

FULL PAPER

Flattering compliments and savage insults – The influence of vicarious intergroup contact on minority (outgroup) support considering empathy as a mediating mechanism

Schmeichelnde Komplimente und brutale Beleidigungen – Der Einfluss von stellvertretendem Intergruppenkontakt auf die Unterstützung von Minderheiten (Outgroups) unter Berücksichtigung von Empathie als mediierender Mechanismus

Sophie Bruns, Jule Scheper & Christine E. Meltzer

Sophie Bruns (Dr.), Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, Department of Journalism and Communication Research, Expo Plaza 12, 30539 Hannover, Germany. Contact: sophie.bruns@ijk.hmtm-hannover.de. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8243-8916>

Jule Scheper (Dr.), Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, Department of Journalism and Communication Research, Expo Plaza 12, 30539 Hannover, Germany. Contact: jule.scheper@ijk.hmtm-hannover.de. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6316-4238>

Christine E. Meltzer (Jun.-Prof. Dr.), Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, Department of Journalism and Communication Research, Expo Plaza 12, 30539 Hannover, Germany. Contact: christine.meltzer@ijk.hmtm-hannover.de. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1801-1923>



FULL PAPER

Flattering compliments and savage insults – The influence of vicarious intergroup contact on minority (outgroup) support considering empathy as a mediating mechanism**Schmeichelnde Komplimente und brutale Beleidigungen – Der Einfluss von stellvertretendem Intergruppenkontakt auf die Unterstützung von Minderheiten (Outgroups) unter Berücksichtigung von Empathie als mediiender Mechanismus**

Sophie Bruns, Jule Scheper & Christine E. Meltzer

Abstract: Minority groups in a society, such as national, ethnic, or religious minorities, often depend on the support of other groups, so-called outgroup support, to assert their interests and bring about social change. Social media environments provide a wide range of options for vicarious intergroup contact, which is assumed to be a low-threshold way to promote outgroup support. This study focuses on intergroup contact between the societal majority group of heterosexual individuals as the ingroup and the minority group of homosexual individuals as the outgroup, as well as intergroup contact between the societal majority group of White individuals as the ingroup and the minority group of people of color (PoC) as the outgroup. Both homosexual individuals and PoC represent minority groups that face systematic discrimination and social disadvantage in our society, requiring support and interventions. We investigate the effects of observed positive and negative intergroup contact in an online environment on different types of outgroup support, as well as the role of empathy and perspective-taking towards the outgroup as potential affective and cognitive mediators. We conducted an online experiment ($N = 477$), using a stratified demographic sample of the German population. Results show that observed intergroup contact in comment sections on social media does not influence empathy or different forms of outgroup support. Instead, empathy and perspective-taking influence outgroup support independent of the observed intergroup contact.

Keywords: Intergroup contact, minority groups, empathy, outgroup support, social change, experiment

Zusammenfassung: Minderheitsgruppen in einer Gesellschaft, etwa nationale, ethnische oder religiöse Minderheiten, sind häufig auf die Unterstützung anderer Gruppen – sogenannter Outgroups – angewiesen, um ihre Interessen durchzusetzen und sozialen Wandel herbeizuführen. Soziale Medien bieten vielfältige Möglichkeiten für stellvertretenden Intergruppenkontakt, der als niedrighschwelliges Mittel zur Förderung von Fremdgruppenunterstützung angenommen wird. Diese Studie untersucht den Intergruppenkontakt zwischen der gesellschaftlichen Mehrheitsgruppe heterosexueller Personen als Ingroup und der Minderheitsgruppe homosexueller Personen als Outgroup sowie zwischen der Mehrheitsgrup-

pe der White Persons als Ingroup und der Minderheitsgruppe der People of Color (PoC) als Outgroup. Homosexuelle Personen und PoC sind Minderheitsgruppen, die in unserer Gesellschaft systematischer Diskriminierung und sozialer Benachteiligung ausgesetzt sind. Wir untersuchen die Effekte von positiven und negativen Intergruppenkontakten auf verschiedene Formen des Outgroup-Supports sowie die Rolle von Empathie und Perspektivenübernahme gegenüber der Fremdgruppe als potenzielle affektive und kognitive Mediatoren. Die Ergebnisse eines Online-Experiments ($N = 477$) mit einer stratifizierten demografischen Stichprobe der deutschen Bevölkerung zeigen, dass beobachteter Intergruppenkontakt in Kommentarsektionen sozialer Medien weder Empathie noch verschiedene Formen des Outgroup-Supports beeinflusst. Stattdessen beeinflussen Empathie und Perspektivenübernahme Outgroup-Support unabhängig vom beobachteten Intergruppenkontakt.

Schlagwörter: Intergruppenkontakt, Minderheitsgruppen, Empathie, Outgroup-Support, sozialer Wandel, Experiment

1. Introduction

Due to the ability to reach large audiences and provide citizens with the opportunity to complement information directly with their own interpretation, the Internet has the potential to foster discussion and deliberation in areas such as social media, news comment sections, and online blogs (e.g., Ziegele et al., 2018). Internet technologies can promote online participation, contribute to more inclusive public spheres, and thus reinvigorate (deliberative) democracy. However, studies show that in many cases, public online comments do not meet the norm of constructive engagement, as they are often uncivil, insulting, and aggressive (e.g., Coe et al., 2014). Studies on the effects of online comments primarily focus on undesirable effects such as less pro-social or more aggressive behaviors toward others (Weber et al., 2020), negative emotions, and aggression (Chen & Lu, 2017).

This study aims to contribute to research on more desirable effects of online comments (e.g., Baden & Springer, 2014) and examines how discussions within online comment sections influence support for the interests of minority groups in a society, such as national, ethnic, or religious minorities. These groups often depend on the support of other groups, so-called outgroup support, to assert their interests and bring about social change (e.g., gain attention for injustice or get support in political decisions). We focus on two distinct minority groups: Homosexual individuals and people of color (PoC). Both groups represent minority groups that face systematic discrimination and social disadvantage in our society, requiring support and interventions. When we refer to outgroups, we are specifically referring to societal minority groups, such as, in our specific case, PoC and homosexual individuals. When we refer to ingroups, we mean majority groups such as White individuals and heterosexual individuals. It should be noted that, in general, ingroups and outgroups can, of course, be defined differently with respect to the majority or minority status of social groups.

To investigate the relation between online comments and outgroup support, we draw on the idea that comments in social media promote spaces where individuals from various cultural backgrounds and social groups come into contact and

can interact with each other and, even more frequently, observe interactions of others (Stroud et al., 2016). Because most citizens do not have frequent face-to-face contact with people they perceive as members of another group (i.e., outgroup members), indirect forms of contact via the Internet and especially observations thereof are particularly important for larger audiences (Kim & Wojcieszak, 2018). This concept is also called vicarious intergroup contact, i.e., watching interactions of ingroup and outgroup members in the media. Such vicarious intergroup contact can have positive (but also negative) effects, not only on the interacting individuals themselves but also on observers of this contact (for an overview, see Vezzali et al., 2014). We use Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) as a theoretical framework to explain whether and how observers of vicarious intergroup contact are motivated to support an outgroup. Since research has shown that cognitive (e.g., social distance; Capozza et al., 2013) as well as emotional reactions (e.g., empathy; Aberson & Haag, 2007) affect attitudes and behaviors directed at the outgroup, we include cognitive and affective aspects of empathy as mediating mechanisms. This study complements research on the effects of different forms of online comments and extends research on (mediated) intergroup contact by focusing on vicarious intergroup contact online and including outgroup support as an under-researched behavioral outcome.

2. Mediated intergroup contact and outgroup support

2.1 (Online) Outgroup support

Relations between groups of different ethnic, religious, and ideological backgrounds are one of the most challenging issues of the century (Mastro, 2015). Distrust and conflict between social groups might lead to prejudice or discrimination, especially against those with lower social status (Hewstone et al., 2014). It thus seems unlikely that members of a higher-status group support the interests of a minority outgroup. Based on Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; ICT), it can also be assumed that minority groups are often not supported by majority groups. ICT posits that systematic prejudice and negative attitudes exist between groups and will persist in the absence of positive intergroup contact (Allport, 1954). These negative cognitions and emotions influence behaviors and can lead to ingroup members not supporting outgroup members (Paolini et al., 2021). Tajfel et al. (1971) demonstrated that even with completely arbitrary group assignments, ingroup favouritism automatically occurs, and the outgroup is disadvantaged – meaning that negative attitudes and behaviors toward the outgroup emerge. Drawing on ICT, we thus expect regarding to societal majority and minority that majority groups often tend to favour their own ingroup – other members of the majority group – while disadvantaging the outgroup, i.e., members of minority groups. This disadvantage can manifest as both negative attitudes and behaviours, such as a lack of outgroup support. For example, if we consider PoC as a minority group in German society and White people as the majority group, it can be assumed that White individuals often exhibit ingroup favouritism and are more likely to support other White individuals than PoC as outgroup members.

While positive intergroup contact can certainly counteract these tendencies (Allport, 1954), ICT fundamentally assumes a general tendency toward ingroup favoritism and outgroup disadvantage. Some exceptions demonstrate outgroup support as the support of minorities in both offline and online contexts (e.g., donations for refugees, legalization of gay marriage, support in online discussions, demonstrations such as #BlackLivesMatter).

From an intergroup perspective, outgroup support can be conceptualized in terms of various forms of (communicative) intergroup behavior, in which an individual supports an outgroup. Thus, it is manifested in any form of behavior associated with a positive attitude, feeling, or intention towards the outgroup. This definition refers to (the motivation for) direct interactions with the outgroup or positive responses to outgroup-initiated contact, actions in the interest of the outgroup, as well as public statements of positive feelings or cognitions towards the outgroup (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012; Park, 2012). Due to self-enhancement and positive distinctiveness of the ingroup, outgroup support represents atypical behavior for group members (Hogg, 2001), rendering supportive behaviors unlikely to occur in intergroup contexts. A promising approach to explain how outgroup support can still occur is Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), which focuses on positive effects of (direct or indirect) intergroup contact on outgroup attitudes expected to translate into more positive intergroup behaviors and greater equality (Dovidio et al., 2017)¹.

Outgroup support is closely related to other concepts such as social support and destigmatization strategies. The concept of social support describes the exchange of informational and emotional (e.g., giving advice & expressing sympathy) between individuals offline and online (for an overview, see Menke et al., 2020). Social support is known to have many positive outcomes, such as mental and physical health (e.g., Doull et al., 2017). Although outgroup support also involves support that can occur both online (e.g., signing a petition) and offline (e.g., participating a demonstration) as well as by giving informational support (e.g., sharing information about the outgroup) and social support (e.g., comforting the outgroup), there is one central difference: Social support, at least in its theoretical core, focuses on individual persons supporting individual persons, whereas outgroup support centers on a whole group (ingroup) providing help to an entire group (outgroup). Outgroup support is related to the concept of destigmatization strategies, as both aim to enhance social groups. However, there are two central differences. Firstly, destigmatization strategies aim to enhance social groups by reducing the stigma associated with groups – for example, using frames such as responsibility frames (Schaller et al., 2023). Outgroup support focuses on enhancing a social group by behavioural support (e.g., signing a petition). Thus, destigmatization is located on the cognitive level, outgroup support on the behavioural (connotative) level. Destigmatization strategies per se target social groups experi-

1 With ICT, we focus on the group perspective in this paper. Of course, there are also motivations for outgroup support from an individual perspective – for example, individual wellbeing (Stehr, 2023). Due to our focus on groups, these individual motivations will not be further addressed in the following paper.

encing injustice (stigmatization), while the outgroup in outgroup support can be any group and does not necessarily have to be disadvantaged, even though, as in this study, it often focuses on social groups experiencing injustice.

2.2 Intergroup contact in an online context

ICT is based on the fundamental assumption that intergroup contact –between members of different social groups – reduces prejudice and improves attitudes through several mechanisms. When individuals from different groups interact, their social distance decreases, they become able to take each other’s perspectives, and experience greater empathy for one another (for an overview, see Harwood et al., 2013). The knowledge gained about the contact individual and the experiences made with a single individual can then be generalized to the entire outgroup. This reduces prejudice towards the whole group and leads to more positive attitudes and behaviors towards the outgroup (e.g., Lim et al., 2024).

This basic proposition of Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) has been widely supported in various contexts and social groups, such as the elderly, sexual minorities, mentally ill, or racial and ethnic minorities (for an overview, see Harwood et al., 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Literature on intergroup contact initially considered contact as an actual face-to-face interaction between social groups (Kim et al., 2018). Not all citizens have frequent interpersonal contact with different outgroups in their daily lives, such as religious or ethnic minorities (Dovidio et al., 2011). Yet, studies show that face-to-face interaction is not required for intergroup contact to have beneficial effects on intergroup relations (e.g., Kim & Wojcieszak, 2018; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Vezzali et al., 2014). Various forms of indirect contact (such as extended, vicarious, or imagined contact) also reduce prejudices and positively affect outgroup attitudes (Dovidio et al., 2017; Vezzali et al., 2014). This study examines vicarious intergroup contact as a form of indirect intergroup contact. The term refers to observations of interactions between ingroup and outgroup members. Many vicarious intergroup encounters are facilitated by the media: Intergroup encounters in fictional series, reports of intergroup encounters by an ingroup member in the news, or, as focused in this study, observations of intergroup contact on the Internet. Social media provides its users with almost endless possibilities for interactions observable by others. Although mediated contact features reduced cues and less immediacy than direct contact (Harwood, 2010), it can comprise an experience analogous to direct contact and improve outgroup attitudes (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016).

This study is interested in vicarious online intergroup contact occurring through observations of users’ comments for several reasons. The media are a primary source of information for people to form impressions of outgroups (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Online comments provide an easy and accessible way for intergroup encounters (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016), and a considerable share of people read these comments (Newman et al., 2016; Stroud et al., 2016).

2.3 Positive and negative vicarious online intergroup contact

Although some studies do not investigate the valence of the contact but compare different forms (observed or direct; e.g., Mazziotta et al., 2011), mostly positive forms of contact are studied from the perspective of Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT), such as friendship with outgroup members, or observations of deliberative discussions between different groups (Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Vezzali et al., 2014; Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). Positive contact is often defined by positive features of the contact, for example, if the interaction is friendly, members show interest in the outgroup, or acknowledge group differences and stereotypes (Harwood, 2010; Hayward et al., 2017).

However, focus on positive intergroup contact neglects negative intergroup experiences characterized by discriminating, aggressive, or unfriendly behavior of group members (Hayward et al., 2017). Especially online, uncivil, aggressive, and negative encounters can occur (e.g., Coe et al., 2014) and may exert stronger and undesirable effects on prejudice than positive contact (positive-negative contact asymmetry; Barlow et al., 2012). Although there is a body of research on negative forms of intergroup contact (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Hayward et al., 2017; Stephan et al., 2009), this work is not framed from this perspective but uses other theoretical accounts for the postulated effects (e.g., Intergroup Threat Theory; Stephan et al., 2009). Concerning media effects on intergroup relations and outgroup attitudes, there is little research on positive effects from ICT, but a large body of research on negative media effects on outgroup attitudes (e.g., Scherer, 2014), which oftentimes analyzes media coverage of outgroups rather than individual outgroup members (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). This research, however, is not connected to ICT (Harwood et al., 2013). Although it is most relevant to consider the valence of online intergroup contact, only a few studies include positive as well as negative intergroup contact (e.g., Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012). This study includes both forms of intergroup contact and examines how different forms of intergroup contact influence outgroup support.

2.4 Positive and negative effects of vicarious intergroup contact

Different effects of intergroup contact have been observed concerning its valence (see Banas et al., 2020; Dovidio et al., 2017; Hayward et al., 2017). Based on ICT (Allport, 1954) studies have shown that direct as well as indirect forms of positive contact lead to desirable cognitive effects, such as enhanced knowledge about the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), more positive emotions, such as empathy and perspective-taking, and less negative emotions, such as intergroup anxiety or threat (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Vezzali et al., 2017), as well as positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, like reduced prejudice or openness for future encounters (Banas et al., 2020; Park, 2012; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). On the other hand, studies using Intergroup Threat Theory as a theoretical framework (Stephan et al., 2009), have shown that negative intergroup contact leads to undesirable cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes for intergroup relations (for an overview, see Aberson, 2015; Hayward et al., 2017; Vezzali et al., 2014), such as

a heightened hostility toward the outgroup, more negative attitudes towards the outgroup, and a lower likelihood of future intergroup interactions (e.g., Aberson, 2015; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2009).

Despite these opposing results, studies have so far mostly focused on either positive or negative intergroup contact, and there is no clear conclusion yet regarding which form of intergroup contact is more strongly related to intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Barlow et al., 2012; Mazziotta et al., 2015; Pettigrew, 2008). A few studies have included both types of intergroup contact and examined the effects on various outcomes simultaneously. Pettigrew (2008) found that (1) the effect of positive contact was more robust than the effect of negative contact, (2) positive contact and negative contact are each significantly related to decreased and increased prejudice against Muslims, and (3) respondents experienced positive contact much more frequently than negative contact. Other studies found that negative contact is more influential in decreasing people's outgroup attitudes as compared to the beneficial impact of the same amount of positive contact (Barlow et al., 2012; Graf et al., 2014).

Concerning vicarious intergroup contact, some studies show that positive media portrayals of outgroup members positively influence attitudes toward outgroups but find no respective effects of negative portrayals (Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

These results imply that the valence of intergroup contact is relevant for its effects on intergroup cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. Positive intergroup contact has more desirable effects than negative intergroup contact. Since outgroup support can be designated as intergroup behavior, we assume:

H1: Positive vicarious intergroup contact leads to more outgroup support than negative contact.

2.5 Empathy as underlying mechanism

Theoretical accounts of the positive and negative effects of intergroup contact refer to cognitive and emotional processes responsible for the consequences of these encounters (Dovidio et al., 2017; Stephan et al., 2009; Vezzali et al., 2014). In a review of extended and vicarious intergroup contact, a distinction between an affective and a cognitive route is proposed for the processes underlying indirect contact effects (Vezzali et al., 2014). Many emotional (e.g., empathy, intergroup anxiety, intergroup threat) and cognitive (e.g., intergroup stereotypes, identification) reactions have been studied in the context of direct and vicarious intergroup contact (for an overview, see Vezzali et al., 2014). One mechanism, empathy, is not only seen as one of the most powerful mediators of direct and mediated intergroup contact (Banas et al., 2020; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) but also relates to both cognitive and emotional responses. Empathy consists of a cognitive aspect involving taking the perspective of others and an emotional aspect involving various types of emotional reactions to others (Finlay & Stephan, 2000). Empathetic emotions, or reactive empathy, describe emotional responses to another person's experience. Perspective taking, on the other hand, refers to

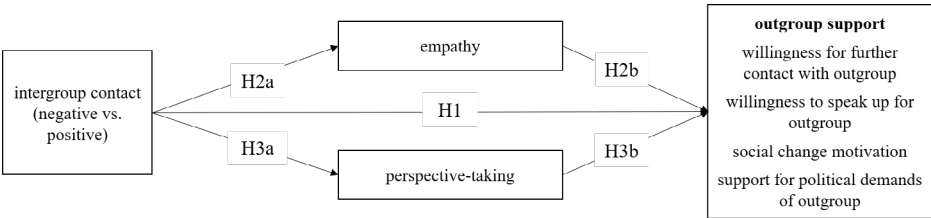
the ability to understand another person's perspective (Aberson & Haag, 2007; Davis, 1994). We consider the affective and cognitive components of empathy and propose that these two mechanisms mediate the influence of vicarious intergroup contact on outgroup support. To substantiate this proposition, we draw on empirical research providing evidence for the mediating role of empathetic emotions as well as perspective taking for the effect of direct and indirect forms of intergroup contact and changes in attitudes and behaviors towards the outgroup.

Research on intergroup relations in general shows that empathetic emotions for an outgroup (e.g., compassion or sympathy) result in improved attitudes towards the outgroup (Batson et al., 1997; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Vescio et al., 2003). Research on intergroup contact shows both that direct and extended intergroup contact is associated with an increased ability to experience the outgroup's feelings and emotions, which in turn is related to a variety of positive perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards the outgroup, such as reduced prejudice or social distance (Banas et al., 2020; Capozza et al., 2013; Capozza et al., 2014; Hewstone et al., 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). Concerning perspective taking, research on intergroup relations proves that the cognitive aspect of empathy also results in more positive attitudes and reduced stereotype endorsement (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Vescio et al., 2003). Direct and indirect forms of intergroup contact have been shown to influence outgroup attitudes by improving perspective taking (Aberson & Haag, 2007; Gurin et al., 2004; Hewstone et al., 2014; Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Hewstone et al. (2014) consider empathetic affect as well as perspective taking and show that both aspects of empathy mediate the effect of direct contact on intergroup forgiveness and trust. Based on these findings, we assume that vicarious intergroup contact enhances perspective taking and gives rise to empathetic emotions towards the outgroup. Empathetic emotions should arise if the intergroup situation informs recipients about the pitiful situation of the outgroup (or its members) and/or when the ingroup member shows empathetic reactions towards the outgroup member. Perspective taking, on the other hand, should be elicited if recipients learn something about the situation of the outgroup that enables them to gain a better understanding of the outgroup perspective or changes their perception about the outgroup in a way that makes a person feel closer to the outgroup (Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). While more positive effects of emotions in response to positive encounters can be expected, the same emotions should mediate the effects of negative mediated contact, but in the opposite direction (Banas et al., 2020). Positive forms of vicarious intergroup contact, compared to negative forms, should result in empathetic emotions and enhanced perspective-taking. Since outgroup support refers to a variety of behaviors associated with a positive stance or feeling towards the outgroup, we assume that empathetic emotions and increased perspective taking in reaction to vicarious intergroup contact enhance outgroup support. We thus propose that empathetic emotions and perspective taking a) emerge in response to positive (compared to negative) vicarious intergroup contact and b) mediate the effect of intergroup contact on outgroup support:

H2: Individuals who observe a positive intergroup contact a) feel more empathy than individuals who observe a negative contact, which b) results in higher outgroup support.

H3: Individuals who observe a positive intergroup contact a) engage more in perspective-taking than individuals who observe a negative contact, which b) results in higher outgroup support.

Figure 1. Theoretical model



3. Method

To test our hypotheses, we employed an online survey with an experimental design, varying intergroup contact (positive vs. negative). For increased generalizability of our findings, the experiment was conducted with two kinds of social groups to test the influence of vicarious online intergroup contact on outgroup support: Homosexual and heterosexual intergroup contact and contact between PoC and White people.

3.1 Sample, design, and procedure

A total of 477 respondents were recruited via the access panel provider Bilendi. Quotas were set to resemble the German voting population in age, gender, and education. For our recruitment, we intentionally focused on White persons and heterosexual individuals. In our theoretical framework, we outline the importance of support from majority groups (the ingroup, in this study) for minority groups (the outgroup, in this study). It was essential to include a sufficient number of ingroup members to explore how contact with the outgroup (minority groups) influences empathy and perspective-taking towards the outgroup, and the willingness to support the outgroup. We intentionally chose not to exclude PoC or homosexual individuals from recruitment. Instead, as part of the online survey, we assessed the extent to which participants identified as belonging to the group of PoC or White individuals, as well as their sexual orientation. Since the final sample included only 9 PoC and 11 individuals with a non-heterosexual orientation, these participants were retained in the sample due to the large overall sample size ($N = 477$), even though they did not belong to the majority groups (ingroups).

Quality checks were applied². The two subsamples did not differ significantly in age, gender, education, and perceived belonging to the outgroup³ (homosexual/heterosexual intergroup contact: $n = 238$; $M_{age} = 46.6$; 50% female; 34% at least German Abitur; 3% self-perception as homosexual; PoC/White people intergroup contact: $n = 239$; $M_{age} = 45.7$; 49% female; 34% at least German Abitur; 5% self-perception as PoC).

Respondents were randomly exposed to the negative or positive stimuli of one of the social groups (homosexual/heterosexual intergroup contact: negative condition $n = 119$, positive condition $n = 119$; PoC/White people intergroup contact: negative condition $n = 120$, positive condition $n = 119$). A randomization check revealed that the groups did not significantly differ regarding gender, age, education, and perceived belonging to the outgroup.

3.2 Stimulus

The stimulus material consisted of a screenshot of a fictional discussion on Facebook⁴. It depicted a short teaser of an online news article, reporting on a new study that investigates the satisfaction of homosexual/PoC employees in terms of fair treatment. User comments were located underneath the article. This kind of vicarious contact might be considered as a “minimal dose”. Yet, several studies have shown that even a one-time vicarious intergroup contact can exert corresponding positive or negative effects (e.g., Joyce and Harwood, 2014; Ju et al., 2016). In all versions, the first comment was written by a member of the outgroup (homosexual/PoC) who reports being discriminated against at work. The next comment came from a member of the ingroup (heterosexual/White person), made clear by stating “me as a heterosexual/White person...”.

In the version of positive intergroup contact, the ingroup member agreed with the outgroup member and expressed general affection for outgroup members through a compliment and positive emojis. In the version of negative intergroup contact, the ingroup member disagreed, generally insulted outgroup members, and used negative emojis. In all versions, the homosexual/PoC, who already spoke in the first comment, evaluated the general intergroup contact. In the positive intergroup contact, this outgroup member said that the conversation was a good example of how purposeful the exchange between members of the ingroup and outgroup is and supported this with a compliment for the whole ingroup and positive emojis. In the negative intergroup contact group, the outgroup member responded that this was a good example of how little purposeful the exchange is, using an insult and negative emojis. To allow any further conclusions about the persons, all names, pictures, and reactions were blurred.

- 2 Only participants who passed an attention test after two-thirds of the total questions were allowed to proceed with the questionnaire; straightliners were excluded.
- 3 In the following, we will equate the term outgroup with a minority group and the term ingroup with a majority group. This is not done for normative reasons, but because these terms and respectively the term “outgroup support” are used in the theory in this way.
- 4 87% of respondents reported having a Facebook account at the time of the study.

3.3 Measures⁵

The dependent variable outgroup support was operationalized with four different measures. *Willingness for further contact with the outgroup* was measured with seven items on a five-point scale (5 = I totally agree). The items were adapted from several established measures (i.e., Hässler et al., 2020; Jost et al., 2012; Mazziotta et al., 2011) and tapped into different ways to get in contact with and support outgroups online and offline. An index was built (homosexual/heterosexual people, Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$; PoC/White people, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Willingness to speak up for the outgroup was self-developed. Four items measured on a five-point scale (5 = I totally agree), how likely respondents chose different ways to speak up for the outgroup online. The items were compiled in an index (homosexual/heterosexual contact Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$; PoC/White people contact Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Support for political demands of the outgroup was a self-developed measure based on political demands that activists and political groups of homosexual people and PoC advocate for in NGOs. Items were assessed on a five-point scale (5 = I totally agree). The items were compiled in an index (homosexual/heterosexual Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; PoC/White people Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

Social change motivation was assessed with eight items on a five-point scale (5 = I totally agree) based on established measures (i.e., Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Vezzali et al., 2014). The items tapped into different aspects of a positive societal change for the outgroup in terms of equality. The items were compiled into mean indices (homosexual/heterosexual contact, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; PoC/White people contact, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Empathy was assessed by asking participants on a five-point scale how strongly they feel empathy regarding the outgroup of homosexuals or PoC (5 = very strong; single item).

Perspective-taking was measured with six items on a five-point scale (5 = totally agree) and assessed how well respondents were able to relate to the outgroup (e.g., Paluck, 2010). The items were compiled into mean indices (homosexual/heterosexual contact, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$; PoC/White people contact, Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

3.4 Treatment check

A treatment check was conducted to test whether the stimuli were perceived as intended as positive or negative intergroup contact. An ANOVA was conducted for both homosexual individuals as the outgroup ($F(1, 236) = 301.8$; $p < .001$) and PoC as the outgroup ($F(1, 237) = 8.379$; $p = .004$). The evaluation of the presented intergroup contact represented the dependent variable, and the experimental group (positive or negative contact) the independent variable. For both outgroups, treatment checks showed that participants perceived the positive in-

5 This study is part of a larger research project. All items used in this study can be found in Table S1 in the Appendix.

tergroup contact as significantly more positive (homosexual people as outgroup: $M = 4.09$; $SD = 0.95$; PoC as outgroup: $M = 3.66$; $SD = 1.03$) than the negative intergroup contact (homosexual people as outgroup: $M = 1.89$; $SD = 1.01$; PoC as outgroup: $M = 1.55$; $SD = 0.81$).

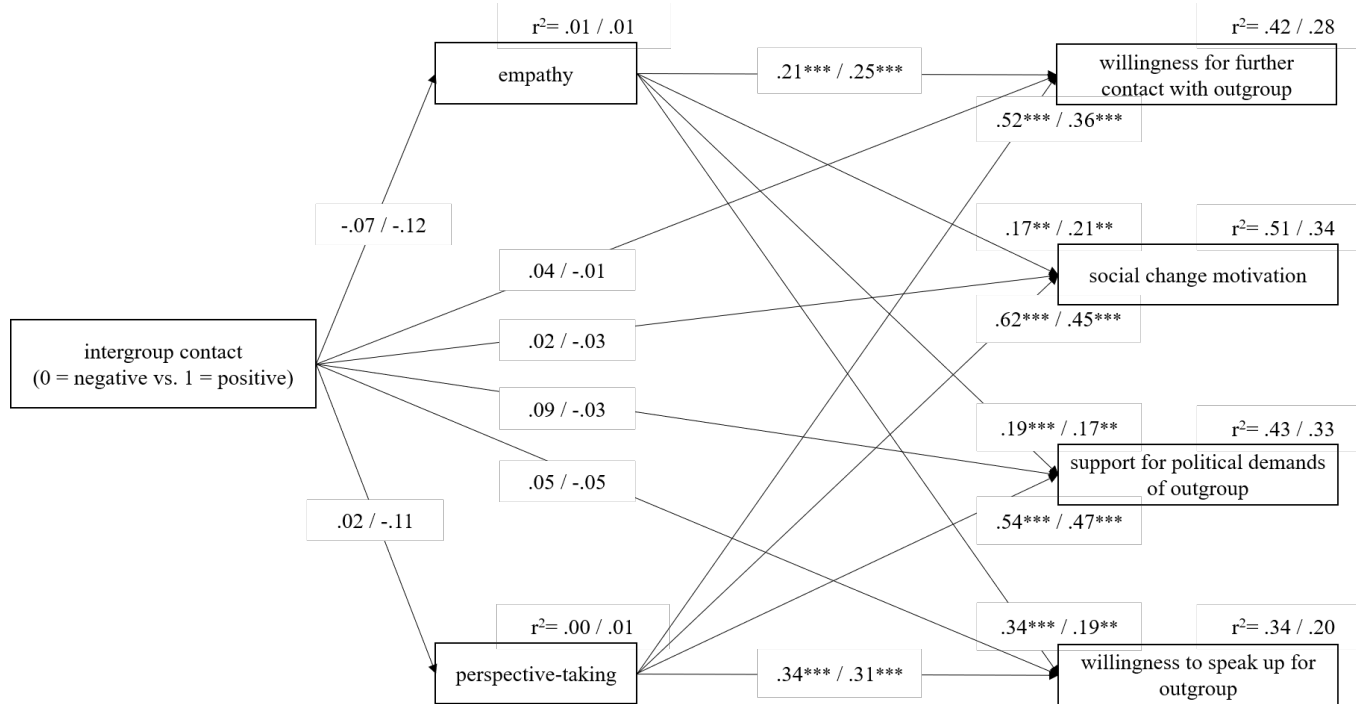
3.5 Data analysis

To test our hypotheses, we employed mediation analyzes. Empathy and perspective taking are included in our analysis as parallel mediators (rather than serial mediators), since our hypotheses focus on the direct relationships between intergroup contact and the mediators, as well as between the mediators and outgroup support. Empathy and perspective taking are conceptualized as the emotional and cognitive facets of empathy, respectively, and are compared in their roles as mediators, which makes a parallel modeling of the mediators appropriate. We used path models, in which the *valence of intergroup contact* (0 = negative contact; 1 = positive contact) predicted the mediator variables *empathy* and *perspective-taking*, as well as the outcome variables of *outgroup support*. For each type of outgroup support, we used a single path model – resulting in eight models (two outgroups times four types of outgroup support; Figure 2).

4. Results

Figure 2 summarizes the results of all four models. Across all four forms of outgroup support, our models were best to explain the *social change motivation*, with 51% variance explained for homosexuals as outgroup and 34% for PoC as outgroup. It was followed by the *willingness for further contact with the outgroup*, with 42% variance explained for homosexuals and 28% for PoC as outgroup. For the *support for political demands of the outgroup*, we were able to explain 43% of the variance for homosexuals and 33% for PoC as outgroup. We were able to explain the least variance for the *willingness to speak up for the outgroup*, with 34% for homosexuals and 20% for PoC as outgroup.

Figure 2. Empirical model



Notes. Eight path models (two outgroups x four forms of outgroup support; bootstrapping by 1000 samples). Intergroup contact as the independent variable, empathy and perspective-taking as mediators, and four forms of outgroup support as dependent variables. Value before/after represents standardized linear regression coefficients for homosexual people as outgroup ($n = 238$), value after/coefficients for PoC as outgroup ($n = 239$). Correlation allowed between empathy and perspective-taking. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

4.1 Direct effects of intergroup contact on outgroup support

We did not find significant effects of intergroup contact on any of the four forms of outgroup support for both homosexuals as outgroup and PoC as outgroup (Figure 2). Contrary to our hypothesis, individuals who observed a positive intergroup contact were not more willing to have further contact with the outgroup, did not have higher social change motivation, did not show stronger support for political demands of the outgroup, and did not have a greater willingness to speak up for the outgroup. Therefore, our first hypothesis was not supported.

4.2 Mediating role of empathy and perspective-taking

In H2, we assumed that individuals who observe a positive intergroup contact a) feel more empathy regarding the outgroup than individuals who observe a negative intergroup contact, which b) results in higher outgroup support. Contrary to our hypothesis, positive intergroup contact did not lead to significantly more empathy for both outgroups than negative intergroup contact (Figure 2). Consequently, and contrary to our hypothesis, there was no indirect mediation effect of intergroup contact over empathy on outgroup support (Figure 2). Individuals who observed positive intergroup contact did not experience more empathy toward the outgroup and did not show more outgroup support as a result. The results apply to both outgroups and all forms of outgroup support. H2 was therefore not supported.

In H3, we presumed that individuals who observe a positive intergroup contact a) engage more in perspective-taking regarding the outgroup than individuals who observe a negative intergroup contact, which b) results in higher outgroup support. Just like with empathy, we found no significant effects of intergroup contact on perspective-taking – neither for homosexuals nor for PoC as an outgroup (Figure 2). Similarly, with perspective-taking, there was no mediation between intergroup contact, perspective-taking, and outgroup support. Individuals who observed positive intergroup contact did not engage more in perspective-taking toward the outgroup and did not show more outgroup support as a result. The results apply to both outgroups and all forms of outgroup support. As a result, H3 was not supported.

There were some noteworthy results concerning the association between empathy and outgroup support, as well as perspective-taking and outgroup support. For both outgroups, we found more pronounced empathy and perspective-taking to be significantly associated with all types of outgroup support (Figure 2). This means that the higher the empathy individuals had toward homosexual individuals and PoC, and the better they could take their perspective, the higher their willingness for further contact with the outgroups, their social change motivation, their support for political demands of the outgroups and their willingness to speak up for the outgroups. The associations between perspective-taking and outgroup support were consistently stronger than those with empathy – often even twice as large (Figure 2). This means that even if intergroup contact was not directly or indirectly related to outgroup support through empathy and perspective-taking, empathy and perspective-taking were positively associated with outgroup support.

5. Discussion

The results did not show any pattern of (mediated) effects of observed intergroup contact on various forms of outgroup support – neither for homosexual people nor for PoC as an outgroup. Regarding outgroup support, empathy and perspective-taking were associated with all different types of outgroup support. However, empathy and perspective-taking were not caused by observed intergroup contact. Although we were able to explain a lot of variances in outgroup support by empathy and perspective-taking, incidents of vicarious intergroup contact did not seem sufficient to induce or influence empathy and perspective-taking.

Our result that intergroup contact did not influence outgroup support might be explained by long-term processes in context of intergroup relations. On the one hand, emotions, perceptions, and attitudes towards a particular social group are not completely formed in one moment but over a long period of time (Spears, 2009). A single exposure to one member of the outgroup might not have been sufficient to change existing empathy and perspective-taking related to the motivation to support an outgroup. Cumulative effects of various mediated encounters with outgroup members might thus be of interest. From a perspective of cultivation (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), media socialize and thus shape perceptions of the world and related attitudes over a long time. This also holds for the perception of social groups (e.g., Mastro et al., 2007). As both analysed mediators and outgroup support might be shaped by multiple and diverse mediated intergroup contacts (in social networks, fictional series, news reports), rather in the long term, we encourage future research to use longitudinal designs or prolonged experimental research with multiple exposures over time. Experimental studies in which participants are requested to follow social media accounts of outgroup members over a certain period or watch a season of a series that deals with outgroup characters or outgroup topics would be suitable for this purpose. Instead of, or in addition to, the between-subjects design we employed, it would also have been possible to use a within-person design with a pre-post measurement of empathy, perspective-taking, and potentially outgroup support before and after the stimulus. Such a measurement would have allowed us to assess participants' individual baseline levels of empathy and perspective-taking, enabling a more precise examination of changes within each participant because of the stimulus. This approach might have revealed more subtle effects that could have been masked by interindividual differences in the between-subjects design. It is possible that our stimuli were not well-suited to influence empathy and perspective-taking. As mentioned earlier, empathetic emotions should arise if the intergroup situation informs recipients about the pitiful situation of the outgroup (or its members). Similarly, perspective taking should be elicited if recipients learn something about the situation of the outgroup that enables them to gain a better understanding of the outgroup's perspective or changes their perception about the outgroup in a way that makes a person feel closer to the outgroup (Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). Fictitious online comments, by their nature, may lack the depth and detail needed to fully immerse participants in the outgroup's reality. They might not have informed the audience well enough about the situation of the outgroup to

evoke empathy and perspective-taking. Future studies might consider using longer online comments to provide a more detailed depiction of the outgroup's situation, potentially eliciting stronger empathy and perspective-taking. It is possible that entirely different media content, such as audiovisual media (i.e., a movie or series excerpts), allow for immersive experience and may be better suited to present the outgroup's situation to recipients over an extended period. To further explore the suitability and effects of our stimuli, future research should include an additional control group without any stimulus as a neutral comparison. This would have allowed us to more clearly distinguish the effects of positive and negative contact. In this way, we could have determined whether the observed outcomes were attributable to the respective stimulus or whether they would also occur in the absence of any intervention.

In addition to numerous methodological explanations for the lack of effects of positive and negative intergroup contact, there are, of course, also relevant theoretical explanations. According to intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), it is possible that our sample included many participants who, due to frequent contact with the outgroup, already held well-established attitudes, as well as stable levels of empathy and perspective-taking toward the outgroup. People with well-established emotions and cognitions toward the outgroup are likely less influenced by situational factors – Tone and Tully (2014), for example, found that individuals with stable levels of empathy are less susceptible to situational influences. In our theoretical framework, we argued that everyday contact with outgroup members is often limited. This may not be the case, at least not for the social groups we selected and in the digital context. Many participants may already have developed strong emotions and cognitions regarding these outgroups. It is therefore possible that the effects we hypothesized emerge over the long term, or only for a subgroup of participants who have had very little prior contact with outgroup members. Future research should address this by considering pre-existing attitudes and general contact with the outgroup as potential moderators. Research on intergroup contact further demonstrates that social distance from the outgroup is also an important factor (e.g., Xiao & Li, 2024). Respondents may exhibit varying degrees of social distance toward the outgroup, for example, due to prior experiences with outgroup members. It is possible that our sample includes different subgroups characterized by varying levels of social distance, and that the hypothesized effects may only apply to certain subgroups. Therefore, future research should urgently consider social distance as a moderator.

From the perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the strength of group identification may also be relevant. It is possible that, among the social groups predominantly represented in our study – heterosexual and White individuals – levels of group identification were generally low. As a result, positive or negative intergroup contact may not have been particularly meaningful for these participants. Even if only a subgroup of participants exhibited low identification, this subgroup could account for the lack of significant effects. Future research should examine the moderating role of group identification in the relationship between intergroup contact and both empathy and perspective-taking. Low identification with one's own group could, in line with the elaboration

likelihood model (ELM), also result in only superficial processing of the stimulus (via the peripheral route), thereby limiting its impact. According to the ELM, it is also conceivable that the social media post used as a stimulus led to shallow processing. Consequently, future research should explore depth of processing as a potential moderator.

For theoretical reasons, we surveyed members of the majority groups (White and heterosexual individuals). Future research should urgently place greater focus on minority groups and examine whether the effects differ from those observed in the majority group.

Our results suggest that the emergence of empathy and perspective-taking towards the outgroup can be fruitful to motivate outgroup support. Individuals who can better empathize with the outgroup's situation and adopt their perspective also have a stronger inclination to ensure the outgroup's well-being through outgroup support. As previously mentioned, perspective taking and empathy have been linked to more positive attitudes and reduced stereotypes towards the outgroup (Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio et al., 2003). Individuals who were able to effectively adopt the outgroup's perspective may also have harbored more favorable attitudes and fewer stereotypes towards the outgroup, which in turn would explain increased outgroup support. Future studies should pay attention to how empathy and perspective-taking arise and what contribution direct or indirect forms of intergroup contact can make in this process. The fact that perspective-taking is usually more strongly associated with outgroup support than empathy might be because, for outgroup support, it is crucial that individuals can put themselves in the perspective of the outgroup rather than just being compassionate. By adopting the perspective of the outgroup, individuals may be better able to understand their challenges, desires, and demands, which could be particularly important in supporting those demands, for example, within outgroup support.

The consistent effects on the two analysed outgroups indicate that the influence of empathy and perspective-taking on outgroup support does not depend on the outgroup. Two minority groups are not sufficient to show overarching effects applicable to various intergroup relations, and more outgroups need to be studied to provide robust evidence. The consistent results for all forms of outgroup support provide evidence that empathy and perspective-taking not only strengthen specific forms of outgroup support but outgroup support in general. Individuals who feel a lot of empathy towards an outgroup and can take the perspective of the outgroup well seem to overall support the outgroup and not just focus on specific forms.

In this paper, outgroups were conceptualized as societal minority groups and ingroups as majority groups. We argued that societal minority groups depend on support from majority groups, for example, to advance political demands. There are many justified critical voices (e.g., Malloy, 2014) that argue that support approaches portray minorities as needy and passive recipients of care, thereby cementing the dependency of minorities on majorities rather than promoting genuine equality. Instead, it is argued that majorities should focus more strongly on empowerment. By conceptualizing outgroups and ingroups as minority and major-

rity groups and focusing on outgroup support as support from majorities for minorities, we are, to some extent, following such a critically discussed support approach. We have chosen to focus on outgroup support, as numerous positive effects of outgroup support have already been discussed and examined in the literature (see theoretical framework). We encourage future research to reflect more deeply on whether outgroup support or outgroup empowerment should be prioritized. It is important to further investigate the respective impacts of support and empowerment on the outgroup, the ingroup, and broader societal developments. Only this way can we make well-founded statements about which approach minority groups benefit from most.

Finally, in this paper, we have focused on a group perspective using intergroup contact theory (ICT) to examine outgroup support. It seems fruitful to also consider other perspectives – such as the individual perspective – to provide a more comprehensive explanation of outgroup support.

Our study is not without limitations. First, outgroup support was measured as the hypothetical likelihood supporting the outgroup. Since our topic probably aroused social desirability, there may be a gap between participants' statements and actual behaviors. We encourage future research to use observational experiments to test our findings. Further, although we used an experimental design, relationships between empathy and outgroup support, as well as perspective-taking and outgroup support, do not allow for causal interpretation. In this study, we have made a binary division into social groups. This only superficially reflects the variance in social groups. We encourage future research to do more nuanced work here.

Overall, our study provides little insight into how to promote outgroup support with the help of observed intergroup contact. These results are disappointing since vicarious intergroup contact seemed to represent a commonplace low-threshold way to promote outgroup support. We need to investigate whether this “ordinariness” might inhibit positive effects or vicarious intergroup contact just requires more than a one-time observation to unfold its positive effects. Nevertheless, we find empathy and perspective-taking to be a promising starting point to foster outgroup support. From a communication perspective, it seems particularly worthwhile to investigate the extent to which communication and media can promote empathy and perspective-taking and thus promote social cohesion in our society. For example, media content could specifically address empathy and perspective-taking concerning an outgroup. If we manage to arouse empathy and perspective-taking, this pays off for most forms of support.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, Department of Journalism and Communication Research, Germany.

References

- Abernon, C. L. (2015). Positive intergroup contact, negative intergroup contact, and threat as predictors of cognitive and affective dimensions of prejudice. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 18(6), 743–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430214556699>
- Abernon, C. L., & Haag, S. C. (2007). Contact, perspective taking, and anxiety as predictors of stereotype endorsement, explicit attitudes, and implicit attitudes. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 10(2), 179–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430207074726>
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison Wesley.
- Baden, C., & Springer, N. (2014). Com(ple)menting the news on the financial crisis: The contribution of news users' commentary to the diversity of viewpoints in the public debate. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(5), 529–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114538724>
- Banas, J. A., Bessarabova, E., & Massey, z. B. (2020). Meta-analysis on mediated contact and prejudice. *Human Communication Research*, 46(2–3), 120–160. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaa004>
- Barlow, F. K., Paolini, S., Pedersen, A., Hornsey, M. J., Radke, H. R. M., Harwood, J., Rubin, M., & Sibley, C. G. (2012). The contact caveat: Negative contact predicts increased prejudice more than positive contact predicts reduced prejudice. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(12), 1629–1643. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212457953>
- Batson, C. D., Polycarpou, M. P., Harmon-Jones, E., Imhoff, H. J., Mitchener, E. C., Bednar, L. L., Klein, T. R., & Highberger, L. (1997). Empathy and attitudes: Can feeling for a member of a stigmatized group improve feelings toward the group? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(1), 105–118. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.105>
- Capozza, D., Falvo, R., Favara, I., & Trifiletti, E. (2013). The relationship between direct and indirect cross-group friendships and outgroup humanisation: Emotional and cognitive mediators. *Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 20(4), 383–397.
- Capozza, D., Falvo, R., Trifiletti, E., & Pagani, A. (2014). Cross-group friendships, extended contact, and humanity attributions to homosexuals. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 114, 276–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.698>
- Chen, G. M., & Lu, S. (2017). Online political discourse: Exploring differences in effects of civil and uncivil disagreement in news website comments. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61(1), 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2016.1273922>
- Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of incivility in newspaper website comments. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 658–679. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12104>
- Doull, M., O'Connor, A. M., Welch, V., Tugwell, P., & Wells, G. A. (2017). Peer support strategies for improving the health and well-being of individuals with chronic diseases. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2017(6). <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD005352.pub2>
- Dovidio, J. F., Eller, A., & Hewstone, M. (2011). Improving intergroup relations through direct, extended and other forms of indirect contact. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430210390555>
- Dovidio, J. F., Love, A., Schellhaas, F. M. H., & Hewstone, M. (2017). Reducing intergroup bias through intergroup contact: Twenty years of progress and future directions. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20(5), 606–620. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430217712052>

- Esses, V. M., & Dovidio, J. F. (2002). The role of emotions in determining willingness to engage in intergroup contact. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(9), 1202–1214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672022812006>
- Finlay, K. A., & Stephan, W. G. (2000). Improving intergroup relations: The effects of empathy on racial attitudes 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30(8), 1720–1737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2000.tb02464.x>
- Galinsky, A. D., & Moskowitz, G. B. (2000). Perspective-taking: Decreasing stereotype expression, stereotype accessibility, and in-group favoritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 708–724. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.4.708>
- Galinsky, A. D., & Ku, G. (2004). The effects of perspective-taking on prejudice: The moderating role of self-evaluation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(5), 594–604. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203262802>
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 173–199. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x>
- Graf, S., Paolini, S., & Rubin, M. (2014). Negative intergroup contact is more influential, but positive intergroup contact is more common: Assessing contact prominence and contact prevalence in five Central European countries. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(6), 536–547. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2052>
- Gurin, P., Nagda, B. A., & Lopez, G. E. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(1), 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-4537.2004.00097.x>
- Harwood, J. (2010). The contact space: A novel framework for intergroup contact research. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(2), 147–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X09359520>
- Harwood, J., Hewstone, M., Amichai-Hamburger, Y., & Tausch, N. (2013). Intergroup contact: An integration of social psychological and communication perspectives. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 36(1), 55–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2013.11679126>
- Hässler, T., Ullrich, J., Bernardino, M., Shnabel, N., van Laar, C., Valdenegro, D., Sebben, S., Tropp, L. R., Visintin, E. P., González, R., Dittmann, R. K., Abrams, D., Selvanathan, H. P., Branković, M., Wright, S., Zimmermann, J. von, Pasek, M., Aydin, A. L., Žeželj, I., . . . Ugarte, L. M. (2020). A large-scale test of the link between intergroup contact and support for social change. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(4), 380–386. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0815-z>
- Hayward, L. E., Tropp, L. R., Hornsey, M. J., & Barlow, F. K. (2017). Toward a comprehensive understanding of intergroup contact: Descriptions and mediators of positive and negative contact among majority and minority groups. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43(3), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216685291>
- Hewstone, M., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Myers, E., Voci, A., Al Ramiah, A., & Cairns, E. (2014). Intergroup contact and intergroup conflict. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 20(1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035582>
- Hogg, M. A. (2001). Social categorization, depersonalization, and group behavior. In M. A. Hogg & R. S. Tindale (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology. Group Processes* (pp. 56–85). Blackwell Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470998458.ch3>
- Jost, J. T., Chaikalis-Petritsis, V., Abrams, D., Sidanius, J., van der Toorn, J., & Bratt, C. (2012). Why men (and women) do and don't rebel: Effects of system justification on willingness to protest. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(2), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211422544>

- Joyce, N., & Harwood, J. (2014). Improving intergroup attitudes through televised vicarious intergroup contact. *Communication Research*, 41(5), 627–643. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212447944>
- Kim, N., Fishkin, J. S., & Luskin, R. C. (2018). Intergroup contact in deliberative contexts: Evidence from deliberative polls. *Journal of Communication*, 68(6), 1029–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy056>
- Kim, N., & Wojcieszak, M. (2018). Intergroup contact through online comments: Effects of direct and extended contact on outgroup attitudes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 81, 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.11.013>
- Lim, T., Neel, R., & Hehman, E. (2024). Intergroup contact is consistently associated with lower prejudice across group properties. *Collabra: Psychology*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.127426>
- Malloy, T. H. (2014). National minorities between protection and empowerment: Towards a theory of empowerment. *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 13(2), 11–29.
- Mastro, D. (2015). Why the media's role in issues of race and ethnicity should be in the spotlight. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12093>
- Mastro, D., Behm-Morawitz, E., & Ortiz, M. (2007). The cultivation of social perceptions of Latinos: A mental models approach. *Media Psychology*, 9(2), 347–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701286106>
- Mazziotta, A., Mummendey, A., & Wright, S. C. (2011). Vicarious intergroup contact effects. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14(2), 255–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430210390533>
- Mazziotta, A., Rohmann, A., Wright, S. C., Tezanos-Pinto, P. de, & Lutterbach, S. (2015). (How) does positive and negative extended cross-group contact predict direct cross-group contact and intergroup attitudes? *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 45(5), 653–667. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2110>
- Menke, M., Wagner, A., & Kinnebrock, S. (2020). Communicative care in online forums: how burdened informal caregivers seek mediated social support. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 1662–1682. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12479>
- Mutz, D. C., & Goldman, S. K. (2010). Mass media. In J. F. Dovidio, M. Hewstone, P. Glick, & V. M. Esses (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (pp. 1–19). SAGE Publications.
- Nagda, B. A., & Zúñiga, X. (2003). Fostering meaningful racial engagement through intergroup dialogues. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 6(1), 111–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430203006001015>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D., & Nielsen, R. K. (2016). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Digital%2520News%2520Report%25202016.pdf>
- Ortiz, M., & Harwood, J. (2007). A social cognitive theory approach to the effects of mediated intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(4), 615–631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150701626487>
- Paluck, E. L. (2010). Is it better not to talk? Group polarization, extended contact, and perspective taking in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(9), 1170–1185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210379868>
- Paolini, S., Harwood, J., Logatchova, A., Rubin, M., & Mackiewicz, M. (2021). Emotions in intergroup contact: Incidental and integral emotions' effects on interethnic bias are moderated by emotion applicability and subjective agency. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.588944>

- Park, S.-Y. (2012). Mediated intergroup contact: Concept explication, synthesis, and application. *Mass Communication and Society*, 15(1), 136–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2011.558804>
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(3), 187–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.12.002>
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751–783. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Meta-analytic tests of three mediators. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(6), 922–934. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.504>
- Riek, B. M., Mania, E. W., & Gaertner, S. L. (2006). Intergroup threat and outgroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(4), 336–353. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_4
- Schaller, S., Wiedicke, A., Reifegerste, D., & Temmann, L. J. (2023). (De)Stigmatizing depression on social media: The role of responsibility frames. *Journal of Health Communication*, 28(11), 757–767. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2023.2266702>
- Scherer, C. (2014). Media effects on racial attitudes: Evidence from a three-wave panel survey in a political campaign. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 26(4), 531–542. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edt041>
- Spears, R. (2009). Four degrees of stereotype formation: Differentiation by any means necessary. In C. McGarty, V. Y. Yzerbyt, & R. Spears (Eds.), *Stereotypes as Explanations* (pp. 127–156). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489877.008>
- Stephan, W. G., & Finlay, K. (1999). The role of empathy in improving intergroup relations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(4), 729–743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00144>
- Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., & Morrison, K. R. (2009). Intergroup threat theory. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* (pp. 43–60). Psychology Press.
- Stroud, N. J., van Duyn, E., & Peacock, C. (2016). *News commenters and news comment readers*. Engaging News Project. Retrieved from <https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ENP-News-Commenters-and-Comment-Readers1.pdf>
- Tajfel, H., Billig, M., Bundy, R., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1(2), 149–178. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420010202>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). In: W. G. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–37). Brooks/Cole.
- Tone, E. B., & Tully, E. C. (2014). Empathy as a “risky strength”: A multilevel examination of empathy and risk for internalizing disorders. *Development and Psychopathology*, 26(402), 1547–1565. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579414001199>
- Vescio, T. K., Sechrist, G. B., & Paolucci, M. P. (2003). Perspective taking and prejudice reduction: The mediational role of empathy arousal and situational attributions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 33(4), 455–472. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.163>
- Vezzali, L., Hewstone, M., Capozza, D., Giovannini, D., & Wölfer, R. (2014). Improving intergroup relations with extended and vicarious forms of indirect contact. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 314–389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2014.982948>

- Vezzali, L., Hewstone, M., Capozza, D., Trifiletti, E., & Di Bernardo, G. A. (2017). Improving intergroup relations with extended contact among young children: Mediation by intergroup empathy and moderation by direct intergroup contact. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 27(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2292>
- Weber, M., Viehmann, C., Ziegele, M., & Schemer, C. (2020). Online hate does not stay online – How implicit and explicit attitudes mediate the effect of civil negativity and hate in user comments on prosocial behavior. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 104, 106192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.106192>
- Wojcieszak, M., & Azrout, R. (2016). I saw you in the news: Mediated and direct intergroup contact improve outgroup attitudes. *Journal of Communication*, 66(6), 1032–1060. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12266>
- Wojcieszak, M., & Warner, B. R. (2020). Can interparty contact reduce affective polarization? A systematic test of different forms of intergroup contact. *Political Communication*, 37(6), 789–811. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1760406>
- Xiao, R., & Li, S. (2024). The effect of positive inter-group contact on cooperation: The moderating role of individualism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1323710>
- Ziegele, M., Weber, M., Quiring, O., & Breiner, T. (2018). The dynamics of online news discussions: Effects of news articles and reader comments on users' involvement, willingness to participate, and the civility of their contributions. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(10), 1419–1435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1324505>

Appendix

Table S1. Measures

| Measure | Dimension | Items | Scale | Source | Cronbach's α |
|------------------|--------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Emotions | | | 1 (do not agree at all) – 5 (totally agree) | Paluck, 2010; Stephan, 2002 | |
| | Perspective-taking | <p>I think I have a good understanding of how [PoC/homosexual persons] see the world.</p> <p>I think I understand what it's like to be a [PoC/homosexual person] in this society.</p> <p>I can relate to the perspective of [PoC/homosexual people] on most issues.</p> <p>I can easily put myself in the shoes of [PoC/homosexual people].</p> <p>I understand the concerns and needs of [PoC/homosexual people].</p> <p>I can sympathize with [PoC/homosexual people].</p> | | | .92 (PoC/White people) .94 (Homosexual/heterosexual people) |
| | Empathy | | 1 (not at all) – 7 (very strongly) | | |
| Outgroup support | | | | | |

| Measure | Dimension | Items | Scale | Source | Cronbach's α |
|--|-----------|--|---|---|--|
| Willingness to speak up for outgroup | | ...express in a comment that discrimination against [PoC/homosexual people] in the workplace is a problem | 1 (very unlikely) – 5 (very likely) | Own formulation based on Eilders & Porten-Chée (2015) | .89 (PoC/ White people) .89 (Homosexual/ heterosexual people) |
| | | ...make a positive comment about [PoC/homosexual people] in a comment (e.g., express understanding or support). ...by liking or disliking other comments, make clear your positive attitude towards the [PoC/homosexual person]? ...sharing the article on social media while speaking positively about [PoC/homosexual people]. | | | |
| Willingness for further contact with the out-group | | I would look around at the official profiles of [PoC/homosexual people] on social media to learn more about their situation. | 1 (do not agree at all) – 5 (totally agree) | Hässler et al., 2020; Jost et al., 2012; Mazziotta et al., 2011 | .91 (PoC/ White people) .92 (Homosexual/ heterosexual people) |
| | | I would look around at websites of associations of [PoC/homosexual people] to learn more about their interests. | | | |
| | | I would donate money to a campaign that advocates for equal rights for [PoC/homosexual people]. | | | |
| | | I would protest along with [PoC/homosexual people] to advocate for more justice. | | | |
| | | I would share posts on social media to support equal rights for [PoC/homosexual people] | | | |
| | | I would sign an online petition to support action against the unfair treatment of [PoC/homosexual people] | | | |
| | | I would attend a cultural event organized by an association/club of [PoC/homosexual people]. | | | |

| Measure | Dimension | Items | Scale | Source | Cronbach's α |
|---------|--------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| | Social change motivation | <p>I don't see the need to improve the position [PoC/homosexual people]*</p> <p>I support legislation that would guarantee [PoC/homosexual persons] equal employment opportunities with [White/straight persons].</p> <p>I wish [PoC/homosexual persons] and [White/straight persons] were more equal.</p> <p>Right now, I'm very motivated to change inequalities between [PoC/homosexual persons] and [White/straight persons].</p> <p>I think that I should participate in activities/actions for equal rights for [PoC/homosexual persons] and [White/straight persons].</p> <p>I would be happy to work with [PoC/homosexual people].</p> <p>I would love for a [PoC/homosexual person] to move into my neighborhood.</p> <p>I think I would be fine with a [PoC/homosexual person] on staff.</p> | 1 (do not agree at all) – 5 (totally agree) | Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Saguy et al., 2009; Vezzali et al., 2014 | .91 (PoC/White people) .90 (Homosexual/heterosexual people) |

| Measure | Dimension | Items | Scale | Source | Cronbach's α |
|---------|---|--|---|--------|---|
| | Approval of political demands of the outgroup | <p>The government must ensure that...</p> <p>...sufficient psychological counseling services are provided to address the concerns of [PoC/homosexual people] to ensure the mental health of [PoC/homosexual people].</p> <p>...all employers are legally obliged to counteract forms of discrimination against [PoC/homosexual people] in the workplace.</p> <p>...hate crime against [PoC/homosexual people] is fought harder at the political level.</p> <p>...the teaching of respect for different ways of life is integrated into the school program.</p> <p>...that journalists are offered training in order to report more sensitively about [PoC/homosexual people] in the media.</p> <p>...more seats in the parliament will be given to [PoC/homosexual people].</p> | 1 (do not agree at all) – 5 (totally agree) | | .92 (PoC/ White people) .90 (Homosexual/heterosexual people) |

Table S2. Mean values and standard deviations of dependent variables for positive and negative contact with outgroups

| | Outgroup homosexual people | | Outgroup people of color | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | Positive contact | Negative contact | Positive contact | Negative contact |
| Empathy | 3.22 (2.06) | 3.50 (1.90) | 3.53 (1.87) | 3.96 (1.84) |
| Perspective-taking | 3.27 (1.14) | 3.21 (1.03) | 3.02 (1.02) | 3.21 (0.97) |
| Willingness for further contact | 2.67 (1.19) | 2.60 (1.12) | 2.50 (1.12) | 2.67 (1.07) |
| Willingness to speak up | 2.49 (1.41) | 2.42 (1.18) | 2.32 (1.15) | 2.58 (1.29) |
| Support for political demands | 3.78 (1.01) | 3.60 (0.97) | 3.51 (1.06) | 3.72 (1.01) |
| Social change motivation | 3.60 (0.91) | 3.57 (0.99) | 3.50 (0.96) | 3.70 (0.96) |

Table S3. Associations between intergroup contact and emotions

| Dependent variable | Model 1 Intergroup contact (1 = positive contact/0 = negative contact) Homosexual people as outgroup | | | | | | Model 2 Intergroup contact (1 = positive contact/0 = negative contact) People of color as outgroup | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|---|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> | <i>p</i> |
| | Empathy | -.27 | .25 | -.07 | -.245 | .781 | .287 | -.43 | .24 | -.12 | .000 | .894 |
| Perspective-taking | -.05 | .14 | .02 | -.305 | .243 | .733 | -.22 | .13 | -.12 | -.066 | .467 | .094 |

Notes. Two models are shown: Homosexual people as outgroup ($n = 238$)/People of color as outgroup ($n = 239$) Significant effects were tested with bootstrap (1000 samples) and are shown in bold.

Figure S1. Stimulus material for PoC as outgroup (positive and negative intergroup contact)

tagesschau 3. Januar um 17:30

Gerechtigkeit am Arbeitsplatz: Studie untersucht die Zufriedenheit von schwarzen Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern.



TAGESSCHAU.DE

Fühlen sich schwarze Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer am Arbeitsplatz gerecht behandelt?

Gefällt mir · Kommentieren · Teilen

Relevanteste zuerst

Michelle Taylor
Ein super wichtiges thema. Ich bin selbst Schwarz und habe schon in vielen jobs schlechte erfahrungen gemacht. arbeitgeber müssen viel aktiver werden und sollten maßnahmen gegen die diskriminierung von Schwarzen entwickln!!
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 19 Std.
↳ 3 Antworten

Christine Thiele
stimmt total. Mir sind echt schon viele tolle schwarze begegnet. ich finds voll schlimm, dass man euch so diskriminiert. ihr seid wirklich stark 🙌
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 16 Std.
^ 4 Antworten verbergen

Michelle Taylor
du verstehst uns. Ein gutes beispiel wie aufbauend es ist mit Weißen über sowas zu sprechen. tolle leute ❤️❤️
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 12 Std.

13 weitere Kommentare ansehen

tagesschau 3. Januar um 17:30

Gerechtigkeit am Arbeitsplatz: Studie untersucht die Zufriedenheit von schwarzen Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern.



TAGESSCHAU.DE

Fühlen sich schwarze Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer am Arbeitsplatz gerecht behandelt?

Gefällt mir · Kommentieren · Teilen

Relevanteste zuerst

Michelle Taylor
Ein super wichtiges thema. Ich bin selbst Schwarz und habe schon in vielen jobs schlechte erfahrungen gemacht. arbeitgeber müssen viel aktiver werden und sollten maßnahmen gegen die diskriminierung von Schwarzen entwickln!!
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 19 Std.
↳ 3 Antworten

Christine Thiele
was für ein scheiß. mir sind echt schon einige bekloppte schwarze begegnet. Ich verstehe schon warum man euch diskriminiert. ist kein wunder ihr freaks 🤡
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 16 Std.
^ 4 Antworten verbergen

Michelle Taylor
du verstehst uns einfach nicht. Ein gutes beispiel wie ernüchternd es ist mit Weißen über sowas zu sprechen. ignorante arschlöcher 🤡🤡
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 12 Std.

13 weitere Kommentare ansehen

Figure S2. Stimulus material for homosexual persons as outgroup (positive and negative intergroup contact)

tagesschau 3. Januar um 17:30 ·

Gerechtigkeit am Arbeitsplatz: Studie untersucht die Zufriedenheit von homosexuellen Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern.



TAGESSCHAU.DE
Fühlen sich homosexuelle Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer am Arbeitsplatz gerecht behandelt?

Gefällt mir Kommentieren Teilen

Relevanteste zuerst ▾

Heidi K...
Ein super wichtiges thema. Ich bin selbst homosexuell und habe schon in vielen jobs schlechte erfahrungen gemacht. arbeitgeber müssen viel aktiver werden und sollten maßnahmen gegen die diskriminierung von homosexuellen entwickln!!
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 19 Std.
↳ 3 Antworten

Christin Th...
stimmt total. Mir sind echt schon viele tolle schwule und lesben begegnet. ich finds voll schlimm, dass man euch so diskriminiert. ihr seid wirklich stark 🍌
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 16 Std.
^ 4 Antworten verbergen

Heidi K...
Heidi K... du verstehst uns. Ein gutes beispiel wie aufbauend es ist mit heterosexuellen über sowas zu sprechen. tolle leute ❤️❤️
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 12 Std.

13 weitere Kommentare ansehen

tagesschau 3. Januar um 17:30 ·

Gerechtigkeit am Arbeitsplatz: Studie untersucht die Zufriedenheit von homosexuellen Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern.



TAGESSCHAU.DE
Fühlen sich homosexuelle Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer am Arbeitsplatz gerecht behandelt?

Gefällt mir Kommentieren Teilen

Relevanteste zuerst ▾

Heidi K...
Ein super wichtiges thema. Ich bin selbst homosexuell und habe schon in vielen jobs schlechte erfahrungen gemacht. arbeitgeber müssen viel aktiver werden und sollten maßnahmen gegen die diskriminierung von homosexuellen entwickln!!
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 19 Std.
↳ 3 Antworten

Christin Th...
was für ein scheiß. mir sind echt schon einige bekloppte schwule und lesben begegnet. Ich verstehe schon warum man euch diskriminiert. ist kein wunder ihr freaks 🍌
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 16 Std.
^ 4 Antworten verbergen

Heidi K...
Heidi K... du verstehst uns einfach nicht. Ein gutes beispiel wie sinnlos es ist mit heteros über sowas zu sprechen. ignorante arschlöcher 🍌🍌
Gefällt mir · Antworten · 12 Std.