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Multiracial families and contact theory in South Africa: Does direct and extended contact facilitated by multiracial families predict reduced prejudice?

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Contact theory holds that increased contact between members of different groups can improve intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice if it meets certain quality criteria, such as equal status, common goals, and cooperation within the contact situation. It is now emerging that even extended contact, or the mere knowledge that an ingroup member has a close relationship with an outgroup member, can lead to more positive intergroup attitudes. However, in South African society optimal contact is uncommon because most social spaces and structures are governed by strong norms of microsegregation that ensure that genuine optimal contact is uncommon. Given that multiracial families exemplify most features of optimal contact while radically challenging social norms of segregation, they may be important nodes for effective prejudice-reducing contact in South African society. This exploratory study investigated the extent to which general contact with people of other races, direct contact with multiracial families (i.e. personally knowing a member of a multiracial family), and extended contact with multiracial families (i.e. knowing someone who knows a member of a multiracial family) predicted reduced prejudice, reconciliatory race-policy attitudes and reduced intergroup threat. The results show that all three forms of contact predicted significantly reduced prejudice and that direct contact with multiracial families significantly predicted reduced prejudice over and above the effect of general interracial contact. Therefore we argue that contact researchers should consider more carefully whether normatively supported contact or radically norm-violating forms of contact optimally disrupt practices of microsegregation. Additionally, we argue that multiracial romantic relationships and families deserve increased attention and support as important nodes of prejudice reduction in South African society. However, general contact was also associated with reduced support for race-based social policies which supports the argument that the prejudice-reducing effects of interracial contact may be at least partially offset by other effects that may hinder broader social change.

Keywords: contact; extended contact; microsegregation; multiracial families; prejudice; racial attitudes

According to contact theory, increased contact between members of different groups can reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), but only when it occurs in optimal conditions. Specifically, contact should result in reduced prejudice when status is roughly equal, goals are positive and cooperative and the contact is supported by social norms (Emerson, Kimbro, & Yancey, 2002). Even extended contact, or knowing that someone you know has a cross-group relationship, has been shown to predict lower levels of overall prejudice (Eller, Abrams, Viki, & Imara, 2007).

However, in South Africa “the unfortunate reality is that, at present, it is not clear that much meaningful contact takes place between members of different race groups” (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010, p. 232). Despite substantial improvements in intergroup relations since the advent of democracy, prejudice persists (Bornman, 2010) and personal “umbrella space” is still subject to powerful social norms of microsegregation (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). Even Universities, which should be sites of optimal contact, still show very low levels of meaningful contact as envisaged by contact theory (e.g. Clack, Dixon, & Tredoux, 2005; Schrieff, Tredoux, Dixon, & Finchilescu, 2005; Tredoux, Dixon, Underwood, Nunez, & Finchilescu, 2005; Alexander & Tredoux, 2010).

The message from current contact theory research in South Africa is therefore that — no matter how optimal the conditions in terms of equal status, shared goals, cooperation or normative support — interracial contact will have little effect on prejudice and behaviour unless it also disrupts and

undermines the social practices that preserve microsegregation. Multiracial families are one form of social practice that simultaneously model relatively ideal and optimal contact *and* radically challenge social norms of segregation. This study explores the role of multiracial families as the facilitators of direct and extended contact in South Africa and considers the extent to which they might act as particularly powerful nodes of prejudice-reduction in South African society.

Literature review and rationale

Contact theory

Contact theory holds that when people experience contact with outgroup members they become aware that their negative beliefs and attitudes are irrational and develop more positive intergroup attitudes. Conversely, people with limited contact with outgroup members have few opportunities to revise their assumptions and generalizations about members of outgroups, and thus stereotypes and prejudice persist (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Emerson *et al.*, 2002).

However mere contact in itself will not necessarily reduce prejudice because many forms of contact serve only to confirm stereotypes and negative attitudes (Allport, 1954). Allport (1954/1979) proposed four main criteria for effective and meaningful contact: equal group status within the contact situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law or custom. There is also evidence that contact is more effective when it is intimate rather than casual in nature (Pettigrew, 1998).

Optimal intergroup contact has been shown to reduce prejudice and bias in a wide variety of situations, groups and societies (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, direct face-to-face contact can also result in negative emotions such as anxiety, discomfort, and fears of appearing prejudiced which may increase the likelihood of negative outcomes such as self-censorship, misattribution and stereotype-confirmation which may then worsen intergroup relations. (Shelton, West, & Trail, 2010). Thus some contact theorists argue that *extended* contact has more promising implications for social change (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997).

Extended contact occurs when an ingroup member knows another ingroup member who has contact with an outgroup member. Extended contact has been associated with improved intergroup attitudes (Eller *et al.*, 2007) and can allow people to vicariously experience the positive effects of contact, while avoiding anxiety or negative feelings that may arise from direct contact (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006). Seeing an outgroup member being friendly, close and positive with an ingroup member may therefore improve expectations about intergroup interactions and reduce prejudice (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, & Christ, 2007), although obviously extended contact cannot occur without direct contact also occurring in a social network.

The problems of microsegregation and subtle racism

Since 1994 there has been considerable effort to dismantle the legal and social structures of apartheid, redress inequalities and create a 'new' and egalitarian South Africa (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008). Studies exploring the effects of interracial contact in post-apartheid South Africa have generally reported positive results (e.g. Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008; Gibson & Claassen, 2010) and there is evidence that, for most groups, blatant prejudice has decreased in South Africa since 1994 (Gibson & Claassen, 2010). However, when old-fashioned forms of blatant prejudice are no longer socially acceptable, more subtle forms of prejudice and racism can emerge in which blatant expressions of racism are avoided but social practices and political beliefs are nevertheless racially biased (*cf.* Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998).

It is also emerging that simply *legally* desegregating public and institutional spaces has had little impact on the practical everyday culture of segregation (e.g. Clack *et al.*, 2005; Schrieff *et al.*, 2005; Tredoux *et al.*, 2005; Alexander & Tredoux, 2010) and that under the surface of public life, racism and prejudice are still deeply embedded in South African social structures and discourses of identity (e.g. Durrheim *et al.*, 2009; Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Gibson & Claassen, 2010; Verwey &

Quayle, 2011).

Therefore, although on the surface many settings in modern South African society appear to produce interracial contact meeting most of Allport's (1954) criteria (such as of equal group status and the support of authorities and law), the lived experience of contact in South Africa chronically fails to challenge cultures of segregation, ethnocentrism and prejudice (Clack *et al.*, 2005; Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Finchilescu, 2010). Indeed, there is some evidence that some intergroup relationships are now deteriorating after the initial post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation' euphoria (Gibson & Claassen, 2010).

Even in technically desegregated contexts (such as beaches, dining halls, nightclubs and public spaces) opportunities for contact are hindered by informal practices and group boundaries in everyday encounters where race groups tend to self-segregate and avoid intergroup interactions (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Finchilescu, 2010). For example, Alexander and Tredoux (2010) undertook a longitudinal study on the spatial segregation in seating arrangements in tutorial classrooms in a desegregated South African University and found that, although tutorials were officially expected to be desegregated, the probability of actual interracial contact was very low, with 'unintentionally' racially homogenous spaces enforcing racial boundaries between races and the majority of students describing interracial contact in these settings as illusory: in other words, superficial; infrequent; and rarely extending into more informal settings by choice. This 'together but separate' microsegregation of overtly multiracial spaces in South Africa has been observed in schools (Soudien, 2010), beaches (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003), racial seating patterns at popular bars and Cape Town nightclubs (Tredoux & Dixon, 2009), and in public spaces on university campuses such as lecture venues, cafeterias and public meeting places (Clack *et al.*, 2005; Schrieff *et al.*, 2005; Tredoux *et al.*, 2005; Koen & Durrheim, 2010).

This combination of illusory contact in many public and institutional spaces combined with stubborn avoidance of micro-contact negates the positive benefits of contact predicted by contact theory (Erasmus, 2010). In other words, although race groups in South Africa co-inhabit public spaces on a regular basis, at least amongst the urban and middle classes, the contact is not sufficient in its quality or intimacy to support much meaningful cross-racial interaction. These informal but ubiquitous social arrangements therefore perpetuate ethnocentrism and prejudice (Alexander & Tredoux, 2010).

However, in cases where South African contact is intimate, harmonious and cooperative it has been shown to have profound effects (Pettigrew, 2010). For example, Gibson and Claassen (2010) found that genuine friendship and intimate contact, such as sharing a meal with someone of another race, was significantly related to reduced prejudice and increased reconciliation. Swart, Hewstone, Christ and Voci's (2010) longitudinal study of cross group friendships in South African schools emphasized that contact that is intimate or has "acquaintance potential" (p. 310) has far stronger effects on prejudice than routine or institutionalized forms of contact such as that between neighbours or work colleagues, and was found to be associated with reduced intergroup anxiety, increased affective empathy, positive outgroup attitudes, greater perceived outgroup variability, and reduced negative reaction tendencies.

Further, although extended contact has not been explored in South African settings, ideal contact may produce positive ripples through the social networks of those who know the individuals who have experienced positive, intimate, harmonious interracial contact (Turner *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, there is an argument that experiencing optimal contact vicariously may be *more* effective than direct contact because the positive effects can be observed without the negative affective experiences such as anxiety that is associated with direct contact (Cameron *et al.*, 2006).

Interracial relationships and multiracial families in South Africa

Controlling the forms and scope of intimacy in society, including friendship, sex, love and marriage was essential to the political projects of colonialism and apartheid (Sherman & Steyn, 2009). Families

perform important social functions, including the control of social and sexual behavior, the maintenance of norms, obligations and motivations that coordinate with broader social and political goals and patterns in society (Amoateng & Richter, 2003). In apartheid South Africa, intimate interracial relationships were governed by public, religious and political discourses and structures supporting racist and eugenic apartheid ideologies (Sherman & Steyn, 2009). Mixed marriages and interracial relations were viewed as “social parasites that required extermination” (Jacobson, Amoateng, & Heaton, 2004, p. 444).

Indeed the first steps towards a totalitarian apartheid state included the regulation of interracial intimacy through the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950 (with many more to follow). These laws and social prohibitions made it virtually impossible for intimate relations across races to be publically acknowledged, let alone for mixed race couples or families to live normally (Jacobson *et al.*, 2004; Sherman & Steyn, 2009). Love across the race line was possible only at great risk or if one or both partners could successfully apply for racial reclassification, which caused other schisms in the social fabric of family and friendship. In the apartheid era multiracial couples and families suffered humiliation, abuse, lack of privacy and degradation, with authorities frequently following people suspected of interracial sex and raiding homes in the early hours of the morning to ensure that sleeping partners were of the same race. Even sharing a mixed-gender and mixed-race car journey was enough to risk arrest on suspicion of contravening the Immorality Act (Jacobson *et al.*, 2004; Sherman & Steyn, 2009). These legal sanctions were supported by public opinion, with mixed race couples and families who violated these segregation family norms facing ostracism and abuse from families, friends and community members of all race groups.

Even though the prohibitions on interracial sex and marriage were amongst the first apartheid laws to be repealed (Sherman & Steyn, 2009) and the frequency of interracial intimate relationships and the number of multiracial couples and families has gradually increased (Jacobson *et al.*, 2004; Sherman & Steyn, 2009), monoracial relationships are still the norm. Barnes, Palmay, & Durrheim (2001, p. 326) described their own experiences as a multiracial couple in South Africa and reported that reactions “ranged from sideways glances to people’s tripping and falling while staring at them” (p. 326). Sherman and Steyn (2009) explored the experiences of young multiracial couples in South Africa who highlighted the transgressive power of multiracial relationships in relation to the enduring, unspoken and unspeakable social norms of segregation.

Multiracial families are more formalised than some intimate interracial relationships (such as sex partners or a casual dating relationship), but share a similar symbolic meaning. They may originate in a variety of ways: through interracial marriage, through transracial adoption, foster care, or single parenting. Multiracial families are often faced with societal or family opposition and are often the object of much attention because of the norm-violating symbolic meaning they carry in the South African historical context (Amoateng & Richter, 2003; Mojapelo-Batka, 2008).

Although it is true that members of multiracial families are not insulated from the racist norms, practices and ideologies of South African society and may reproduce many of the problems of the broader society in which they are embedded (Ratele, 2003; Jaynes, 2010), their most powerful feature is that they unashamedly violate the norms of segregation and microsegregation (eg. Barnes *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, since they simultaneously model many features of optimal contact, bring race to the surface of social interactions, challenge social norms of segregation, and challenge the gulfs between public ideology and private normative practice in post-apartheid South Africa, they may be particularly effective nodes of prejudice-reducing contact and might play an important role improving racial attitudes in South Africa.

However, these intimate personal arrangements involve more than just a relationship between couples and nuclear families — they become nodes that join together chains of related individuals via extended family and friendship relationships (Emerson *et al.*, 2002). Therefore they may be particularly important sites for prejudice-reducing extended contact as well.

AIMS

This exploratory study investigated the role of multiracial families as facilitators of direct and extended contact between race groups in South Africa. Specifically, we aimed to get a preliminary idea of whether direct and extended contact facilitated by multiracial families is associated with improved racial attitudes and reduced prejudice in South Africa over-and-above the influence of general interracial contact.

The first hypothesis was that any contact between race groups would be associated with reduced prejudice and improved racial attitudes. The second was that, since contact with multiracial families is a particularly effective form of contact, direct contact with multiracial families would have a stronger relationship to reduced prejudice and improved racial attitudes than general contact. The third hypothesis was that even extended contact with multiracial families would be associated with reduced prejudice and improved racial attitudes.

METHOD

The study took the form of a correlational online survey. Participants were directed to an URL where they could complete the survey using their internet browser. The survey was compiled using the Limesurvey open source online survey system.

Assessing contact and extended contact with multiracial families

Three levels of contact with multiracial families were considered: participants could be members of multiracial families (intimate contact); they could personally know members of multiracial families (direct contact with multiracial families) and they could know someone who knows someone in a multiracial family (extended contact with multiracial families). These relationships could additionally be modified by having direct or extended ties to more than one multiracial family (quantity) and by engaging in direct or extended contact more or less often (frequency). To estimate direct and extended contact the quantity and frequency for each were averaged to arrive at contact metrics.

Distinguishing general contact from contact with multiracial families

One problem with this study was that it was very difficult to assess levels of *general* contact distinct from contact with members of multiracial families. Since this was an online survey with no direct interaction with participants, we gave them the following instructions: "The following questions will ask about your contact with members of other race groups. When you answer, try to think about your interactions with members of other race groups EXCLUDING any contact you may have with people in multiracial families." General contact with members of other race groups was then measured by several items asking respondents how much interracial contact with the outgroup they experienced with acquaintances and friends in their everyday lives ($\alpha = .801$). Given that distinguishing between these forms of contact was a difficult task, it is likely that participants' estimates of general contact are not likely to be fully independent from estimates of contact facilitated by multiracial families. However, this overlap of measures would be likely to obscure associations, making significant differences in prejudice by direct and extended contact even more noteworthy.

Assessing prejudice

Blatant prejudice was assessed by five semantic differential items asking participants to rate their primary outgroup on the dimensions of: Negative/Positive; Cold/Warm; Hostile/Friendly; Suspicious/Trusting; and Disrespect/Respect. Respondents were also asked to describe how they feel about the outgroup by selecting a number along the continuum, where 1 was very negative and 10 was very positive. Scores were reverse-coded where necessary and averaged to arrive at an estimate of blatant prejudice ($\alpha = .932$). However, prejudice is a weak predictor of behaviour and practice (e.g. Duckitt, 1992) so participants also completed measures of race policy attitudes and outgroup threat, which more directly assess prejudicial social practice.

Assessing race-policy attitudes

Race policy attitudes were operationalized as support for government policies designed to rectify race-based injustices in education, housing, land reforms and jobs using scales from Durrheim *et al.* (2009) and Dixon *et al.* (2010). These items scaled with excellent reliability ($\alpha = .899$).

Assessing threat

Outgroup threat was operationalized using Cantrill ladder scales in which participants estimated the relative change in status of each race group over the previous five years (from Durrheim *et al.*, 2009 and Dixon *et al.*, 2010). The items assessed perceived threat between race groups in the domains of housing, jobs, education, economic welfare and legal and political power, as well as perceived threats to cultural values. The reliability for this measure was excellent ($\alpha = .919$).

Design

The study used hierarchical regression analysis to model the relationships between the three levels of interracial contact (general contact, direct contact with multiracial families, and extended contact facilitated by multiracial families) and the outcome variables of prejudice, racial attitudes and threat. This cross-sectional design has a flaw common to most contact research: that it is those people who are less prejudiced to begin with are more likely to have more contact with multiracial families as they are more open to interracial interactions of this nature (Pettigrew, 1998). Given that this was an exploratory study on a small budget and a short timeframe, we could not afford the methodological sophistication of a longitudinal design (e.g. Swart *et al.*, 2010). However, meta-analyses, reviews and longitudinal studies confirm that contact-prejudice relationships are generally causal as well as correlational (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Swart *et al.*, 2010), although this particular study cannot comment on the causality of the observed relationships.

PROCEDURE

Sampling:

Since members of multiracial families are a small percentage of the South African population (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008), the sample was recruited to ensure that a statistically viable proportion of respondents would know, or know of, multiracial families. Urban and suburban schools have been identified as amongst the most integrated South African institutions (Seekings, 2008)¹ and parents of school children are often in contact with a wide variety of other families through school-related activities (e.g. sports and cultural events, their children's friendship circles) whom they may not usually socialize with. A school is also an environment in which parents are likely to meet new people and see diverse families together. Therefore parents of school children are likely to have opportunities for direct and indirect extended contact with multiracial families.

Initially a Google advert was set up to be presented to any South African internet user who was searching school-related keywords, such as 'South African Schools', or for the names of any South African schools that have websites (e.g. "Carter High School"). However, this pay-per-click strategy turned out to be more expensive and less effective than initially expected and it was decided to combine it with a snowball sampling strategy. This was done by approaching a few school principals with existing relationships with the authors and their affiliated university and asking them to assist by forwarding an email inviting parents to participate (and asking them to forward the survey to anyone else who may have been interested in participating). Two of these schools directly contacted by the authors were from the Pietermaritzburg district (both racially integrated public schools in a middle class suburban area), and one from Grabouw in the Western Cape (a predominantly 'coloured' public school based in a small agricultural-based town). The final sample consisted of participants sampled online and via the snowball sampling strategy.

Ultimately this procedure resulted in 107 responses. Only 74 progressed beyond the informed

consent procedure and 64 completed the entire survey. Since the sample size was small, voluntary and exclusively recruited from the subset of South Africans with easy access to the internet, it cannot be seen as fully representative of all South Africans. It excluded many subgroups in the South African population, including the poor and the illiterate. However, (1) these features of the sample are equally true of the student samples used in the vast majority of psychological research in South Africa and internationally and (2) neither extended contact nor the power of multiracial families as nodes of effective contact have been given empirical attention in the South African context. Therefore these exploratory results may provoke further thought and research despite their clear limitations.

Ethics

The survey was structured so that the first page included an explanation of the purposes and nature of the study, what was expected of participants, and the uses to which the results may be put. Participants were asked to indicate that they had read the informed consent form and that they agreed to take part in the study before they were able to continue with the survey.

There was no serious risk of harm to participants, and if participants felt uncomfortable at any point they were free to withdraw. In order to ensure participation was completely anonymous in this study, responses were stripped of the IP addresses and participants were not required to give any personal information that could have been traced back to them. There were no direct benefits to participants except for the possibility that the questions may have been a useful opportunity for participants to reflect on their own racial attitudes and potentially change them. The study received ethical clearance from a University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics committee before data collection began.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis showed that 82.19% of the sample self-reported their race as white, 9.59% as black, 5.48% as coloured and 2.74% as Indian. Since approximately 80% of South Africans classify themselves as black (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2009) this confirms the suspicion that online surveys in South Africa are likely to result in skewed samples. Age ranged between 19 and 57 years with a mean of 36 years, and 66.7% of the sample being female. Despite approaching schools only in the Kwa-Zulu Natal and Western Cape areas, the geographical location of the sample showed a fair range across South Africa, with 58.9% of the final sample from Kwa-Zulu Natal; 13.7% from Gauteng; 12.3% from the Western Cape; 6.8% from the Eastern Cape; 5.4% from Mpumalanga; and the remaining 2.7% from the Free State and North-West Province.

Sixteen of the 74 participants reported that they were members of a multiracial family, which is a very large proportion considering that multiracial families constitute only about four in every thousand families in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2009).² We suspect this may be because members of multiracial families would be more interested in participating in research of this nature as it concerns them directly. In the analyses that follow, the members of multiracial families have been excluded from the sample since "contact" is likely to have a very different meaning for them than other participants. Of the remaining 58 participants, 73% had experienced direct contact with multiracial families, and 61% had experienced extended contact with multiracial families.

The effects of contact on prejudice

Model 1: Extended contact with multiracial families and prejudice

The basic regression model on prejudice by extended contact with multiracial families was significant, $r^2 = .111$, $F(1, 54) = 6.739$, $p = .012$. Therefore, as expected, extended contact with multiracial families in South Africa predicted reduced prejudice ($b = -.376$).

Model 2: Extended contact and direct contact with multiracial families on prejudice

The second block of the hierarchical regression analysis entered extended and direct contact with

multiracial families on prejudice and was highly significant, $r^2 = .219$, $F(2,53) = 7.418$, $p = .001$. The r^2 -change was significant, $\Delta r^2 = .108$, $F(1, 53) = 7.310$, $p = .009$, confirming that the second model accounted for significantly more of the variance in prejudice than the first. Additionally, extended contact with multiracial families no longer had a significant independent effect on prejudice once direct contact with multiracial families was included in the model, $b = -.171$, $t = 1.090$, $p = .281$. This suggests that the effects of extended and direct contact with multiracial families overlap, confirmed by the substantial correlation between these terms, $r = .413$, $p < 0.01$. Due to this multicollinearity and the small sample size, it is therefore difficult to separate the independent influences of extended and direct contact with multiracial families on prejudice.

Model 3: Extended contact and direct contact with multiracial families and general contact on prejudice

The third model in the hierarchical regression analysis regressed extended contact with multiracial families, direct contact with multiracial families, and general contact (unrelated to multiracial families) on prejudice. This full model accounted for a large proportion of the variance in reported prejudice, $r^2 = .557$, and accounted for significantly more of the variance in prejudice than the second model, $\Delta r^2 = .339$, $F(1, 52) = 39.808$, $p < .001$. In this model the influence of extended contact with multiracial families was further reduced, $b = -.063$, $t = -.527$, $p = .601$, but the influence of direct contact with multiracial families still had a significant independent influence on prejudice, $b = -.303$, $t = -2.177$, $p = .034$, over and above the more powerful effect of general contact, $b = -2.757$, $t = -6.309$, $p < .001$. However, it must be noted that direct contact with multiracial families also correlated substantially with general contact, $r = .413$, $p < .01$, blurring the ability to distinguish the independent contribution of each term to the model.

Effects of contact on threat and policy attitudes

Since contact may have different effects on policy attitudes for white and black participants (Dixon *et al.*, 2010), and only a small proportion of the sample were non-white, we filtered for white participants only before exploring the effects of contact on perceived outgroup threat and race-policy attitudes. The hierarchical regression procedure was repeated for each dependent variable, regressing extended contact with multiracial families, then extended and direct contact with multiracial families, and then all three forms of contact on threat. Extended contact with multiracial families alone did not significantly predict threat, $p = .292$, although the second model including both extended and direct contact with multiracial families on threat approached significance, $p = .074$, and the r^2 -change statistic achieved significance at the 5% level, $p = .050$. The third model including general contact with direct and extended contact with multiracial families was highly significant, $F(3, 48) = 5.605$, $p = .002$. However, the only term contributing significantly to threat was general contact, $b = -.806$, $t = -3.302$, $p = .002$. A very similar pattern emerged for policy attitudes. Although a model including extended and direct contact with multiracial families and general contact was significant, $F(3,51) = 3.158$, $p = .032$, only general contact contributed significantly to the model, $b = -.668$, $t = -2.857$, $p = .006$. Increased general contact with members of other races was associated with reduced resistance to racial policy attitudes.

DISCUSSION

We have argued that multiracial families meet several criteria for optimal intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), including (relatively) equal status, intimacy, common goals and intergroup cooperation (Emerson *et al.*, 2002). Multiracial families are likely to satisfy many of these requirements particularly well.

However, contact theory conventionally holds that contact should be normatively supported in order to successfully reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954). In South African society the normative support is dilemmatic, since although there is strong support from *authorities* for desegregation, there is

strong backstage prejudice and resistance to desegregation embedded in the social practices of racial and class-based subgroups (e.g. Verwey & Quayle, 2011). Since there are still strong *implicit* norms perpetuating illusory contact, it seems clear that normative support from authorities (Allport, 1954) is not enough to effect change; instead, we argue, interracial contact is most likely to effectively reduce prejudice if it challenges the implicit norms that sustain practices of microsegregation. Therefore, although the norm-violating features of multiracial families make them less than completely optimal in terms of conventional contact theory, we argue that their radical violation of microsegregation norms and practices (*cf.* Barnes *et al.*, 2001) will make them particularly potent sites of prejudice reduction by direct and extended contact.

The aim of this exploratory study was therefore to investigate whether direct and extended contact with multiracial families has beneficial effects on prejudice, threat and race-policy attitudes over and above the expected influence of general contact. The clearest finding of this study is that general contact with members of racial outgroups is associated with lower levels of reported prejudice. This finding contributes to the contact literature in South Africa and supports the growing consensus that increased contact is generally an effective means of reducing prejudice (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008; Dixon *et al.*, 2010; Gibson & Claassen, 2010; Swart *et al.*, 2010; Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2010).

Despite the small sample size, direct contact with multiracial families had a significant relationship with prejudice over and above the effects of general contact. Although extended contact with multiracial families predicted reduced prejudice by itself, it did not retain significance when direct contact with multiracial families and general contact were entered into the model and it was not possible to explore the independent effect of extended contact with multiracial families on prejudice due to the substantial overlap between measures. However, the results were very promising with a sample of this size and suggest that extended contact will be a fruitful avenue for further research in South Africa.

We suspect that multiracial families are effective sites of direct and extended interracial contact for two reasons. First, multiracial families radically violate norms that support microsegregation, and we suspect — at least in countries where segregation persists despite strong institutional support for desegregation — that norm-violating forms of contact will be more optimal than forms of contact with strong normative support as initially suggested by Allport (1954).

Second, although direct contact (both general contact and direct contact with multiracial families) was a better predictor of prejudice in this study, these results are a reminder that prejudice is a function of *networks* of people in and between groups, as well as results of individual cognition. Therefore, although “extended contact” as measured here is a poor indicator of the impact of contact on a social network, these results are suggestive that interracial contact should be considered in terms of its effects on networks of people rather than just on individuals (*cf.* Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007). Indeed, the feature of multiracial families that may be most important to prejudice reduction is that they may act as relatively permanent ‘bridges’ between groups of people whose networks are then more-or-less permanently linked.

Although previous studies have found that contact can undermine social change by *reducing* support for structural race-based transformation policies (Durrheim *et al.*, 2009; Dixon *et al.*, 2010; Reicher, 2007), the present study found that increased general interracial contact was associated with reduced threat and reduced resistance to race-based transformation policies. Since we used threat and race-based policy attitudes as indicators of implicit prejudice, we can conclude that contact with members of other race groups was associated with reductions in both blatant and implicit prejudice.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has made some sweeping generalizations about the nature of race-relationships in multiracial families. While we agree that in most multiracial South African families there will be status

and power differentials between spouses; and between spouses and children (as noted by Jaynes, 2010), it is also true that the nuclear family as a unit has a *shared* status with respect to other families and individuals in a given society, allowing us to argue that multiracial families roughly satisfy Allport's (1954) criterion of relatively equal status. However, our understanding of the role of multiracial families in facilitating contact and prejudice-reduction would be greatly improved if future research addresses the *quality* of the enactment of optimal contact in multiracial families instead of assuming that all multiracial families enact these features equally well.

Although the results of this exploratory study were positive, there are several methodological limitations that remind us that these results should still be treated as preliminary indications that more study in this area is warranted, including: the small sample size; the large non-response bias; the demographic bias; the high proportion of members of multiracial families in the sample compared to the general population; and the usual problems with reductionism when quantitative methods are used to explore complex social phenomena.

As with most cross-sectional contact research, the observed relationships cannot be assumed to be purely causal, although longitudinal studies have confirmed that the contact-prejudice relationship often is (e.g. Pettigrew, 1998; Swart *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, future studies will have to apply more effort to solving the problem of independently measuring general contact and contact facilitated by multiracial families. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that multiracial couples and families deserve special consideration as important nodes of effective positive interracial contact in South Africa.

CONCLUSIONS

Increased contact between members of different groups can improve intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice, and it is now emerging that even extended contact — the mere knowledge that an ingroup member has a close relationship with an outgroup member — can lead to more positive intergroup attitudes (Eller *et al.*, 2007). Specifically, contact should result in reduced prejudice when contact conditions are optimal — when status is roughly equal, goals are cooperative and the contact is supported by social norms (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Although the research on interracial contact in post-apartheid South Africa is still relatively limited, the studies that have been conducted have generally had positive results (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008).

Since multiracial families satisfy the conventional conditions for optimal contact (*cf.* Amoateng & Richter, 2003; Mojapelo-Batka, 2008) and also radically violate segregation norms (Barnes *et al.*, 2001) we expected that they would be particularly effective nodes for prejudice-reducing contact in South African society. Additionally, marriages and families involve more than just the nuclear family — they bring together related *groups* of individuals with strong investments in maintaining ties. Therefore we expected that they would be effective nodes for prejudice reduction via extended contact.

This study therefore explored the relationship between prejudice and three levels of contact (general interracial contact, direct contact with multiracial families and extended contact with multiracial families). The results supported the contact hypothesis, confirming that conventional general contact strongly and significantly predicted reduced prejudice. As hypothesized, direct and extended contact with multiracial families also each significantly predicted reduced prejudice, although substantial correlations between the three levels of contact made it difficult to describe the direct independent effect of each. Despite the small sample size, the results of this exploratory study confirm: (a) the now common finding that general contact between races is associated with reduced prejudice and improved racial attitudes in South Africa; (b) that contact with multiracial families is likely to be an effective site for prejudice-reducing contact that contributes to reduced prejudice over and above the effects of general contact; and (c) that even extended contact with multiracial families is likely to effectively reduce racial prejudice.

NOTES

1. Although fully multiracial schools are still the exception rather than the norm.
2. Statistics South Africa provides interactive views of the 2009 Household Survey which allowed us to crosstabulate the race of the nominated household head by the race of household members and thereby estimate the proportion of multiracial households.

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