

Intergroup Contact and the Potential for Post-Conflict Reconciliation:
Studies in Northern Ireland and South Africa

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Abstract

With surveys of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and Whites and Blacks in South Africa, this research examines how both positive intergroup contact and exposure to intergroup conflict predict attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors relevant to intergroup reconciliation. Across both studies, positive intergroup contact predicted more positive intergroup attitudes, trust, more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions in working toward peace, and greater engagement in reconciliation efforts. These effects were observed when controlling for exposure to conflict-related violence in one's neighborhood growing up, and the extent to which one has personally suffered due to the conflict. Implications of these findings for future work on intergroup contact and reconciliation efforts are discussed.

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Considerable research indicates that positive contact between members of different groups can improve intergroup attitudes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), and promote intergroup trust (Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009). Such encouraging effects of contact are especially likely when the quality of the contact is cooperative, friendly, close, and equal status in nature (Islam & Hewstone, 1993).

Emerging research continues to expand our understanding of the effects of positive intergroup contact, by testing how contact may predict a broader range of intergroup outcomes, and how a broader range of intergroup experiences contribute to predicting these outcomes. Indeed, beyond improving intergroup attitudes, recent work has shown that positive contact can enhance support for policies that benefit other groups (Dixon et al., 2010a), foster positive beliefs about outgroup members' intentions in cross-group interactions (Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone, 2009), and promote more positive attributions for outgroup members' behavior (Vollhardt, 2010).

Still, relatively little is known about the extent to which positive contact between groups can predict outcomes relevant to intergroup reconciliation in the aftermath of violent conflict. Legacies of group conflict present distinct challenges, as they are likely to exemplify the kinds of intergroup experiences that further reinforce negative attitudes and relations between groups (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). Indeed, exposure to intergroup conflict – such as being surrounded by intergroup violence or having negative intergroup experiences due to conflict – may undermine the potentially positive effects of intergroup contact (Wagner & Hewstone, 2012; Tropp, 2015). Nonetheless, a growing body of work, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland, suggests that positive contact can lead to positive intergroup outcomes even

among group members who have suffered due to intergroup conflict (see Hewstone et al., 2006; 2014; Tam et al., 2009). Consistent with this work, we expect that positive contact will generally predict more positive intergroup attitudes and trust in the present research.

Moreover, extending this prior work, we expect that positive contact will also predict more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions in working toward peace, as well as greater involvement in reconciliation efforts. People's perceptions of the sincerity of outgroup intentions in working toward peace, and their own active engagement in reconciliation efforts, both represent critical aspects for building trust and goodwill between conflicting groups (see Bar-Tal, 2013). Distrust can fuel perceptions of malevolent intentions (Langholtz & Stout, 2004), and "suspicion of others' intentions is often the root cause of failure to achieve or sustain rational compromise" (Mansergh, 2007). A certain level of trust must therefore be achieved in order for conflicting groups to begin to see each other's intentions in a more positive light and take active steps toward reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2013; Langholtz & Stout, 2004). Correspondingly, we not only test whether positive contact predicts greater trust, more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions, and reconciliation efforts, but also whether positive contact predicts reconciliation efforts through the processes of building trust and shifting perceived outgroup intentions.

These issues are examined across two survey studies of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland (Study 1), and Whites and Blacks in South Africa (Study 2). The histories of conflict in Northern Ireland and South Africa share some features common to many divided societies with legacies of conflict. Conflicts in both societies have involved asymmetric power relations and violent clashes between dominant and subordinate groups, where government policies favored the interests of the dominant group, and where members of the subordinate group challenged and resisted their treatment by the state (O'Malley, 2000); each context also witnessed attempts to transform relations between the groups following decades of violent conflict, through embarking on political processes to curb violence and establish peace

(McGarry, 1998). At the same time, in Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics committed considerable violence against each other, borne out of their interests in belonging to different states; by contrast, in South Africa, most of the violence was perpetrated by Whites against Blacks, using brutal measures to enforce apartheid, while Blacks sought fuller recognition of their identity and rights as part of the same state (McGarry, 1998; O'Malley, 2000).

Study 1

Study 1 examines the effects of positive contact among Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. Violent conflict persisted in Northern Ireland over a thirty-year period in the late 20th century, during which time unionists and loyalists (mostly Protestants) sought to remain part of the United Kingdom, whereas nationalists and republicans (mostly Catholics) sought to become part of the Republic of Ireland (McGarry & O'Leary, 2004). Although based largely in territorial and constitutional concerns, contradictory views of national identity have fueled conflict between the relatively advantaged Protestant majority community and the relatively disadvantaged Catholic minority community (Ruane & Todd, 1995).

Participants were approached by undergraduate researchers in public squares and shopping areas in greater Belfast and asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire for which they would receive the equivalent of \$10 USD. Altogether, 133 Protestants and 152 Catholics agreed to participate. Protestant participants included 65 males and 68 females, with ages ranging from 17 to 74 years (mean age = 36 years). Catholic participants included 64 males and 88 females, with ages ranging from 16 to 81 years (mean age = 36 years).

Measures

Positive contact. Positive contact was assessed using five items from prior research to assess contact quality (Dixon et al., 2010a; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Participants reported the extent to which they feel their everyday contact with members of the other community are pleasant, cooperative, friendly, equal in status, and close like with good friends and family, on

scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree; $\alpha = .91$ for Protestants and $.89$ for Catholics).

Exposure to intergroup conflict. Exposure to intergroup conflict was assessed using two items inspired by prior research (Hewstone et al., 2006; Canetti et al., 2015). Specifically, participants reported the extent to which they have personally suffered due to political violence, and the degree to which they were exposed to political violence in the neighborhood in which they were raised, on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a great deal). Scores on these two items were significantly correlated¹ among both Protestants ($r = .48, p < .001$) and Catholics ($r = .58, p < .001$), and they were averaged for data analysis.

Intergroup attitudes. Intergroup attitudes were assessed using three items adapted from prior research (Dixon et al., 2010b; Wright & Lubensky, 2009), in which participants responded to 10-point semantic differential scales to indicate the extent to which they generally feel positive-negative, cold-warm, and hostile-friendly toward the other community ($\alpha = .93$ among Protestants, $.94$ among Catholics).

Trust. Trust was assessed using a single item (“I think I could trust most members of the other community”) with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Perceived intentions. Four items assessed perceived intentions of the other community in working toward peace, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Two items assessed participants’ perceptions of positive intentions (“I believe that most members of the other community are really committed to working toward peace” and “I believe that the other community’s peace-making efforts are motivated by a genuine interest in more peaceful relations between the communities”). Two additional items assessed participants’ perceptions of negative intentions (“I believe that the other community’s interest in peace is just a means to achieve another goal” and “I believe the other community’s peace-making efforts are part of a strategic plan to gain or maintain political power”) and were reverse-scored. Principal

components analysis (oblique rotation) revealed that the four items loaded onto a single factor among both Protestants (eigenvalue: 2.27, loadings: .67-.82) and Catholics (eigenvalue: 2.10, loadings: .64-.82). Scores on the four items were therefore averaged for data analysis ($\alpha = .74$ among Protestants, .69 among Catholics).

Reconciliation efforts. Two items assessed participants' reported active involvement in reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland ("I am actively involved in efforts to achieve peaceful relations between the two communities" and "I regularly participate in activities designed to establish peaceful relations between the two communities"), on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores on the two items were highly correlated among Protestants, $r = .82, p < .001$, and Catholics, $r = .63, p < .001$, and were averaged for data analysis.

Demographic indicators. In addition, demographic indicators such as participant age, gender, level of education (5-point scale ranging from "Level 1" to "Higher Education Degree or Above"), and socio-economic status (4-point scale ranging from "poor" to "upper class") were included in order to be used as controls in data analysis.² Protestants and Catholics reported comparable levels of education ($M = 2.58$ and 2.62 , respectively, $t(279) = -.22, p = .83$), yet Protestants on average reported higher socio-economic status than Catholics ($M = 2.45$ and 2.20 , respectively, $t(283) = 3.54, p < .001$).

Results

Preliminary correlations showed that positive intergroup contact was inversely related to exposure to intergroup conflict among Protestants, $r = -.40, p < .001$, while positive contact did not significantly relate to exposure to intergroup conflict among Catholics, $r = -.11, p > .15$. Regression analyses then tested participant group membership, positive contact, and exposure to intergroup conflict as predictors for each of the key intergroup outcomes. For each outcome, participant group membership and centered versions of the positive contact and exposure to

intergroup conflict variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) were entered as predictors at the first step of analysis; two-way interactions between participant group membership, positive contact, and exposure to intergroup conflict were then entered at the second step, and a three-way interaction for these variables was entered at the third step (see Hayes, 2013). Adding the three-way interaction term did not add significantly to predicting any of the intergroup outcomes; thus, to simplify the presentation of results, three-way interactions will not be reported.

Intergroup attitudes. At the first step, positive contact emerged as a strong predictor of intergroup attitudes (see Table 1)³, such that greater positive contact with the other community predicted significantly more positive intergroup attitudes. This effect was obtained when controlling for the effects of exposure to intergroup conflict, which negatively predicted intergroup attitudes. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Trust. At the first step, positive contact was a strong predictor of trust (see Table 1), such that greater positive contact with the other community predicted significantly greater trust. This effect was obtained even when controlling for exposure to intergroup conflict, which was a significant negative predictor of trust. Additionally, the two-way positive contact x exposure to intergroup conflict interaction was significant at the second step. Positive contact was an especially strong predictor of trust when participants reported greater exposure to intergroup conflict, $B = .64$, 95%CI [.45, .83], $t = 6.56$, $p < .001$, while positive contact was a weaker – though still significant – predictor of trust when participants reported less exposure to intergroup conflict, $B = .25$, 95%CI [.04, .44], $t = 2.44$, $p < .05$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Perceived intentions. At the first step, positive contact was a significant predictor of perceived intentions (see Table 2)⁴, such that greater positive contact with the other community predicted significantly more positive perceptions of outgroup members' intentions. This effect was obtained when controlling for exposure to intergroup conflict, which negatively predicted

perceptions of outgroup intentions. Additionally, the main effect of participant group membership was significant, indicating that Catholics tended to have more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions than Protestants. Although the model did not significantly add to the overall prediction of perceived intentions at the second step, the positive contact x participant group membership interaction was marginally significant; greater positive contact tended to predict positive perceptions of outgroup intentions more strongly among Protestants, $B = .36$, 95%CI [.18, .55], $t = 3.85$, $p < .001$, than among Catholics, $B = .13$, 95%CI [-.014, .278], $t = 1.79$, $p = .08$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Reconciliation efforts. At the first step, positive contact was a significant predictor of participants' reported reconciliation efforts (see Table 2), such that greater positive contact with the other community predicted significantly greater efforts toward reconciliation. This effect was obtained when controlling for exposure to intergroup conflict, which did not significantly predict reconciliation efforts. Although the model did not significantly add to the overall prediction of reconciliation efforts at the second step, the positive contact x participant group membership interaction term was significant; greater positive contact predicted greater reconciliation efforts only among Protestants, $B = .36$, 95%CI [.10, .62], $t = 2.79$, $p < .01$, and not among Catholics, $B = -.01$, 95%CI [-.21, .20], $t = -.04$, $p = .96$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Trust and perceived intentions as mediators between contact and reconciliation efforts. A serial mediation analysis was conducted using the SPSS macro PROCESS (see Hayes, 2013; Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2010). Trust and perceived intentions were entered as serial mediators in a model where contact predicts reconciliation efforts (contact → trust → positive beliefs → reconciliation). This procedure uses an ordinary-least-squares path analysis to estimate the coefficients in order to determine the direct and indirect effects of contact on reconciliation efforts. Bootstrapping was implemented to obtain bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for

making statistical inference about specific and total indirect effects (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008). All paths for the mediation model are presented in Figure 1, and their corresponding coefficients are provided in Table 3. The total indirect effect of contact on reconciliation efforts was significant (point estimate = .076, 95% CI [.005,.171]). The specific indirect effect through trust only was not significant ($a_1b_1 = .015$; 95% CI[-.062 to .091]), nor was the specific indirect effect through perceived intentions only ($a_2b_2 = .021$; 95% CI[-.004 to .080]). However, the specific indirect effect of contact on reconciliation efforts through both trust and positive beliefs ($a_1d_2b_2$) was significant (point estimate = .040, 95% CI [.010,.093]). Thus, more positive contact predicted greater trust, which in turn predicted more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions, which subsequently predicted greater reconciliation efforts.

Discussion

Findings from Study 1 indicate that, among both Protestants and Catholics, greater positive contact predicted significantly more positive intergroup attitudes and trust, as well as more positive perceptions of outgroup members' intentions in working toward peace and greater involvement in reconciliation efforts. We also observed that greater positive contact predicted greater involvement in reconciliation efforts through the mechanisms of building intergroup trust and developing more positive perceptions of outgroup members' intentions. It is important to note that these encouraging effects of positive contact were observed when controlling for exposure to intergroup conflict, which also uniquely contributed to predicting many of the intergroup outcomes. Additionally, positive contact was an especially strong predictor of trust when participants reported *greater* exposure to intergroup conflict. Together, these results respond to the call for greater emphasis on negative forces in intergroup relations (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), showing both how intergroup conflict can adversely affect intergroup attitudes, and how positive contact can enhance intergroup attitudes and efforts toward reconciliation even in contexts of long-standing intergroup conflict (see Wagner & Hewstone, 2012).

Additionally, although the positive contact x participant group membership interaction did not add significantly to the variance accounted for, positive contact strongly predicted perceived intentions and reconciliation efforts only among members of the Protestant majority. These trends are consistent with other work showing that the effects of positive contact are often weaker among members of historically disadvantaged groups than among members of historically advantaged groups (Binder et al., 2009; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), and that other factors associated with group differences in power and status may be especially important to encourage support for reconciliation among the historically disadvantaged (Saguy, Tropp, & Hawi, 2012; Shnabel, Nadler, Canetti, & Ullrich, 2008; Wright & Baray, 2012).

A second study was conducted to investigate whether patterns of findings would replicate in the context of South Africa. Like Northern Ireland, South Africa has gone through major transformations following decades of intergroup conflict and violence. At the same time, as South Africa moves toward becoming a more integrated society (Worden, 2007), it continues to face the legacy of oppressive racial segregation and inequality twenty years after the fall of the apartheid regime, where Blacks still constitute the numerical majority (Clark & Worger, 2011).

Study 2

Participants were approached by trained undergraduates from a multi-racial research team in five locations of a major department store, located in shopping malls representing diverse neighborhoods in greater Cape Town; they were asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire; for those who agreed, their names were entered into a raffle for gift cards to the department store in exchange for their participation. Altogether, 103 White and 102 Black South Africans agreed to participate. White participants included 39 males and 64 females, with ages ranging from 19 to 79 years (mean age = 36 years). Black participants included 49 males and 53 females, with ages ranging from 19 to 62 years (mean age = 27 years).

Measures

The measures used in Study 2 were virtually identical to those used in Study 1. However, item wordings were changed to ask participants about positive contact, attitudes, trust, perceived intentions and reconciliation in relation to the “other racial group”, or in relation to “Whites” or “Blacks” in South Africa, rather than in relation to the “other community” in Northern Ireland. Similarly, exposure to intergroup conflict items were modified to ask participants about neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to “racial violence” in South Africa, rather than due to “political violence” in Northern Ireland.

As in Study 1, high levels of reliability were obtained for the positive contact measure among both Whites and Blacks ($\alpha = .86$ and $.86$, respectively). Although scores on the two exposure to intergroup conflict items were significantly related among Blacks, $r = .46$, $p < .01$, they were not significantly related among Whites, $r = .18$, $p = .08$, and therefore have been treated as independent predictors in data analysis for Study 2.

Trust was assessed using the same single item, and intergroup attitudes using the same three semantic-differential items, as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .89$ among Whites, $.90$ among Blacks), though adapted for the present study. As in Study 1, scores on the two reconciliation items were strongly correlated among both Whites, $r = .73$, $p < .001$, and Blacks, $r = .52$, $p < .001$, and these were averaged for data analysis.

Although the four perceived intentions items loaded onto a single factor for both groups in Study 1, principal components analyses in Study 2 revealed that the items loaded onto a single factor for Whites (eigenvalue: 2.60, loadings: $.76$ -. 83) yet onto two factors for Blacks: one for perceived positive intentions (eigenvalue: 1.65, loadings: $.87$ -. 88) and one for perceived negative intentions (eigenvalue: 1.56, loadings: $.89$ -. 90). Thus, separate two-item measures of perceived positive intentions ($r = .67$ among Whites, $.55$ among Blacks, $p < .001$) and perceived negative intentions ($r = .72$ among Whites, $.62$ among Blacks, $p < .001$) were analyzed in Study 2.

As in Study 1, demographic indicators including participant age, gender, level of education (6-point scale ranging from “primary school” to “honours education above the university level), and socio-economic status (3-point scale ranging from “lower class” to “upper class”) were included as control variables in data analysis. White and Black respondents did not significantly differ in their reported levels of education ($M = 3.87$ and 3.56 , respectively, $t(197) = 1.24$, $p = .22$), yet Whites on average reported higher socio-economic status than Blacks ($M = 2.04$ and 1.71 , respectively, $t(200) = 5.12$, $p < .001$).

Results

Preliminary correlations showed that positive contact was not significantly correlated with either neighborhood exposure to or personal suffering due to racial violence among Whites, $r = -.06$ and $-.09$, $p > .30$, or Blacks, $r = .17$, $p = .09$, and $r = .07$, $p > .30$. Regression analyses then tested participant group membership, positive contact, neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence as predictors for each of the key intergroup outcomes. In separate regression analyses for each outcome, participant group membership and centered versions of the positive contact, neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence variables were entered as predictors at the first step of analysis; two-way interactions between positive contact and participant racial group, neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence were then entered at the second step.⁵

Intergroup attitudes. At the first step, positive contact emerged as a significant predictor of intergroup attitudes (see Table 4), such that greater positive contact with the other racial group predicted significantly more positive intergroup attitudes. This effect was obtained when controlling for the effects of neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence, each of which did not significantly predict intergroup attitudes.⁶ Additionally, the positive contact x neighborhood exposure to conflict-related violence interaction term was significant at the second step. Positive contact was an especially strong predictor of intergroup

attitudes when neighborhood exposure to conflict-related violence was low, $B = 1.95$, 95% CI [1.51 2.39], $t = 8.78$, $p < .001$, yet positive contact became a weaker – though still significant – predictor of intergroup attitudes when neighborhood exposure to conflict-related violence was high, $B = .75$, 95% CI [.07, 1.44], $t = 2.17$, $p < .05$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Trust. At the first step, positive contact was a significant predictor of trust (see Table 4), such that greater positive contact with the other racial group predicted significantly greater trust. This effect was obtained when controlling for the effects of neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence, neither of which significantly predicted trust. Additionally, the effect of participant racial group was nearly significant; however, this trend becomes weaker and clearly non-significant when demographic indicators such as age, gender, level of education, and socio-economic status are included in the model, $B = .10$, 95% CI [- .06,.25], $t = 1.26$, $p = .21$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Perceived positive intentions. At the first step of analysis, positive contact emerged as a significant predictor of perceived positive intentions (see Table 5), such that greater positive contact with the other racial group predicted significantly more positive perceptions of their intentions in working toward peace. This effect was obtained when controlling for the effects of neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence, neither of which significantly predicted perceived positive intentions. The positive contact x neighborhood exposure interaction term was also significant at the second step. Positive contact was a significant predictor of positive intentions when neighborhood exposure to conflict-related violence was low, $B = .67$, 95%CI [.49, .86], $t = 7.21$, $p < .001$; however, positive contact became a weaker – and only marginally significant – predictor of positive intentions when neighborhood exposure to conflict-related violence was high, $B = .25$, 95%CI [- .03, .52], $t = 1.75$, $p = .08$. Additionally, the positive contact x personal suffering interaction term was

significant. In contrast to the patterns described above, positive contact was an especially strong predictor of perceived positive intentions when personal suffering was high, $B = .87$, 95%CI [.58, 1.16], $t = 5.90$, $p < .001$, as compared to when personal suffering was low, $B = .34$, 95%CI [.15, .53], $t = 3.51$, $p < .001$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Perceived negative intentions. Although the model as a whole did not account for a significant portion of variance at the first step of analysis (see Table 5), greater positive contact with the other racial group predicted less negative perceptions of outgroup intentions. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Reconciliation efforts. At the first step, positive contact was a significant predictor of reconciliation efforts (see Table 6)⁷, such that greater positive contact with the other racial group predicted significantly greater reported involvement in reconciliation efforts. This effect was obtained when controlling for the effects of neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict-related violence, neither of which significantly predicted reconciliation efforts. There was also a significant effect of participant racial group, such that Blacks reported greater involvement in reconciliation efforts than Whites. At the second step, the positive contact x personal suffering interaction term was significant. Positive contact was an especially strong predictor of reconciliation efforts when personal suffering was high, $B = .79$, 95%CI [.47, 1.11], $t = 4.85$, $p < .001$, as compared to when personal suffering was low, $B = .21$, 95%CI [.00, .43], $t = 1.96$, $p = .05$. No other main or interaction effects were significant.

Trust and positive intentions as mediators between trust and reconciliation efforts. A serial mediation analysis was again conducted, with trust and perceived positive intentions as mediators in a model where contact predicts reconciliation efforts (contact → trust → positive beliefs → reconciliation). The total indirect effects of contact on reconciliation efforts was significant (point estimate = .195, 95%CI [.076,.342]). However, close inspection revealed different patterns of results for Whites and Blacks (see Table 7). Among Whites, contact was a

direct, significant predictor of reconciliation efforts, even with trust and perceived positive intentions included in the model. Instead, among Blacks, the total indirect effects of contact on reconciliation efforts was significant (point estimate = .163, 95% CI [.021,.373]. The specific indirect effect through trust only was not significant ($a_1b_1 = .040$; 95% CI [-.094 to .209]), nor was the specific indirect effect through perceived positive intentions only ($a_2b_2 = .074$; 95% CI [-.0003 to .251]). However, the specific indirect effect of contact on reconciliation efforts through both trust and perceived positive intentions ($a_1d_2b_2$) was significant (point estimate = .049, 95% CI [.002 and .160]). Thus, paralleling results from Study 1, among Blacks more positive contact predicted greater trust, which predicted more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions, which subsequently predicted greater involvement in reconciliation efforts.

Discussion

Consistent with findings from Study 1, greater positive contact predicted significantly more positive intergroup attitudes and trust, more positive and less negative perceptions of outgroup members' intentions, and greater reconciliation efforts, among both Whites and Blacks. Importantly, even though Blacks generally reported greater exposure to intergroup conflict than Whites, these effects of positive contact were observed even when taking into account participants' reported exposure to and personal suffering due to racial violence.

Interestingly, results also showed that, in the South African context, neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to conflict violence moderated the effects of positive contact, but in different ways. In particular, when predicting intergroup attitudes and positive intentions, the effects of positive contact were dampened the more that participants were exposed to conflict-related violence in the neighborhood where they were raised. By contrast, when predicting positive intentions and reconciliation efforts, the effects of positive contact were stronger the more participants reported personal suffering due to conflict-related violence. It is likely that being surrounded by intergroup violence in one's social environment can reinforce a

norm of conflict (see Bar-Tal, 2013), thereby making it more challenging for even positive contact experiences to yield positive intergroup effects (see Hewstone et al., 2006; Tropp, 2015). At the same time, the positive contact they do have may counterbalance the impact of personal suffering, as such contact can predict a greater willingness to forgive and take the perspective of opposing parties in conflict (Hewstone et al., 2006). Both processes clearly play important roles, and more work is needed to understand how they mutually influence relations between groups with legacies of conflict. Study 2 also revealed some asymmetries in the extent to which contact predicted reconciliation efforts through greater trust and perceived positive intentions, to be elaborated upon in the general discussion.

General Discussion

Together, findings from these studies in Northern Ireland and South Africa suggest that greater positive contact can promote more positive intergroup attitudes and trust, as well as more positive perceptions of outgroup members' intentions in working toward peace and greater active involvement in reconciliation efforts reported by the participants themselves. Importantly, these effects were observed when controlling for participants' exposure to conflict-related violence in the neighborhoods where they were raised and their own personal suffering due to conflict-related violence. Although the present findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the use of single-item measures, they extend the reach of contact research, in that they demonstrate the valuable role positive contact can play in perceptions and behaviors that foster reconciliation between groups confronted with legacies of conflict (Wagner & Hewstone, 2012; Tropp, 2015).

The studies also show that, in many cases, positive contact can encourage involvement in reconciliation efforts through the mediating mechanisms of trust and perceptions of outgroup members' intentions. We observed this trend across Protestants and Catholics in Study 1 and among Black South Africans in Study 2; however, among White South Africans in Study 2, we simply found that positive contact directly predicted greater involvement in reconciliation

efforts, rather than through the mechanisms of trust and perceived outgroup intentions. It is possible that this distinct result for White South Africans may be associated with differences in the socio-historical context of Whites' experiences during the conflict in South Africa, relative to the historically documented experiences of Blacks in South Africa and Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. Protestants and Catholics both experienced considerable violence perpetrated by members of the other community in Northern Ireland, while Blacks were most often the targets of violence perpetrated by Whites in South Africa (McGarry, 1998; O'Malley, 2000). Understandably, there may be a greater need to build trust and shift perceptions of outgroup intentions to enhance reconciliation efforts among Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and Blacks in South Africa, who were most likely to be targets of violence during conflict. By contrast, these specific mechanisms may not play such important roles in promoting reconciliation efforts among Whites in South Africa; instead, other needs and mechanisms may underlie support for reconciliation efforts among South African Whites and members of other historically advantaged groups, such as willingness to accept, and feeling accepted by, members of historically disadvantaged groups (see Shnabel et al., 2008).

More broadly, in thinking about the effects of positive contact and exposure to intergroup conflict, we must remain mindful of the nature and stage of the intergroup relationships that are being studied. The present research focuses explicitly on post-violent conflict settings, where power-sharing agreements and major political transformations have emerged in recent decades (McGarry & O'Leary, 2004; Clark & Worger, 2011). It is possible that exposure to intergroup conflict would play more a prominent role in predicting intergroup attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in contexts where there has been more recent broad-scale violence between groups (see Wagner & Hewstone, 2012), or in conflict settings that are still in the process of major transition (see, Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012). Moreover, while greater positive contact generally predicted more favorable intergroup outcomes in both studies, we also observed some

differences in how contact interacted with exposure to intergroup conflict in predicting intergroup outcomes across the studies. Further research should therefore continue to examine the relative effects of positive contact and exposure to intergroup conflict across a broader range of conflict contexts.

Footnotes

- ¹ All correlations reported in this manuscript are Pearson r coefficients.
- ² Across both studies, parallel regressions were conducted with participant age, gender, level of education, and socio-economic status entered as control variables when predicting intergroup outcomes; these analyses yielded identical patterns of results as those without the demographic controls, and the control variables rarely added to prediction of the intergroup outcomes. Effects for the control variables will therefore be reported only in those few cases where they accounted for a significant portion of variance in the intergroup outcomes of interest.
- ² Age also predicted intergroup attitudes, $\beta = .15$, $t = 2.60$, $p = .01$, such that older respondents generally reported more positive intergroup attitudes.
- ³ Higher levels of education also predicted more positive perceptions of outgroup intentions, $\beta = .17$, $t = 2.84$, $p < .05$.
- ⁴ Initially, full factorial regression models were conducted for each intergroup outcome with all possible two-way, three-way, and four-way interactions among the positive contact, participant racial group, neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to racial violence variables. Inclusion of three- and four-way interaction terms did not add significantly to prediction of any of the outcomes. Moreover, like Study 1, the inclusion of two-way interactions between participant racial group and the exposure to intergroup conflict items did not add significantly to prediction of the intergroup outcomes. Thus, only two-way interactions between positive contact, participant racial group, and neighborhood exposure to and personal suffering due to racial violence have been retained in the regression analyses reported in this manuscript.
- ⁵ Supplementary regressions tested either neighborhood exposure to or personal suffering due to racial violence as predictors for intergroup outcomes alongside positive contact and participant racial group. Regardless of whether entered as predictors in separate analyses or simultaneously as predictors in the same analyses – neither neighborhood exposure nor personal suffering due to racial violence uniquely predicted any of the intergroup outcomes beyond what was accounted for by positive contact and participant racial group.
- ⁶ Also, age contributed significantly to predicting reconciliation at the first step of analysis, $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$, with older respondents reporting greater engagement in reconciliation efforts.

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Table 1
 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Intergroup Attitudes and Trust (Study 1)

Predictor Variables	Intergroup Attitudes						Trust					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β
Participant Group	-.08	.11	-.04	-.09	.11	-.05	-.02	.04	-.03	-.05	.04	-.06
Positive Contact	1.13***	.16	.39***	1.13***	.17	.39***	.43***	.07	.36***	.38***	.07	.32***
Exposure to Intergroup Conflict	-.28*	.14	-.11*	-.22	.14	-.09	-.16**	.06	-.16**	-.14*	.06	-.14*
Positive Contact x Exposure				-.16	.18	.05				.21**	.07	.16**
Positive Contact x Group				-.14	.16	-.05				-.04	.07	-.03
Group x Exposure				-.17	.14	-.07				-.03	.06	-.03
	R^2	.20***		.20***			.19***		.21***			
	R^2 Change	.20		>.01			.19***		.02*			
	F Change	22.75***		.89			21.90***		2.85*			

Note. *B* = raw regression coefficient; *se* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient. For the participant group variable, “Protestant” was coded as “-1” and “Catholic” was coded as “1”. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Perceived Intentions and Reconciliation Efforts (Study 1)

Predictor Variables	Perceived Intentions						Reconciliation Efforts					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β
Participant Group	.09*	.04	.14*	.09*	.04	.13*	-.09	.05	-.10	-.09	.05	-.10
Positive Contact	.25***	.07	.25***	.23***	.07	.23***	.17*	.08	.13*	.18*	.09	.14*
Exposure to Intergroup Conflict	-.15**	.05	-.18**	-.14**	.05	-.17**	.05	.07	.04	.07	.07	.06
Positive Contact x Exposure				.05	.07	.05				-.00	.09	-.00
Positive Contact x Group				-.12	.06	-.11 [^]				-.18*	.08	-.14*
Group x Exposure				.03	.05	.04				.03	.07	.03
	R ²			.14***			.03*			.05		
	R ² Change			.02			.03*			.02		
	F Change			1.96			2.78*			2.04		

Note. *B* = raw regression coefficient; *se* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient. For the participant group variable, “Protestant” was coded as “-1” and “Catholic” was coded as “1”. [^]*p* = .052 **p* < .05 ***p* < .01 ****p* < .001

Table 3

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the Effect of Contact on Reconciliation Efforts (Study 1)

	M_1 (Trust)			M_2 (Perceived Intentions)			Y (Reconciliation Efforts)					
		Coeff.	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		Coeff.	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	
X (Contact)	a_1	.485	.065	<.001	a_2	.106	.065	.106	c'	.099	.085	.246
M_1 (Trust)		—	—	—	d_{21}	.407	.054	<.001	b_1	.031	.078	.686
M_2 (Perceived Intentions)		—	—	—		—	—	—	b_2	.202	.078	.010
Constant	i_{M1}	1.719	.259	<.001	i_{M2}	1.489	.255	<.001	i_Y	1.541	.351	<.001
		$R^2 = .164$				$R^2 = .226$				$R^2 = .049$		
		$F(1, 282) = 55.429, p < .001$				$F(2, 281) = 40.964, p < .001$				$F(3, 280) = 4.820, p = .003$		

Table 4
 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Intergroup Attitudes and Trust (Study 2)

Predictor Variables	Intergroup Attitudes						Trust					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β
Participant Racial Group	.16	.14	.08	.17	.14	.08	.13 [^]	.07	.12 [^]	.13 [^]	.07	.13 [^]
Positive Contact	1.52***	.17	.56***	1.51***	.17	.55***	.74***	.08	.55***	.75***	.08	.55***
Neighborhood Exposure	-.24	.17	-.10	-.14	.17	-.06	.00	.08	.00	.00	.08	.00
Personal Suffering	.05	.17	.02	.01	.17	.00	.02	.08	.02	-.01	.08	-.00
Positive Contact x Exposure				-.60**	.22	-.21**				-.17	.11	-.13
Positive Contact x Suffering				.43	.25	.13				.17	.12	.11
Positive Contact x Racial Group				-.08	.18	-.03				-.07	.09	-.05
	<i>R</i> ²	.31***		.34***			.31***		.32***			
	<i>R</i> ² Change	.31***		.03*			.31***		.01			
	F Change	21.06***		2.77*			21.37***		1.33			

Note. *B* = raw regression coefficient; *se* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient. For the racial group variable, "White" was coded as "-1" and "Black" was coded as "1". [^]*p* = .051 **p* < .05 ***p* < .01 ****p* < .001

Table 5
 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Positive and Negative Intentions (Study 2)

Predictor Variables	Positive Intentions						Negative Intentions					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β
Participant Racial Group	.08	.06	.09	.08	.06	.10	-.12	.07	-.13	-.11	.07	-.11
Positive Contact	.52***	.07	.47***	.52***	.07	.47***	-.18*	.09	-.15*	-.22*	.09	-.18*
Neighborhood Exposure	-.01	.07	-.01	-.00	.07	-.00	.06	.09	.05	.05	.09	.05
Personal Suffering	-.01	.07	-.01	-.01	.07	-.02	.03	.09	.03	.02	.09	.02
Positive Contact x Exposure				-.21*	.09	-.19*				-.13	.11	-.11
Positive Contact x Suffering				.26**	.10	.22**				.12	.12	.09
Positive Contact x Racial Group				-.04	.08	-.04				.18	.10	.14
	R^2	.22***		.26***			.03		.06			
	R^2 Change	.22***		.04*			.03		.03			
	F Change	13.61***		2.97*			1.59		1.70			

Note. *B* = raw regression coefficient; *se* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient. For the racial group variable, “White” was coded as “-1” and “Black” was coded as “1”. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 6
 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Reconciliation Efforts (Study 2)

Predictor Variables	Reconciliation Efforts					
	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	β
Participant Racial Group	.23***	.07	.25***	.23***	.07	.25***
Positive Contact	.39***	.08	.33***	.41***	.08	.34***
Neighborhood Exposure	-.01	.08	-.01	.01	.08	.01
Personal Suffering	.11	.08	.10	.10	.08	.10
Positive Contact x Exposure				-.17	.10	-.14
Positive Contact x Suffering				.29**	.11	.21**
Positive Contact x Racial Group				-.14	.09	-.11
	R^2	.18***		.22***		
	R^2 Change	.18***		.04*		
	F Change	10.58***		3.10*		

Note. *B* = raw regression coefficient; *se* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient. For the racial group variable, “White” was coded as “-1” and “Black” was coded as “1”.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 7

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the Effect of Contact on Reconciliation Efforts (Study 2)

White South Africans												
		M_1 (Trust)			M_2 (Positive Intentions)			Y (Reconciliation Efforts)				
		Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p		
X (Contact)	a_1	.814	.118	<.001	a_2	.379	.119	.002	c'	.363	.153	.020
M ₁ (Trust)		—	—	—	d_{21}	.232	.084	.007	b_1	.170	.107	.114
M ₂ (Positive Intentions)		—	—	—		—	—	—	b_2	.0006	.124	.996
Constant	i_{M1}	.311	.401	.441	i_{M2}	1.050	.119	.002	i_Y	1.093	.429	.013
$R^2 = .327$				$R^2 = .299$				$R^2 = .175$				
$F(1, 98) = 47.710, p < .001$				$F(2, 97) = 20.670, p < .001$				$F(3, 96) = 6.783, p < .001$				
Black South Africans												
		M_1 (Trust)			M_2 (Positive Intentions)			Y (Reconciliation Efforts)				
		Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p		
X (Contact)	a_1	.679	.115	<.001	a_2	.284	.112	.013	c'	.125	.131	.340
M ₁ (Trust)		—	—	—	d_{21}	.279	.087	.002	b_1	.059	.103	.571
M ₂ (Positive Intentions)		—	—	—		—	—	—	b_2	.260	.118	.030
Constant	i_{M1}	.994	.382	.011	i_{M2}	1.320	.330	<.001	i_Y	1.592	.351	<.001
$R^2 = .276$				$R^2 = .277$				$R^2 = .134$				
$F(1, 92) = 34.984, p < .001$				$F(2, 91) = 17.428, p < .001$				$F(3, 90) = 4.625, p = .005$				

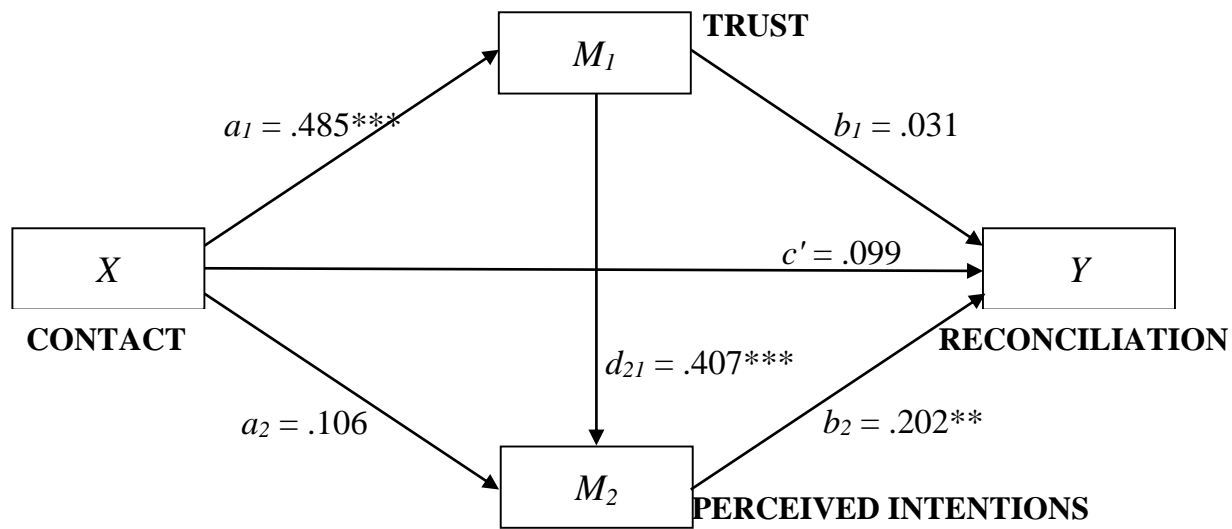


Figure 1. Serial multiple mediator model for the effect of contact on reconciliation efforts, through the mediators of trust and perceived intentions (Study 1).