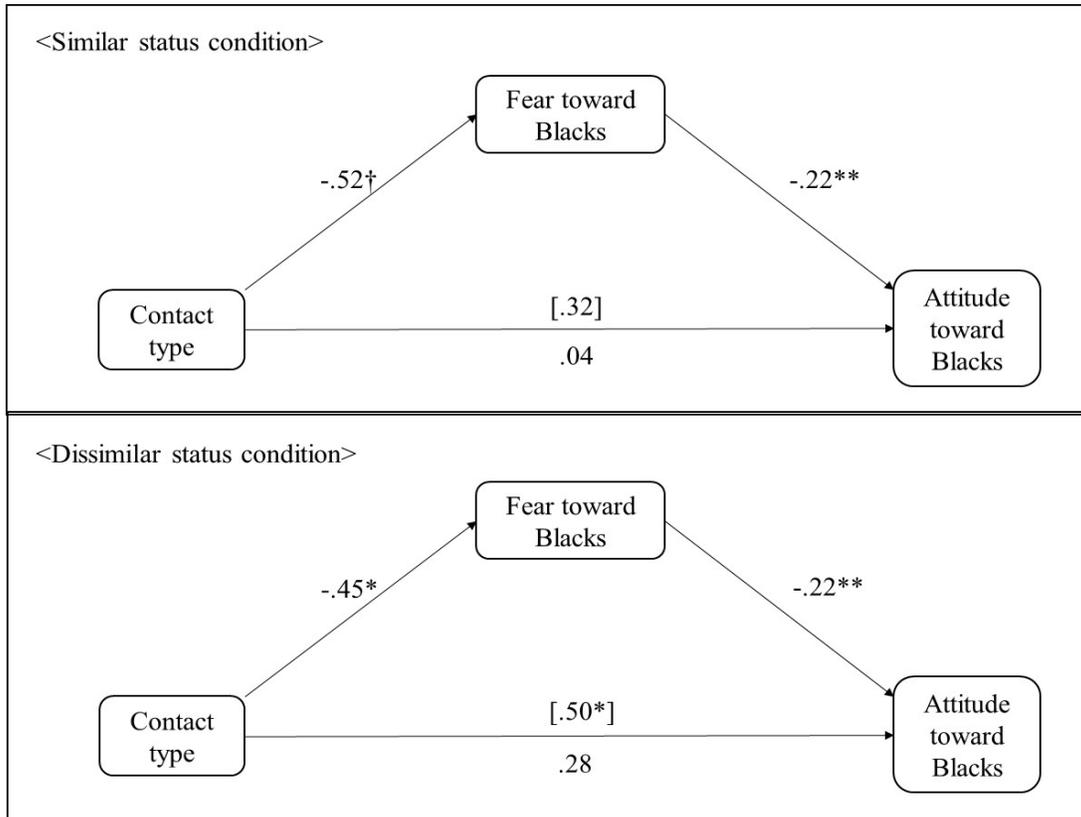
In the similar status condition (observing Blacks), results indicate that the effect of parasocial out-group-out-group contact (compared with the control) on attitude toward Blacks was mediated by fear of Blacks (see Table 2). Parasocial out-group-out-group contact predicted less fear toward Blacks than did the control stimulus; reduced fear predicted positive attitudes toward Blacks (see top panel of Figure 1). Effects in the dissimilar status condition (observing Native Americans) were identical (see Table 2 and the bottom panel of Figure 1). There were no mediation effects involving comparison of the two parasocial contact conditions or comparing the parasocial condition to the control, nor were there mediating effects of positive social identity threat or anger. These effects are in the opposite direction to our expectation (we expected parasocial out-group-out-group contact with Blacks to increase fear of Blacks, not decrease it) and involved

comparisons only with the control condition, not between the two contact conditions. Therefore, H2 and H3 are not supported.

Table 2. Estimates of Mediated Pathway From Contact Type Through Mediators to Attitude Toward Blacks.

Status condition	Comparison between contact conditions	Mediators	Point estimate	95% CI
Similar out-group status (contact with Blacks)	Parasocial out-group-out-group vs. control group	Threat	-.006	[-.084, .021]
		Anger	.176	[-.011, .463]
		Fear	.117	[.006, .323]
	Parasocial out-group-out-group vs. parasocial contact	Threat	.002	[-.029, .056]
		Anger	.016	[-.166, .187]
		Fear	.051	[-.038, .203]
	Parasocial contact vs. control group	Threat	-.009	[-.085, .019]
		Anger	.161	[-.024, .459]
		Fear	.066	[-.036, .261]
Dissimilar out-group status (contact with Native Americans)	Parasocial out-group-out-group vs. control group	Threat	.019	[-.015, .104]
		Anger	.100	[-.061, .342]
		Fear	.100	[.001, .310]
	Parasocial out-group-out-group vs. parasocial contact	Threat	.009	[-.029, .085]
		Anger	-.033	[-.232, .163]
		Fear	-.065	[-.250, .022]
	Parasocial contact vs. control group	Threat	-.027	[-.128, .010]
		Anger	-.067	[-.324, .106]
		Fear	-.035	[-.211, .053]

Note. CI = confidence interval. 95% CI indicates the statistical significance of mediation effect. Threat: positive social identity threat from Blacks. Significant effects ($p < .05$) are in bold type. Estimates are unstandardized. $N = 213$ (similar out-group status), and 218 (dissimilar out-group status). Control variables are included in the analysis.



$^\dagger p < .10$. $^* p < .05$. $^{**} p < .01$.

Figure 1. Indirect effect model from contact type to attitude toward Blacks via fear toward Blacks. All path coefficients are unstandardized. Contact type is coded as control group = 0, and parasocial out-group-out-group contact = 1.

Discussion

We predicted that, in the multigroup context, parasocial out-group-out-group contact (a minority group member observing positive contact between majority and minority out-group members) will have distinct effects relative to parasocial contact (observing just minority out-group members). Drawing on social identity theory and parasocial contact theory, we hypothesized that parasocial out-group-out-group contact could bring about a more negative attitude toward a relevant (similar status) minority out-group by increasing the perceived status of the minority out-group and therefore increasing that out-group's potential threat. We predicted that similar effects would not occur when the out-group was much lower status due to such groups being irrelevant to social comparison processes. None of our predicted effects emerged.

Instead, we found an interesting, albeit unpredicted, pattern of effects. Participants in all the parasocial contact conditions had more positive attitudes toward Blacks than did the control group. The idea that positive portrayals of Blacks might improve attitudes about Blacks is not strange; indeed, it is the straightforward prediction of parasocial contact theory (Schiappa et al., 2005). Curiously, though, our research found positive effects on attitudes about Blacks even when participants experienced parasocial contact with Native Americans. Adding to the puzzle, parasocial contact had no effect on attitudes toward Native Americans, even when the contact was with Native Americans. We consider these two surprising effects separately.

Secondary Transfer, Deprovincialization, Cognitive Liberalization, and Elevation

The fact that parasocial contact with Native Americans led to positive attitudes about Blacks might lead some contact theorists to consider secondary transfer effects. Secondary transfer refers to attitude generalization in which the effect of contact on reducing prejudice with one out-group extends to another group that is not directly involved in the contact (Meleady, Crisp, Hodson, & Earle, 2019; Pettigrew, 2009). Such effects are strongest when the groups involved are somewhat similar to one another, such as both being ethnic groups (Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2011). However, secondary transfer does not appear the most plausible explanation in our study, because there were no effects on attitudes toward Native Americans, and hence no effects to transfer.

Instead, broader effects of contact on cognitive liberalization (Hodson, Crisp, Meleady, & Earle, 2018) or deprovincialization (Pettigrew, 1997) might be a better explanation. One effect of contact is to broaden people's worldviews, increasing their openness to other cultures and new experiences (Hodson et al., 2018). From the cognitive liberalization perspective, positive parasocial contact (whether with Native Americans or Blacks) should increase levels of support for multiculturalism and intergroup harmony, thus increasing a desire for closeness and interdependence with African Americans. Notably, the effects are mediated by fear perceptions. The improved attitudes result from amelioration of negative perceptions related to perhaps the most salient and pernicious social stereotypes of Blacks—that is, perceptions of violence (T. Dixon, 2015). The mediation findings are also broadly consistent with the literature on the mechanism of contact effects, which indicates that affective predictors are strong underlying mediators of contact's effects (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

An additional explanation for the results of our study comes from mass media research on the elevating power of media messages. M. Oliver and colleagues (2015), for example, find that uplifting media content can enhance feelings of shared humanity, which has positive consequences for intergroup attitudes of all flavors. The messages in our study included positive portrayals of teamwork, cooperation, and selfless work to improve a community. As such, it is possible that they elicited feelings of elevation sufficient to improve intergroup attitudes about all out-groups. Replicating this study and measuring elevation and cognitive liberalization would allow a test of these ideas.

Why Not Native Americans?

These ideas, of course, still beg the question of why the same effect did not occur for Native Americans. Two interrelated processes may serve as useful explanations here. First, Native Americans differ substantially from Blacks in terms of stereotype content and attitude valence. As noted in the introduction, Native Americans are unlikely to serve as a status comparison group for Hispanics; they have very low population numbers and rank significantly lower in most studies of objective or subjective status. Hence, the lack of effects might reflect a more general perception of the group's overall lack of relevance (e.g., see Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015, for a discussion of Native Americans' invisibility in the media).

The lack of effects might also simply reflect a ceiling effect in the measurement. On our scale from 1 to 7, attitudes about Native Americans across conditions were 5.96 or higher (overall mean = 6.04). In other words, even in the control condition, attitudes were very positive. Native Americans are rarely viewed as a threatening group and are often perceived (and stereotyped) in terms related to spirituality, closeness to nature, and traditional ways of life (Leavitt et al., 2015). These nonthreatening and positive (albeit highly restrictive) views mean that "improving" attitudes is a challenge. It is particularly notable that the effects we observed for African American attitudes were mediated by fear perceptions, and fear perceptions were extremely low for Native Americans (at or below 1.5 on a scale from 1 to 7). Thus, the possibility of reflecting the specific effects found with perceptions of Blacks were doubly unlikely here.

This discussion reveals a broader challenge in examining social status as an intergroup variable. While these groups clearly vary in terms of their social status, they also vary in terms of the specific content of their group stereotypes and other features as well. Experimental work to isolate status as the sole variable (e.g., by priming high or low status for an existing group or by using messages featuring artificial groups) would be helpful to disentangle some of these issues.

Implications, Future Directions, and Limitations

In terms of theoretical implications, we broadened the scope of contact theory by applying it in a multigroup context. Contact theory, including its media forms, has largely been developed and tested from a majority-centric perspective and in two-group settings. However, in a multiracial United States, with many variations in contact type in the real world and in the media, the effect of multigroup media contact should be examined. We believe this study is the first that explores parasocial contact effects considering more than two groups at the same time; indeed, even in other contact research paradigms, there is little consideration of multigroup contact. Hence, although our specific hypotheses were not supported, the study provides valuable information about how parasocial contact theory could be developed in a multigroup context.

Why did we not find our predicted effects? Our specific choice of messages might have been a contributing factor. Engaging with the majority (dominant) group in a relatively menial task (cleaning up a neighborhood) perhaps does not provide the potential boost in perceived status that we were anticipating. We recommend that future work in this area examine minority out-group members involved in higher-status situations (e.g., writing legislation, starting a new business). Such portrayals should be status-enhancing, and we believe they might be particularly so when they involve collaboration with the majority group. In

other words, despite the lack of effects in our specific context, we still believe there is value in examining whether a minority group's perceived status is increased by seeing members of that group in contact with the majority group, and whether such status increases result in intergroup tensions among minority groups. An interesting corollary would be to examine whether negative contact between an out-group minority and the out-group majority might improve interminority relations. Viewing another minority group member being abused by the majority might engender a sense of shared destiny and interminority solidarity in ways that mirror our original prediction for positive contact (Hurwitz, Peffley, & Mondak, 2015).

Our study sets the stage for exploration of other forms of multigroup contact. These include, for example, examining contact among three (or even more) groups, whether including or excluding the in-group. Recent research reports that observing positively portrayed in-group members in media improves attitudes toward the in-group (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2017). This suggests the value of exploring multigroup media contact that includes the in-group (i.e., various forms of vicarious contact), something we did not do.

In terms of practical implications for producing prejudice-reducing media messages, we know that exposure to a positively portrayed minority group can reduce prejudice. Extending previous literature, our findings suggest that exposure to a minority out-group interacting with majority group can also reduce prejudice toward the minority group. This finding provides evidence to encourage multicultural casts in the media. Even portrayals of out-groups other than a focal out-group might improve attitudes toward the focal out-group via cognitive liberalization, deprovincialization, or elevation. It is worth advocating for more frequent positive portrayals of specific groups, but more portrayals of dynamic and positive multigroup settings might be a particularly promising goal for producers committed to improving the intergroup media landscape.

The current work is limited because we did not measure perceived social status of the three groups among our sample, or among any large sample of Hispanics. Hence, while we have reviewed considerable evidence for the idea that Blacks and Hispanics are perceived to have similar status, and higher status than Native Americans, we cannot definitively say that these perceptions are shared by our sample. We also did not measure potential identification of the Hispanic participants with the White ethnic group. In the screening, they all selected Hispanic as the group with which they identified the most, but they may also have identified as White and hence might have seen the White participants in the stimuli as in-group members. Also, we used only a short newspaper story as the experimental stimulus, which may have weakened the manipulation effect. If the same information was presented in richer media (e.g., TV news) via long-term, repeated exposure, then the experimental stimuli might be more impactful. An additional limitation is that we used news media. News has the advantage of enhancing the perceived reality of the message (Appel & Maleckar, 2012). However, parasocial contact effects have largely been documented with fictional stimuli (e.g., Schiappa et al., 2005), and our effects might not extend to such portrayals.

Finally, the current study tests only one type of mediated intergroup contact. The multigroup context allows for forms other than parasocial out-group-out-group contact, such as three-group contact involving an in-group member and members of both out-groups. This contact type might be termed *out-group-out-group vicarious contact*. Such contact has the potential to invoke social learning processes and hence to have stronger effects than parasocial contact (without an in-group member). Despite these limitations and unexpected results, our findings provide valuable information about how theoretical models of mediated intergroup contact can be

expanded to incorporate more realistic portrayals of our multicultural world. The results provide a tantalizing glimpse of how portrayals of one group can improve attitudes about a second group.

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