

**Benefits of Contact between Racial and Ethnic Groups:
A Summary of Research Findings**

**Testimony in Support of
New York City School Diversity Bills**

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I wish to thank the New York City Council Education Committee for this opportunity to summarize social science evidence *demonstrating the benefits of racial integration* for reducing prejudice and promoting positive relations between racial and ethnic groups.

I am a social psychologist, and using mostly quantitative methods, my work concerns how people relate to each other as members of different groups, and what strategies we can use to encourage positive intergroup relations.

With my colleague Thomas Pettigrew, I have conducted a *meta-analysis* of research on intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). A meta-analysis is essentially a *quantitative integration* of studies, where researchers work to find every study ever conducted on a particular topic; then, they can statistically pool the results of those studies to examine the overall effects, and they can code the research studies for additional factors that might strengthen or weaken those effects (see Johnson & Eagly, 2000).

Our meta-analytic research concerned the effects of intergroup contact, to provide an answer to the question: *What happens when members of different groups interact with each other?* From a six year search, we found a total of 515 studies testing the effects of intergroup contact, where the contact is defined in terms of actual, face-to-face interactions between members of different groups. These studies span from the 1940s through the year 2000 and they include responses from over 250,000 participants in 38 countries.

Our results overwhelmingly show that greater contact between groups predicts lower intergroup prejudice (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011). Approximately 94% of the cases in our analysis show a relationship such that greater contact is associated with lower prejudice. Further analysis (see Rosenthal, 1991) reveals that it would take more than 1,200 additional studies showing no relationship between contact and prejudice to undo the significance of the overall effect we have found.

Findings from our meta-analysis are illustrated in graphs such as Figure 1 below. In this figure, the values on the Y-axis represent mean effects and correspond with values of the correlation coefficient r . A “zero” value on the Y-axis means that there is no meaningful relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice (mean $r = .00$). Positive values would mean that intergroup contact is associated with greater prejudice, and negative values mean that intergroup contact is associated with lower prejudice.

Figure 1

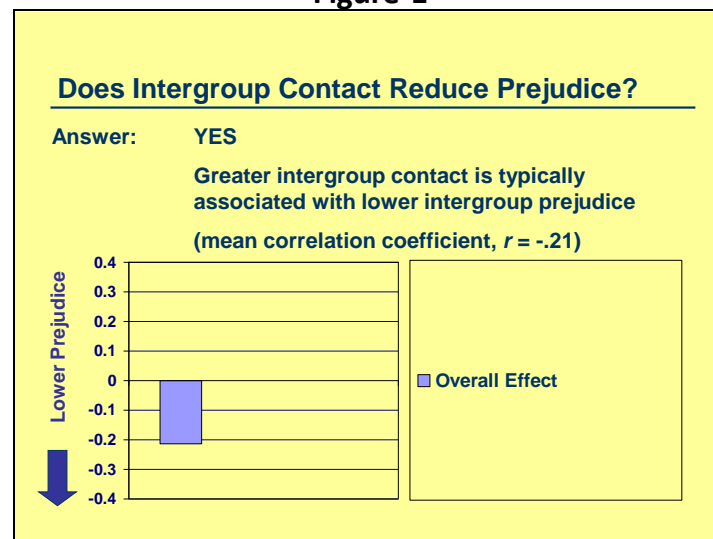
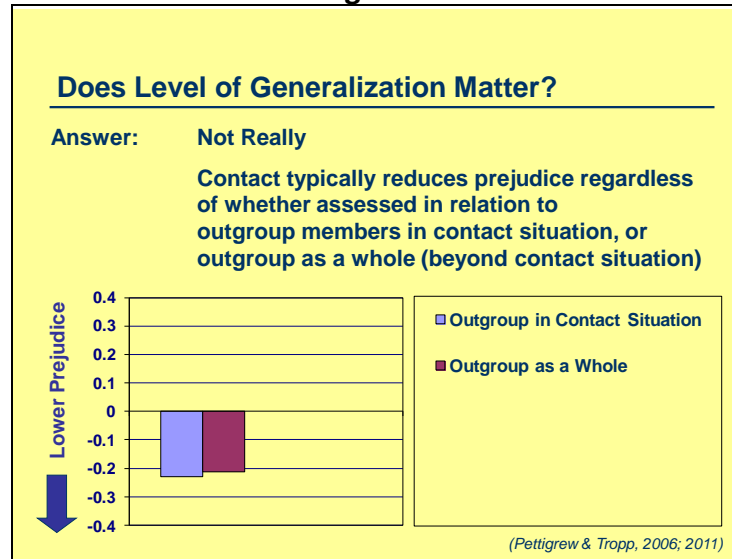


Figure 1 shows the mean contact-prejudice relationship, corresponding to a correlation coefficient r of $-.21$, such that greater intergroup contact is associated with lower prejudice. This mean effect is relatively modest in magnitude, but it is a highly significant effect and a highly consistent effect that becomes only slightly stronger or weaker depending on other characteristics of the studies.

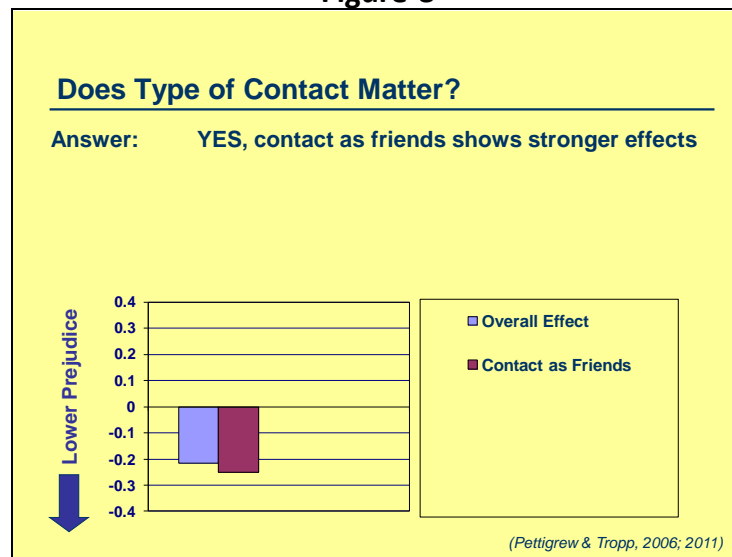
Generalization. For example, we examined whether the effects of contact can *generalize*. Here, we coded whether prejudice was assessed toward the individual outgroup members with whom the contact occurred (in the contact situation) or toward the outgroup as a whole (beyond the contact situation; see Figure 2). We find that the effects of contact on prejudice toward the outgroup as a whole do not significantly differ from the effects of contact toward the individual outgroup members in the contact situation. These results suggest that the effects of contact can generalize from positive experiences with individual members of other groups to more positive attitudes toward those groups as a whole.

Figure 2



Friendship contact. We have also looked closely at the types of contact people have with other groups. We find that, compared to the general contact effect, there are greater reductions in prejudice when the contact involves friendships between members of different groups (see Figure 3). There is also experimental evidence that supports this finding (Page-Gould, Mendoza Denton, & Tropp, 2008), as well as research with children (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003) and adults (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011) showing that friendship contact is especially effective for reducing prejudice.

Figure 3

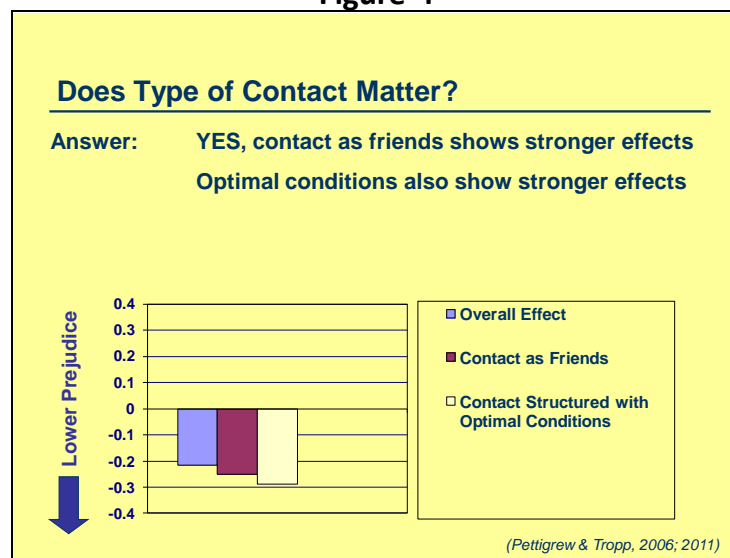


This finding is also an important reminder that not all types of contact are equal, and that superficial forms of contact may be relatively unlikely to change our attitudes. But the more able we are to cultivate meaningful relationships across groups, the more likely it is that the contact will be effective in reducing prejudice.

In order for these cross-group relationships to develop, children must have opportunities to become friends with people from other groups. This issue points to the importance of promoting racial integration in schools and classrooms, because cross-race friendships typically increase with greater racial and ethnic diversity in schools (Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Other work also shows that White children in ethnically diverse schools and classrooms are more likely to perceive that children from different ethnic groups can be friends, and to select children from other ethnic groups as potential friends (Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Wright & Tropp, 2005). Additional research suggests that Whites who report having had contact with Blacks during their childhoods report less racial prejudice as adults (Wood & Sonleitner, 1996). Furthermore, longitudinal studies with White children and adolescents indicate that greater numbers of cross-race friendships predict more positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities over time (Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Binder, Zagefka, Brown, Funke, et al., 2009; Levin, Van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003)

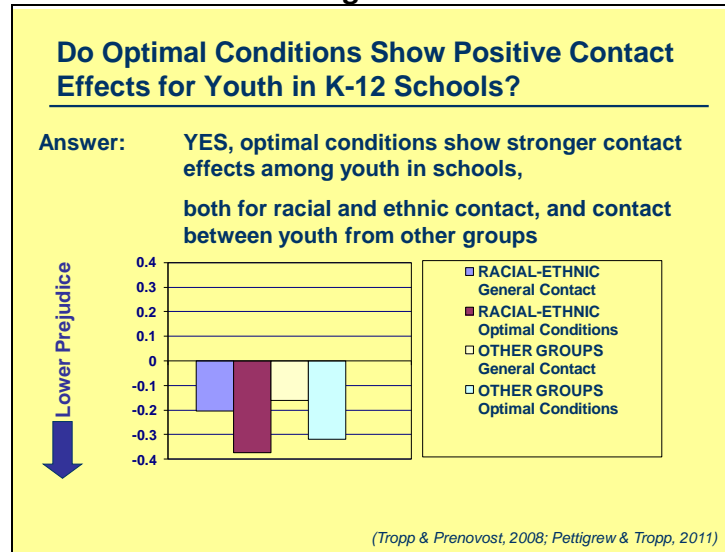
Optimal conditions for contact. Our meta-analytic research also shows that positive effects of contact are found in schools, as well as in other settings. Such positive outcomes of contact are especially likely to occur when the contact situation is structured in terms of *optimal conditions* (Allport, 1954), such as when there are institutional norms that support equality and cooperation between the groups (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



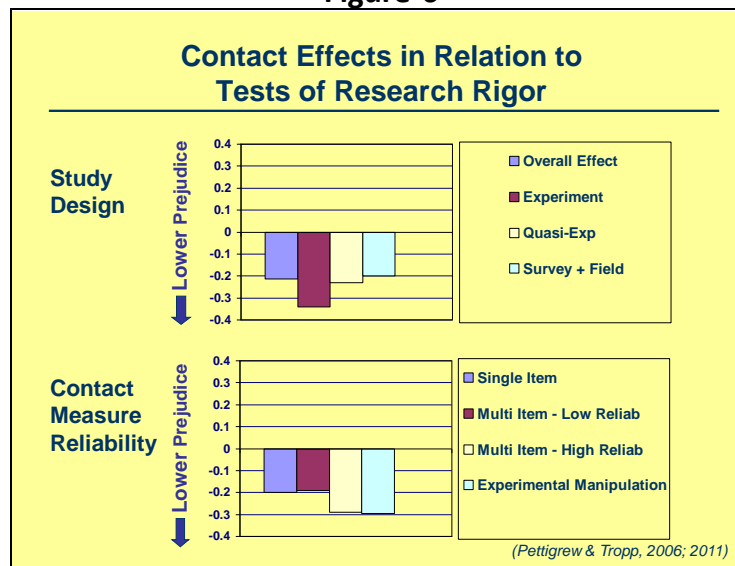
We have conducted a more specialized analysis to look specifically at the effects of optimal contact among children and adolescents in K-12 schools (see Tropp & Prenovost, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). We find that contact structured in line with these optimal conditions yields significantly greater reductions in prejudice among children and adolescents in school settings; this finding is consistent when the contact occurs between youth from different racial and ethnic groups and between youth from other groups (e.g., children with or without physical or mental disabilities; see Figure 5).

Figure 5



Research rigor. Importantly, our research also indicates that the contact studies that use more rigorous research methods are more likely to show that contact reduces prejudice. For example, we observe stronger contact effects when the study design involved a controlled experiment, which allows for testing the causal effects of contact on prejudice, as compared to other kinds of studies (see top of Figure 6). We also find that when intergroup contact was measured using more reliable indicators, stronger relationships between contact and prejudice emerge (see bottom of Figure 6). Across these and other indicators, what we find is that the more rigorous research procedures used in the studies, the more clearly we observe that greater contact predicts reduced prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011).

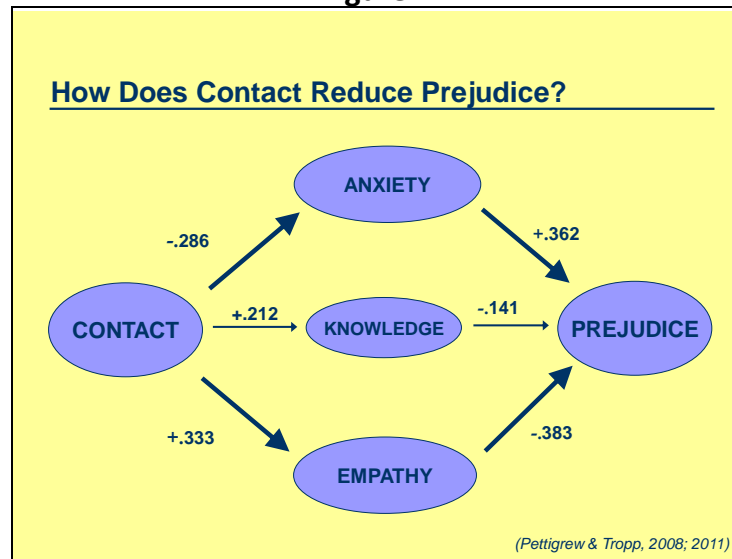
Figure 6



Mediators of contact effects. Through our meta-analytic research, we have also learned more about the *mediators* of contact effects, or the processes through which contact reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; see also Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014). We find some

evidence that contact enhances our knowledge about other groups, and greater knowledge contributes to lower levels of prejudice. But even more strongly, we see that contact reduces our anxiety in relation to other groups and enhances our ability to empathize with other groups, and these in turn predict significant reductions in prejudice (see Figure 7)¹.

Figure 7

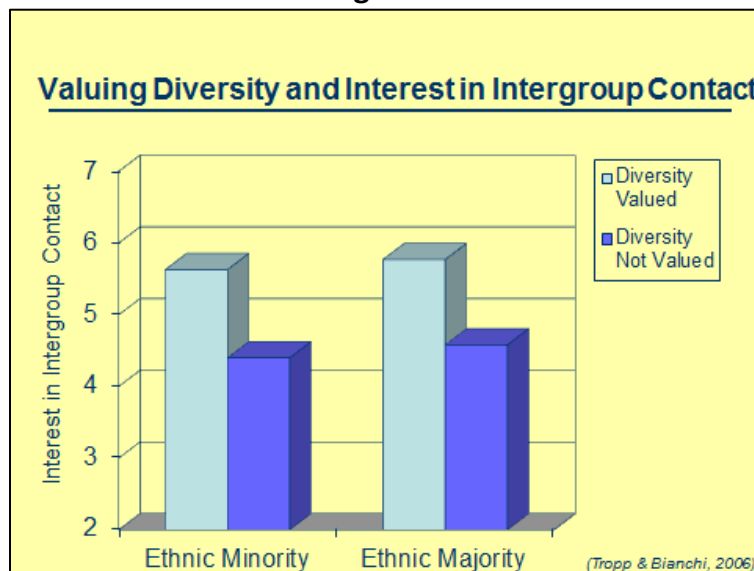


“Extended” effects of contact. Furthermore, a growing body of research with children, adolescents, and adults shows that, even when they do not have direct contact with other groups, simply knowing that members of their group are friends with members of other groups can promote more positive attitudes and a greater willingness to engage in contact (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006; Gómez, Tropp, & Fernandez, 2011; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). This finding importantly suggests that benefits of racial integration can be achieved both when children themselves develop cross-race friendships, and when they observe others’ cross-race friendships in their social environments.

Effects of perceived norms for cross-ethnic relations. We also have research evidence from White and Black students in New York City schools, as well as from White and Latino students in Massachusetts, showing that the norms students perceive for cross-ethnic relations among their peers predicts their own interest in developing cross-race friendships (Tropp, O’Brien, & Migacheva, 2014). Specifically, perceiving inclusive norms – that kids from their own racial group would like to become friends with kids from other racial groups – predicts students’ own interest in having cross-race friends. We and other researchers have also found that when students perceive that teachers and principals support positive cross-ethnic relations, they themselves report greater comfort with classmates from different ethnic groups, more positive inter-ethnic attitudes, and a greater willingness to develop cross-ethnic friendships (Green, Adams, & Turner, 1988; Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2011; Tropp et al., under review).

Effects of valuing diversity. Our research also indicates that people are more likely to report interest in intergroup contact when they perceive that racial and ethnic diversity is valued (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). Among both ethnic minority and ethnic majority (White) college students, those who perceive that racial and ethnic diversity is valued report significantly more interest in contact with members of other racial and ethnic groups (see Figure 8). Additionally, perceiving that Whites value diversity is especially important for predicting interest in intergroup contact among ethnic minority students (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006, Studies 2 and 3), who are often attuned to how they will be perceived and received by the ethnic majority (see Gómez et al., 2011; Tropp, 2006).

Figure 8



Conclusions. Overall, the findings from our meta-analysis and other recent work overwhelmingly show that greater contact between groups predicts lower prejudice and many other positive intergroup outcomes. Having racially integrated schools and classrooms can play crucial roles in promoting positive effects of intergroup contact, by providing opportunities for children from different groups to interact and become friends, and by establishing norms that support diversity and inclusion across groups. *Thus, I encourage the New York City Department of Education to officially recognize the importance and benefits of school diversity and set it as a priority in decision making, and to amend the administrative code of the city of New York to report annually on progress and efforts toward increasing diversity within its schools.*

Notes

¹ The reader should note that, for ease of presentation, Figure 7 represents summary results from separate analyses testing each of the three mediators.

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