



Short communication

## Contact with a multicultural past: A prejudice-reducing intervention



Anna Stefaniak\*, Michał Bilewicz

University of Warsaw, Poland

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 14 May 2015

Received in revised form 2 November 2015

Accepted 27 November 2015

Available online 11 December 2015

#### Keywords:

Intergroup contact

Indirect contact

Antisemitism

Interest in history

Prejudice reduction

### ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the notion of contact with a multicultural past as a new type of indirect intergroup contact. It presents results of a study which evaluated the effects of an educational program utilizing the proposed framework. The program aimed to facilitate the engagement of Polish students ( $N = 427$ ) with historical Jewish heritage in their places of residence. The intervention proved highly successful at increasing students' knowledge of and interest in local history which both contributed independently to an increased inclusion of the outgroup (Jews) in the self and in turn to more positive attitudes towards them. The implications of using contact with a multicultural past in societies with low levels of direct intergroup contact are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

"I have been living in Kielce since childhood, but I have to admit that I had no idea about the meaning of the monuments I pass by every day and where the Jewish cemetery is located" said 18-year-old Anna from Kielce, Poland, a homogeneously Polish city that used to be an important center of Jewish life before World War II. Anna participated in an intervention program in which young people engage with the historical cultural diversity of their local communities. In this article we present a preliminary study of the effectiveness of this intervention in improving intergroup relations. It is based on the model of contact with a multicultural past, a new type of indirect intergroup contact which is an extension to intergroup contact theory applicable in situations where opportunities for current contact are limited (cf.: Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). We hope that this paper will inspire future systematic studies of this model, applying experimental and longitudinal studies with control groups.

#### 1.1. Intergroup contact

Intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) constitutes an effective tool for prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, when contact opportunities are scarce or contact is difficult, intergroup relations may deteriorate or fail to improve. In societies that have experienced violent conflicts (e.g. Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina), former enemies often remain isolated, intergroup contact is rare, and mutual hostility persists (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006). But it is also the case in societies differing in relative presence of minorities. For instance, in eastern Germany (as compared to the western part) a smaller minority proportion was associated with greater prejudice

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [astefaniak@psych.uw.edu.pl](mailto:astefaniak@psych.uw.edu.pl) (A. Stefaniak).

(Wagner, Van Dick, Pettigrew, & Christ, 2003). Many places that used to be diverse historically offer only scarce chances for intergroup contact today (Lewicka, 2008a,b). Thus prejudice persists and is reinforced even in the absence of its objects (Lendvai, 1971).

### 1.2. Multicultural relations in Poland

Poland constitutes an example of such a lack of diversity. Prior to World War II the country had a highly diverse population with ethnic Poles constituting only 69.2% of the total (Eberhardt, 2006). The Jewish minority was the second largest group at 10.5%. Currently, the Jewish population in Poland comprises less than 0.1% of the whole (Central Statistical Office of Poland, January 1, 2013). Under such circumstances opportunities for contact are limited, yet antisemitic sentiments persist (Bilewicz, Winiewski, & Radzik, 2012). According to the Polish Prejudice Survey conducted in 2013, 23% of Poles subscribe to traditional antisemitic sentiments, 60% express secondary antisemitism, and 65% believe in a Jewish conspiracy (Bilewicz, Winiewski, Kofta, & Wójcik, 2013). Polish youth are not free of those sentiments—research carried out in towns formerly populated by the Jewish minority found that Jews and Roma are two of the most disliked minority groups (Bilewicz & Wójcik, 2009).

### 1.3. Inclusive historical representations and intergroup relations

Presence of outgroups' heritage in one's environment results in a more inclusive view of history (Lewicka, 2008a,b; Wójcik, Bilewicz, & Lewicka, 2010). People living in areas rich in *urban reminders* – original remnants and memorials – tend to remember more accurately both the history of these places and that of outgroup members formerly living there.

Historical memory, in turn, may be associated with current intergroup attitudes. That is because people who display an interest in the history of their place of residence tend to possess a more inclusive representation of that history and to hold more favorable attitudes towards outgroup members. For example, current inhabitants of Oświęcim (where the former concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz is located) who were more interested in the history of their city displayed significantly more favorable attitudes towards Jews and Roma (Lewicka, 2012; Wójcik, Lewicka, & Bilewicz, 2011). The findings of Lewicka and colleagues do not allow for causal inferences but it is plausible that learning about the multicultural past of one's place of residence (i.e., increasing knowledge) and becoming interested in that history may stimulate more tolerant intergroup attitudes in societies where direct intergroup contact is unlikely.

### 1.4. Contact with a multicultural past

Contact with the multicultural past of one's local community is understood here as learning about this heritage and directly engaging with it (e.g., visiting sites and discovering the multicultural history of well-known, everyday places). We believe that it constitutes an instance of *indirect intergroup contact* (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Pettigrew, 2008).

Indirect intergroup contact research has demonstrated that gaining knowledge about ingroup members' intergroup friendships (*extended contact*, Wright et al., 1997); witnessing intergroup contact of ingroup members (*vicarious contact*, Herek & Capitanio, 1997; Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011) or imagining one's own interaction with outgroup members (*imagined contact*, Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007) can change intergroup attitudes much in the same way as direct intergroup contact does (Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007). Contact with a multicultural past is a new form of indirect contact because it entails gaining knowledge about members of one's own group who used to live close to and regularly met outgroup members. This knowledge is reinforced by the presence of architectural (and other) material remnants which testify to the outgroup's presence in a given place and also speak to the spatial closeness of the ingroup and outgroup(s) in the past.

Knowledge about one's ancestors' personal contact with minority members is known to correlate with more positive outgroup-oriented attitudes (Stasiuk & Bilewicz, 2013). Moreover, reminders of a historical outgroup presence have been shown to relate to current attitudes towards outgroup(s) (Lewicka, 2008a,b; Wójcik et al., 2010).

Research on intergroup contact strives to establish the mechanisms responsible for its effectiveness in changing attitudes. With regard to indirect intergroup contact, four processes have been identified as mechanisms of extended contact: reduction of intergroup anxiety, respective changes in both perceptions of ingroup and outgroup norms, and inclusion of others in the self (IOS; see: Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008; Wright et al., 1997). The inclusion of others in the self seems particularly pertinent to the present study since the intervention in question aimed at presenting the history of Poles and Jews living together in the same place and at building new knowledge about local history so that it includes the outgroup. IOS is a cognitive process whereby an overlap occurs between the self-concept and the concept of another, close person (such as an ingroup member, see: Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Therefore, we assumed that this could also be the mechanism leading from learning about a multicultural history to improved attitudes towards outgroups.

### 1.5. Intervention

The main objective of the intervention was to raise awareness for the local Jewish material heritage and the multicultural history of currently homogeneous Polish communities. The intervention comprised four workshops, spanning over a period

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7323778>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7323778>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)