

## Look and Imagine Yourself Giving that Same Touch: The Role of Intergroup Vicarious Physical Contact in Racial Prejudice Revision

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Keywords: physical contact; touch; self-involvement; indirect contact; prejudice

Prejudice reduction has been a core issue in social psychology for many decades. Indeed, research aimed at understanding and defining the ingredients which ameliorate intergroup relations and weaken social exclusion are still under investigation. According to the contact hypothesis [1] positive encounters with out-group members increase in-group favorable attitudes towards those members which further generalize to the out-group as a whole [2]. Unfortunately, direct contact is not always straightforward as different groups tend to ignore each other [3]. Indirect contact strategies (e.g., imagined contact, vicarious contact) have been suggested, to overcome this limitation and ultimately promote positive attitudes towards the out-group [4,5]. Given the major lack of intergroup direct contact, and the encouraging results obtained from indirect forms of contact, investment in new forms of indirect contact is strongly needed.

The present research was guided by recent findings proving that intergroup physical contact, rather than intergroup contact, triggers favorable attitudes towards the out-group [66]. In addition, we focused on the role self-involvement in reducing out-group prejudice, as research has shown that being personally involved in a positive vicarious interaction by identifying with an in-group character positively interacting with an out-group character, ameliorates outgroup attitudes in general [7].

The aim of the current research was to test the effectiveness of a novel form of indirect contact, which specifically focuses on intergroup vicarious physical contact, in ameliorating attitudes towards immigrants. In study 1, participants were either requested to rate the quality of an image depicting a White hand touching a Black hand (i.e., IVPC-low self-involvement), identify with a White hand touching another White hand (i.e; vicarious physical contact; VPC-high self-involvement) or identify with a White hand touching a Black hand (i.e; IVPC-high self-involvement). Study 1 demonstrated that participants who identified with an in-group member touching an out-group rather than an in-group member displayed less implicit out-group prejudice. In addition, experimentally enhancing (vs. reducing) participants' self-involvement in the IVPC, moderated the beneficial effect of IVPC on out-group prejudice. In Study 2 we compared the IVPC to an intergroup vicarious *nonphysical* contact condition (i.e; the same two hands were shown but they were not touching each other), and found that the IVPC triggered lower levels of out-group prejudice, and changed acculturation attitudes accordingly, by enhancing the self-out-group overlap.

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