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Theorizing Prejudice Reduction via Mediated Intergroup Contact

Extending the Intergroup Contact Theory to Media Contexts

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Abstract: The current paper describes an effort to develop an integrated theory – integrated mediated intergroup contact (IMIC) model – to account for the two types of mediated intergroup contact (parasocial and vicarious) that have been shown to help with prejudice reduction. To this end, our model applies concepts from intergroup contact theory, parasocial and vicarious research, and narrative transportation theory. The present research expands our theoretical understanding of how entertainment media can function as a tool for reducing prejudice toward various outgroups. The IMIC model accounts for the effects of the two types of mediated contact – parasocial and vicarious – and delineates the process of prejudice reduction.

Keywords: intergroup contact theory, mediated contact, Entertainment media

The global COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented amount of media consumption: With shut-downs occurring throughout the globe, many consumers turned to digital and other forms of media for entertainment, news, and information with both negative and positive effects (Adgate, 2021, April). For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in what has been termed an "infodemic," a global spread of false or misleading information that has contributed to fostering cultural prejudice toward certain groups (e.g., Asian Americans). References to the COVID-19 as "Kung-flu" or "the Chinese virus" within media coverage and direct attributions of blame have led to some negative responses by the public and even violence being enacted against Asian Americans (e.g., Cheung et al., 2020). However, mass media can also play an important role in reducing prejudice and stigma in our society. It can help do so by fostering positive intergroup interactions between media users and members of stigmatized outgroups. For example, programs like highly personal stand-up comedy specials from Muslim Americans (e.g., Hasan Minhaj's *Homecoming King* or Mo Amer's *The Vagabond*) that are popular on Netflix provide an opportunity for positive mediated contact that could help reduce prejudicial attitudes.

Mediated intergroup contact (hereinafter "mediated contact") occurs when people are exposed to outgroups in media (Banas et al., 2020; Park, 2012). Mediated contact wherein a viewer engages in interactions or forms one-sided relationships with an outgroup character or media figure is referred to as "parasocial contact" (Schiappa et al., 2005). In this case, the contact is between viewer and outgroup character (e.g., feeling like the outgroup character is talking to them directly by verbally addressing the viewer; see Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011) or media figure (e.g., listening to a celebrity talk about their struggle with mental illness on a late-night talk show; see Wong et al., 2017). By contrast, when people observe intergroup interactions between characters representing the ingroup and outgroup (e.g., an Asian American character interacting with a White American character) and identify with the ingroup character, *vicarious contact* has occurred (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Thus, mediated contact can be differentiated depending on whether media messages initiate intergroup contact *with* the viewer or show intergroup contact *to* the viewer (Banas et al., 2020). This distinction is often the primary means of operationalizing mediated intergroup contact.

Although both types of mediated contact have been shown to facilitate prejudice reduction, parasocial contact and vicarious contact are often investigated as separate lines of research (cf. Bond, 2020; Harwood et al., 2016). Even though vicarious and parasocial contact operate

through different processes (i.e., watching intergroup contact between characters vs. experiencing intergroup contact with a character), the overarching mechanism whereby positive contact reduces prejudice toward outgroups is the same for both types of mediated contact (Banas et al., 2020; Park, 2012). Despite a shared explanatory mechanism based on intergroup contact research (i.e., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; see Figure 1), no integrated theoretical models account for vicarious and parasocial contact together.

To address this gap in the literature, this paper seeks to integrate concepts from intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998), parasocial contact (Schiappa et al., 2005) and vicarious contact (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007), and extended elaboration likelihood model (Slater & Rouner, 2002) to describe an integrated mediated intergroup contact (IMIC) model explaining the two main pathways through which mediated contact (parasocial and vicarious) can facilitate prejudice reduction (see Figure 2). This integration extends our theoretical understanding of how entertainment media can function as a tool for reducing (or increasing) prejudice toward various outgroups. We begin with an overview of the theoretical foundations for the integrated model, which rests on more than 60 years of theoretical and empirical research into direct intergroup contact.

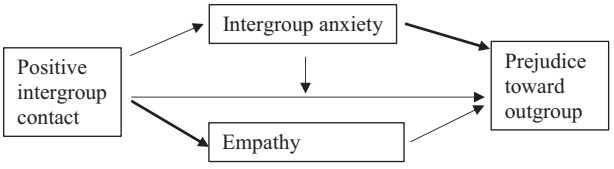

Figure 1. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) intergroup contact model of prejudice reduction. Bolded solid arrows indicate hypothesized positive relationships. Non-bolded arrows indicate hypothesized negative relationships.

Theoretical Foundations for the IMIC Model

Direct Intergroup Contact

In the aftermath of World War II, social scientists focused on research that could reduce intergroup conflict (Pettigrew, 1998). An influential framework in this area was Allport's (1954) *contact hypothesis*, which argued that friendly *face-to-face* interactions between people from different social groups (i.e., intergroup contact) could reduce intergroup prejudice. The mechanism by which contact influences cross-group evaluations (i.e., perceptions about an outgroup after contact with an outgroup person) is well established: Intergroup contact encourages people to evaluate one another on discrete characteristics instead of group-based categorizations (Brewer & Miller, 1984). When an outgroup person does not conform to outgroup categorizations during an interaction, cognitive dissonance can arise, motivating re-evaluation of the outgroup category (Rothbart & John, 1985). The degree to which the contact experience conforms with the group-based category is key in predicting the direction of contact–prejudice effects. When outgroup categories are negative or stereotypical (e.g., an ethnic majority person believes that a particular ethnic minority is incompetent), positive intergroup contact can facilitate more favorable outgroup evaluations (Zingora et al., 2020). Conversely, when contact is negative or unpleasant, the encounter can reinforce negative or stereotypical assessments that increase outgroup prejudice (Barlow et al., 2012; Zingora et al., 2020). Intergroup contact, then, can range from positive to negative in valence, with contact–prejudice effects possibly improving or worsening outgroup attitudes (Harwood, 2010).

Intergroup contact research has identified key mediators for contact–prejudice effects. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of intergroup contact studies to test common mediators from intergroup contact research, including outgroup knowledge, intergroup anxiety, and empathy. In line with Allport's (1954) theorizing, contact was predicted to reduce prejudice by increasing outgroup knowledge, which would then reduce intergroup anxiety and increase empathy and perspective-taking (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). While meta-analytic results supported the influence of all three mediators, intergroup anxiety and empathy were stronger mediators than outgroup knowledge.

Alternative Intergroup Contact Models

In addition to Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) intergroup contact model, three alternative frameworks have been proposed to explain how intergroup contact influences feelings of prejudice toward outgroup members. We provide a brief overview of these three additional models here to offer some context in terms of other theorizing that has been done to explain how intergroup contact facilitates prejudice reduction.

Brewer and Miller (1988) proposed a *decategorization model* of intergroup contact, arguing that contact should, "reduce information processing that is category-based and must promote, instead, attention to personal or individual information that is not correlated with category membership" (p. 320). The decategorization model argues that reducing category salience during contact promotes interpersonal approaches to thinking and behaving (Brown &

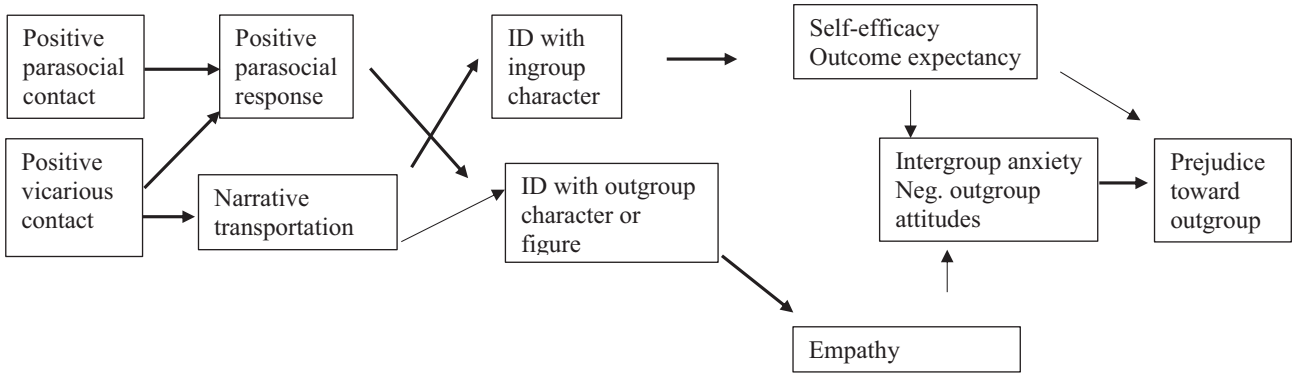

Figure 2. Proposed integrated mediated intergroup contact model of prejudice reduction. Bold solid arrows indicate hypothesized positive relationships. Non-bold arrows indicate hypothesized negative relationships. Illustrated is when audiences are exposed to positive mediated intergroup contact, but the model can also be applied in situations involving audience exposure to negative mediated intergroup contact.

Hewstone, 2005). *Category salience* – defined as the level of awareness people have of group memberships during an intergroup-contact episode (Hewstone & Brown, 1986) – is a critical construct in contact research that moderates how contact–prejudice effects generalize from interpersonal encounters to outgroup evaluations (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). The decategorization model argues that decreasing category salience facilitates interactions that are interpersonal rather than intergroup. Support for the decategorization model can be found in research showing that cross-group friendships – where outgroup persons are perceived in interpersonal versus intergroup terms – are especially effective at reducing intergroup bias (e.g., Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997).

The second alternative intergroup contact framework, known as the *common ingroup model* proposed by Gaertner and Dovidio (2000), argues that redefining ingroup categories to include outgroup members is more effective than eliminating category salience during contact. The common ingroup model argues that providing a superordinate identity (e.g., being an American) that subsumes other subordinate identities (e.g., being a Texan vs. an Oklahoman) can reduce intergroup biases by changing the contact episode from *inter-* to *intra*-group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This model aligns with the decategorization model by focusing on de-emphasizing inter-group categories. Support for the common ingroup model is found in experimental research wherein cross-group teams are assigned a superordinate identity (i.e., intra-group team) versus no superordinate identity (i.e., inter-group team), with results demonstrating less intergroup hostility among the intra- (vs. inter-)group teams (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, for an overview).

Taking a somewhat contrary stance to the decategorization and common ingroup models, Hewstone and Brown's (1986) *intergroup contact model* argues that an optimal amount of category salience is necessary to generalize contact–prejudice effects from interpersonal encounters to outgroup evaluations. Specifically, Brown and Hewstone (2005) postulate that if group categories are not salient during contact, there is no group category to evaluate in relation to the contact episode. However, if group categories are excessively salient, as can happen during intergroup conflict, then category salience can increase intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Importantly, the intergroup contact model identified typicality or representativeness – both measures of category salience – as key variables for understanding moderation of contact–prejudice effects (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005; for an overview).

Mediated Intergroup Contact

Intergroup contact theory has been applied to mediated contexts. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) conceptual intergroup contact model, derived on the basis of their meta-analysis, has been used in mediated contexts, and, similarly to the direct contact applications, was expected to both: (a) reduce intergroup anxiety and (b) foster greater levels of empathy toward the outgroup, which in turn, would be negatively associated with prejudice toward the outgroup (see Figure 1). Massey et al. (2021) tested Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) intergroup contact model examining parasocial relationships with a transgender person; their results offered support for the model's predictions applied to a mediated context. Banas et al. (2020) further tested the model in a meta-analysis, empirically validating the mediated intergroup contact model.

In addition to testing the mediated intergroup contact model, Banas and colleagues' (2020) meta-analytic results also revealed that both parasocial contact and vicarious contact can reduce prejudicial attitudes toward stigmatized outgroups, and further, they found parasocial contact and vicarious contact were equally effective at reducing prejudicial attitudes. Although the overall effects of parasocial and

vicarious contact were similar, the specific mediational pathways through which the different types of mediated contact affect prejudice were largely beyond the scope of the meta-analysis. As such, the meta-analysis could not address potential differences in the processes by which parasocial and vicarious contact facilitate intergroup harmony. For example, identification with the outgroup character versus the ingroup character may be an important distinction between parasocial contact and vicarious contact, but a lack of reported data made such a comparison impossible in the meta-analysis (Banas et al., 2020). Meta-analyses are limited by the available data, making theory pieces like this a more appropriate venue for explicating the processes by which different types of mediated contact affect prejudice. Although parasocial and vicarious contact have been shown to affect prejudice in similar ways, the approaches to studying mediated contact differ greatly across different research traditions. Although, as meta-analytic findings demonstrate (Banas et al., 2020), many similarities exist across these traditions, there have not been theoretically derived attempts to unify disparate lines of mediated contact research. The lack of an integrated model accounting for overlapping research lines is even more surprising considering that there are established models of direct intergroup contact research (i.e., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) applicable to mediated contact scenarios (e.g., the mediated intergroup contact model; Banas et al., 2020; Massey et al., 2021).

Integrated Mediated Intergroup Contact Model

Parasocial and Vicarious Contact

The IMIC model focuses on two types of mediated contact: parasocial and vicarious. These two types of mediated contact are distinct in key ways. Theoretically, *parasocial contact* combines intergroup contact with parasocial concepts to explain how viewer response to outgroup performers affects perceptions of prejudice toward performer groups. An example of this is how viewers' feelings toward gay characters on a television show (e.g., *Six Feet Under*) influence straight viewers' attitudes toward gay men (Schiappa et al., 2005).

On the other hand, *vicarious contact* combines intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002) to explain how identifying with ingroup performers during mediated contact provides viewers with a model of cooperative intergroup behaviors (e.g., Harwood & Joyce, 2012; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Vezzali et al., 2014). An example of this is White viewers identifying with a White television performer, then observing them interact with non-White television performers, offering a model for intergroup behavior. Both types of mediated contact have been shown to help with prejudice reduction (Banas et al., 2020). However, these two types of mediated contact are often studied separately, contributing to disparate bodies of research literature. We argue that these types of contact are guided by the same underlying intergroup contact mechanisms (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) and could be considered together within an integrated model. This approach is supported by recent research on mediated intergroup contact (Banas et al., 2020).

Mediated Intergroup Contact and Prejudice Reduction

Banas et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the influence of mediated intergroup contact on reducing prejudice toward stigmatized outgroup members from diverse groups and communities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (e.g., Li, 2019; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006), undocumented immigrants (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Visintin et al., 2017), people with mental illnesses (e.g., Hoffner & Cohen, 2015; Wong et al., 2017), African Americans (e.g., Ramasubramanian, 2011), Muslims (e.g., Murrar & Brauer, 2018; Saleem & Anderson, 2013; Saleem et al., 2016), and people from non-Western countries and cultures (e.g., Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Detenber et al., 2013). The meta-analysis results provided empirical support for the influence of empathy and intergroup anxiety as mediators to help explain the relationship between mediated intergroup contact and prejudice. Although empathy and intergroup anxiety are shared mediators of both parasocial and vicarious contact effects as they relate to prejudice, there are likely additional intervening variables that more fully explain the relationship between types of mediated contact and empathy/intergroup anxiety.

Parasocial Contact

Historically, Schiappa et al. (2005) proposed the parasocial contact hypothesis by integrating Allport's hypothesis with the concept of parasocial interaction (i.e., PSI; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Horton and Wohl originally described PSI as media users' experience of rapport with media performers. Notably, Horton and Wohl used the terms "parasocial interaction" and "parasocial relationship" (PSR) interchangeably; however, subsequent theoretical and conceptual distinctions are important for delineating parasocial contact research (see Dibble et al., 2016).

PSIs can be conceptualized as perceived (and often illusionary) mutual awareness between media users and characters or media figures within the mind of the media user (Dibble et al., 2016). This perception is facilitated through

interpersonal communication cues, such as when a character breaks the fourth wall to address an audience (e.g., viewers feel like the character is talking to them directly through body orientation facing the viewer or verbally addressing the viewer; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Notably, PSIs are conceptually restricted to a single viewing exposure.

Comparatively, PSRs are conceptualized to extend beyond a single exposure and develop into one-sided relationships wherein media users form strong emotional bonds with performers they have often never met in person (Cohen, 2009; Dibble et al., 2016). Once developed, PSRs are similar to social relationships (Cohen, 2009), where the audience member situates the media figure as part of their friend group (i.e., as part of their common ingroup). PSRs affect people in a manner similar to that of interpersonal relationships. Overall, based on the common ingroup model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), positive PSRs between viewers and outgroup members should result in reduced prejudice toward the outgroup via de-emphasis of intergroup differences. However, in the IMIC model the relationships between parasocial contact and prejudice are mediated through multiple mediators.

Mediators of Parasocial Contact–Prejudice Effects

Parasocial Response

Combining Horton and Wohl's (1956) theorizing on PSIs with Allport's (1954) hypothesis, Schiappa et al. (2005) predicted that contact with likable characters should improve viewer attitudes toward the characters groups. Beyond simply initiating mediated contact, Schiappa et al. (2005) argued that viewers' parasocial response to outgroup characters was the mechanism explaining how exposure (i.e., mediated contact) decreased prejudice. Citing lack of conceptual and operational clarity related to PSI, Schiappa et al. (2005) operationalized PSI as a form of mediated contact and used the term "parasocial response" to describe affective and cognitive reactions to the mediated contact episode. Although not explicitly stated, Schiappa and colleagues' (2005) conceptualization of parasocial response maps directly onto the concept of parasocial processing, described by Schramm and Hartmann (2008) as a viewer's cognitive (e.g., intensive thoughts, seeking to understand the character's behavior), affective (e.g., empathy, emotional contagion), and behavioral (e.g., speaking to the character) responses to the characters depicted in a mediated context. Therefore, parasocial responses can be thought of as a viewer's level of cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement with characters in a mediated contact episode. Schiappa et al. (2005) further hypothesized that exposure to positive portrayals of outgroups would decrease viewer prejudice and that prejudice scores would be negatively associated with positive parasocial response. Overall, there is substantial empirical support for the relationship between mediated contact and subsequent positive parasocial response between viewers and outgroup members – both fictional characters (Banas et al., 2020; Bond, 2020; Massey et al., 2021; Murrar & Brauer, 2018; Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006; Shim et al., 2012) or real-life figures (Wong et al., 2017) – and reduction in prejudice toward the represented outgroup. Given the empirical support for these relationships, parasocial response is the first mediator in the relationship between parasocial contact and prejudice.

Identification With Outgroup Character

Positive parasocial response should increase identification with outgroup character. According to Cohen (2001), identifying with a media character means understanding the events in the story from the character's perspective. Indeed, "identification is based on a series of momentary connections with a fictional character or performer. Thus, any insights, memories, feelings, or knowledge that we experience through our identification with media characters is integrated into our lives" (Cohen, 2006, p. 230). The more strongly viewers identify with an outgroup character, the more likely they will develop empathy toward the character.

Empathy and Outgroup Anxiety

In the mediated contact meta-analysis, empathy and outgroup anxiety were treated as parallel mediators, and although the meta-analysis did not test separate explanatory mediating processes for parasocial and vicarious contact, it did provide empirical support for the mediation (Banas et al., 2020). The meta-analytic findings indicated that positive mediated intergroup contact is positively related to empathy, which was negatively related to prejudice; positive mediated intergroup contact also decreased intergroup anxiety, which was positively related to prejudicial attitudes. Extending these findings, in the IMIC model, identifying with the outgroup character is predicted to increase empathy and reduce intergroup anxiety, and empathy is also negatively related to anxiety. Although parasocial and vicarious contact share many of the same mediators, some parts of the process are unique to vicarious contact. We outline the process for vicarious contact in the next section.

Vicarious Contact

By pairing mediated contact with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), Ortiz and Harwood (2007) proposed a prejudice-reducing mechanism that occurs by observing positive interactions between ingroup and outgroup members. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2002) posits

that human beings learn by observing others. Originally, Bandura's (1986) proposal explained only in-person observations leading to learning; however, it was later amended to include observations through the media as well (Bandura, 2002). By observing others in novel situations, people can learn how to think, feel, and act in future encounters (Bandura, 2002). The theory has been frequently applied to the domain of mass media-mediated persuasion (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Branscum et al., 2013; Mazziotta et al., 2011) and, more specifically, as a theoretical framework for explaining the effects of entertainment education (e.g., Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Singhal & Rogers, 2002).

Ortiz and Harwood (2007) connected social cognitive theory to mediated contact by relying on the four human capabilities that make vicarious learning possible. These four capabilities are *symbolization capability, self-regulation, self-reflection,* and *vicarious capability* (Bandura, 2009). These four capabilities describe how people learn from others by focusing on how other people are rewarded or punished for their behavioral choices. In addition, people often retain this information to apply to future situations so that they may be rewarded or to help avoid punishment as well (Bandura, 2009).

These four capabilities are necessary for observational learning to occur and are inherent in human nature. However, additional steps must be taken for observational learning to occur. People must *pay attention* to the behavior or interaction being portrayed, and they must *retain* the information in their memory so that they can adopt it as their own in future interactions before they *reproduce* the behavior itself (Krcmar, 2020). Most importantly, people must possess the *motivation* to perform the behavior (Krcmar, 2020). Taken together, simply observing intergroup interactions in the media does not always lead to prejudice reduction via vicarious contact: Audience members must attend to these interactions and be motivated to reproduce them. Further, based on the Hewstone and Brown's (1986) intergroup contact model, viewers must recognize that interactions are intergroup, meaning the outgroup status of specific characters must be salient, and those characters typical representatives of their groups, a condition that entertainment media is well-suited to structure (see Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

Mediators of Vicarious Contact–Prejudice Effects

Parasocial Response and Narrative Transportation

The extended elaboration likelihood model describes two types of involvement that viewers may experience with an entertainment narrative: involvement with characters through parasocial response and involvement with the storyline or narrative transportation and their influence on message processing outcomes (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Both types of involvement are said to help foster more deliberate processing of messages while at the same time reducing the motivations of viewers to counterargue and resist the messages presented to them (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

Positive parasocial response to characters in a narrative helps reduce viewers' motivation to counterargue and resist messages (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) due to the development of parasocial relationships between viewers and outgroup characters or media figures. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) found empirical support for this claim in their initial test of the entertainment overcoming resistance model. Specifically, they found that viewers experiencing positive PSIs with story characters through vicarious contact (exposed to mediated intergroup interaction between in-group and out-group characters) engaged in less counterarguing with the message and reported less reactance, a negative motivational state associated with message rejection (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

Moyer-Gusé and Nabi's (2010) findings related to PSI align with extant research showing that parasocial response to outgroup characters in entertainment media was associated with decreased prejudice toward the characters' groups. This finding has been supported in cross-sectional (Bond & Compton, 2015; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Schiappa et al., 2006; Sink & Mastro, 2018), longitudinal (Bond, 2020), and experimental studies (Harwood et al., 2016; Massey et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2017) with mediated contact decreasing prejudice toward a wide range of outgroups (e.g., gay men, Schiappa et al., 2005, Studies 1 and 2; Muslims, Abrams et al., 2018).

As for narrative transportation, the extended elaboration likelihood model asserts that absorption into a narrative allows viewers to become more identified with the characters, fostering more positive attitudes and responses toward the characters (Slater & Rouner, 2002). In two separate studies, Johnson (2013) also found vicarious outgroup contact with Muslims through narrative fiction bolstered empathy and reduced prejudice toward Arab Muslims via transportation into the fictional story. Similarly, Igartua and Cachón-Ramón (2021) found as narrative transportation increased with immigrant testimonials, counterarguing was reduced, resulting in more positive attitudes toward the outgroup.

On the basis of the rationale from the extended elaboration likelihood model (Slater & Rouner, 2002) and the entertainment overcoming resistance model (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010), we propose parasocial response and narrative transportation – a unique mediator of vicarious contact effects – as parallel mediators between vicarious contact and identification with outgroup character.

Identification With Outgroup Character

Ortiz and Harwood (2007) used identification to help explain why audience members attend to certain media content. Empirical research indicates that the more strongly viewers identify with an outgroup character in a narrative, the more likely they will accept and develop positive attitudes toward this character (Slater & Rouner, 2002). For example, Iguarta and Barrios (2012) examined people's reactions to watching a controversial film about Opus Dei (an institution of the Catholic Church) in which the organization was depicted negatively. They found that individuals' attitudes toward the group were largely influenced by their level of identification with the film's protagonist (an outgroup character, depicted as an adversary of Opus Dei). The stronger viewers identified with the protagonist (in this case, cast as the outgroup), the more negative were their attitudes toward Opus Dei (i.e., the more willing they were to accept the stance of the outgroup character).

Identification With Ingroup Character

According to Slater and Rouner (2002), identifying with a media character because of shared group membership (i.e., the media character is perceived to be in my ingroup) leads viewers to experience a net positive response to the narrative. Observing an intergroup interaction in which an audience member identifies with their ingroup member can lead to stronger effects on various outcome variables (e.g., outgroup attitudes and intergroup anxiety; Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). When narrative transportation occurs, individuals experienced greater identification with characters (Slater & Rouner, 2002). When viewers strongly identify with an ingroup character who has positive interactions with outgroup characters, they tend to have more favorable attitudes toward the represented outgroup, as a result (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2018; Murrar & Brauer, 2018; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Taken together, there is empirical evidence to connect positive parasocial response to increased identification with outgroup character and narrative transportation to identification with both ingroup and outgroup members.

Self-Efficacy, Intergroup Anxiety, and Empathy

In the IMIC model, identification with the ingroup is connected to self-efficacy defined as, "the self-perception that an individual has the ability to enact a behavior" (Krcmar, 2020, p. 103). Self-efficacy is another unique mediator of vicarious contact effects. Increased self-efficacy is a notable outcome of observational learning, which has been repeatedly demonstrated to be an important mechanism in attitude and behavioral change, as people are unlikely to attempt a behavior if they do not believe in their capability to execute it (Bandura, 1997; Lo et al., 2013). During vicarious contact, when audience members observe ingroup members being rewarded for their behavior, the viewers' self-efficacy to perform the behavior also increases because they can imagine the behavior resulting in a similar outcome for themselves (i.e., positive outcome expectancies), and audience members' willingness for future contact with outgroup members increases as a result (Mazziotta et al., 2011). Support for this connection comes from Moyer-Guse and colleagues' (2018) test of the entertainment overcoming resistance model. Their study examined the effect of vicarious contact with Muslims (via watching interactions between an in-group character and a Muslim character) on non-Muslim viewers' level of intergroup anxiety and self-efficacy regarding interactions with Muslims. Moyer-Guse et al. (2018) found that for non-Muslim viewers, the stronger they identified with in-group characters following vicarious contact, the lower the reported intergroup anxiety toward Muslims, and the greater the self-efficacy in interacting with Muslims. The IMIC model predicts that increases in identification generates efficacy, and efficacy (along with empathy) is the mechanism through which intergroup anxiety is reduced.

In vicarious contact research, the effect of vicarious contact on intergroup anxiety is empirically demonstrated. For example, Ortiz and Harwood (2007) examined the relationships between vicarious contact and such variables as intergroup anxiety and social distance (i.e., the willingness to engage with outgroup members) toward gay men, using *Will & Grace* and *Real World: Austin* as the stimuli. They argued that vicarious contact would occur for straight-identifying audience members when observing interactions between a straight media character (the ingroup member, *Grace*) and a gay media character (the outgroup member, *Will*). Consistent with these ideas, identification with *Grace* decreased intergroup anxiety and social distance toward gay men (i.e., resulted in greater willingness to engage with the outgroup; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

In summary, based on research discussed above, the IMIC model (Figure 2) predicts positive vicarious contact reduces prejudice toward outgroups through fostering positive parasocial responses to the characters, as well as increasing people's transportation into the narrative, which in turn, increase the level of identification with both ingroup and outgroup characters. Identification with characters (both ingroup and outgroup) is hypothesized to increase viewers' feelings of self-efficacy to interact with outgroup members and create positive outcome expectations regarding intergroup interactions. Identification with characters and self-efficacy both can help reduce feelings of intergroup anxiety and facilitate prejudice reduction.

Most mediated contact research examines vicarious or parasocial contact as separate processes (cf. Bond, 2020; Harwood et al., 2016). However, vicarious and parasocial

contact are both forms of mediated contact (Banas et al., 2020; Park, 2012). Thus, we present our IMIC model (Figure 2), predicting that positive vicarious contact positively predicts parasocial response work to decrease outgroup prejudice through distinct pathways.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the IMIC Model

We proposed an integrated model of mediated intergroup contact to address current gaps in our understanding of how intergroup contact facilitates prejudice reduction effects within an entertainment context. Borrowing concepts from parasocial research, narrative transportation theory, and other media effects theories (e.g., social cognitive theory, extended elaboration likelihood model) and integrating them into intergroup contact theory, we describe two pathways through which mediated contact may help facilitate prejudice reduction toward stigmatized outgroups. Figure 2 provides a visual depiction of the two pathways through which entertainment media is predicted to reduce prejudice. Specifically, viewers may have mediated contact (parasocial or vicarious) with an ingroup or outgroup character or media figure, and such contact may lead to prejudice reduction through a series of mediated effects (see Figure 2).

The IMIC model has a number of theoretical implications for the study of mediated intergroup contact. One implication is the unification of parasocial and vicarious contact research programs. Although parasocial and vicarious contact share a historical foundation in that they both build off the work of Allport (1954), their respective research programs have largely been conducted in isolation, resulting in a lack of theoretical integration (Banas et al., 2020). The IMIC model demonstrates the similarities of how parasocial and vicarious contact affect prejudice, and it also illustrates differences in their respective processes. The IMIC model demonstrates how, "all vicarious contact is parasocial, but not all parasocial contact is vicarious" (Banas et al., 2020, p. 145). Specifically, the IMIC model puts both types of contact into the same model and connects vicarious contact to parasocial responses.

The treatment of parasocial responses is another theoretical implication of the IMIC model. Parasocial contact research has been plagued by disagreements on how to conceptually and methodologically address parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships (see Dibble et al., 2016). Similar to Schiappa and colleagues' (2005) seminal research on the parasocial contact hypothesis, the IMIC model sidesteps the conceptual murkiness inherent in the PSI versus PSR debate and recenters the focus on parasocial response, which is about the parasocial connection between an outgroup media character and a viewer. The IMIC model connects parasocial response to the variable of identification, further integrating parasocial contact research with broader media effects works.

The integration of positive and negative media effects is a further theoretical contribution of the IMIC model. Although Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis was focused on positive contact reducing prejudice, media scholars have long studied how media portrayals can reinforce negative stereotypes (Gerbner, 1972; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). Indeed, empirical evidence indicates that negative portrayals and limited positive portrayals of minority groups in the media foster prejudicial perceptions of minority groups, propagating negative stereotypes (Mastro, 2009). Although mediated-contact effects can be positive or negative depending on the depiction of the outgroup, the "light" and "dark" sides are rarely studied together or even under the same theoretical umbrella (Harwood, 2010; Schäfer et al., 2021). Our model is designed to account for positive and negative contact experiences by providing hypothesized relationships between explanatory and intervening variables and outgroup prejudice. For instance, this model predicts that positive (or negative) parasocial contact results in positive (or negative) parasocial response, leading to greater (or lesser) identification with the character, lesser (or greater) intergroup anxiety, and more (or less) outgroup prejudice. These predicted relationships could be used to investigate positive or negative mediated contact experiences, allowing for a broader examination of mediated intergroup contact effects on prejudice toward outgroups.

Another theoretical implication of the IMIC model is the treatment of temporal effects of parasocial contact. One of the most interesting results of the mediated contact meta-analysis was that the duration of mediated contact was unrelated to prejudicial attitudes (Banas et al., 2020). Aside from demonstrating that the *quantity* of mediated contact should not be conflated with the *quality* of mediated contact, the meta-analytic findings also provide empirical support to expand the boundary conditions for the parasocial contact hypothesis. Many scholars describe parasocial contact to only be a long-term phenomenon (e.g., Abrams et al., 2018; Atwell Seate, 2017; Ramasubramanian, 2011; Schiappa et al., 2005), which is a constraint that is not shared by vicarious contact. This is a curious limitation since the concept of parasocial contact is rooted in interpersonal attraction, which is not inhibited by time in the same manner (e.g., the idea of "love at first sight" is common among people with the popular love style Eros; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1988). The IMIC model asserts that both parasocial contact and vicarious contact effects can emerge in the short and long term, removing the time constraint from parasocial theorizing.

The IMIC model proposed in this manuscript also has practical implications for the study of mediated intergroup

contact. One practical implication is the treatment of contact duration on future tests of the parasocial contact effects, as brief parasocial contact may be sufficient to elicit prejudice reduction toward outgroups without the development of a long-term parasocial "relationship" between the viewer and outgroup character/figure over an extended period. Research has demonstrated that mediated contact can influence cross-group evaluations immediately after exposure (Schiappa et al., 2005) or multiple exposures (Schiappa et al., 2006). However, the meta-analysis of mediated contact studies showed that the length of exposure did not produce significantly different effect sizes (Banas et al., 2020). These findings highlight one area where the empirical record has outpaced theorizing on mediated contact processes. For instance, scholars have argued that mediated contact should be repeated so viewers can form nonsuperficial relationships with characters (Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006). If, as the empirical record suggests, mediated contact does not have to be repeated to influence attitudes, then greater attention should be paid to identifying minimal conditions for media exposure to decrease viewer prejudice. Our model is equally suited for short-term experimental tests or longitudinal studies and could easily be applied to test several intriguing research questions about the length of exposure, including: What is the *minimal* exposure necessary to influence attitude change? Do mediated contact effects fluctuate over time? Do the types of mediated contact (parasocial and vicarious) produce different effects longitudinally?

Another practical implication of the IMIC model is identifying a possible research agenda concerning linkages in the model. Some of the proposed linkages within the model have already been empirically supported, while other mediational relationships need further empirical investigation. For instance, the mediated intergroup contact meta-analysis (Banas et al., 2020) empirically documented that parasocial and vicarious contact reduce prejudice through the mediators of empathy and intergroup anxiety, but further linkages were beyond the scope of the model. Specifically, the role of narrative transportation mediating vicarious contact and identification needs more empirical investigation. Additionally, although a central variable in vicarious contact research, identification requires more research attention regarding its relationship with parasocial contact (see, e.g., Murrar & Brauer, 2018). Similarly, the linkage between identification and self-efficacy and outcome expectancy has more conceptual than empirical support and requires additional research focus.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, there are limitations to our proposed model that also highlight future research directions. One limitation of the IMIC model is that it largely relies on research from scholars and participants from "WEIRD" countries. It is possible that the Western-centric nature of the research informing the model has created a biased perspective on mediated intergroup contact theorizing that may not extend to non-WEIRD populations. Future research should continue to investigate mediated intergroup contact with more diverse scholars and audiences. Another limitation of the IMIC model is that the mediational linkages, to a large degree, assume conscious recognition of the process. It is possible that mediated intergroup contact effects also function, at least to some degree, beyond our conscious awareness, which is beyond the scope of the proposed model. Future research should examine the degree to which participants are aware of the processes that contribute to their intergroup attitudes resulting from mediated contact. Finally, although the IMIC model is intended to capture both positive and negative mediated intergroup contact effects, the explication of the model clearly favors positive parasocial and vicarious contact, as evident by how the model is presented, and a potential consequence of this framing is an underappreciation of the differences between positive and negative mediated intergroup contact effects. For example, negative parasocial contact may involve category salience, which is currently absent from the model.

Conclusion

In closing, this paper proposes an integration of the intergroup contact model (i.e., the intergroup contact model proposed Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) into the entertainment media context accounting for the parasocial and vicarious types of contact, and incorporating variables from parasocial research, narrative transportation theory, social cognitive theory, and extended elaboration likelihood model. Empirical support for mediated contact–prejudice reduction effects have been found, as summarized within a recent meta-analysis (Banas et al., 2020). Incorporating concepts from intergroup and parasocial research, we provide a more explicated model outlining the specific pathways through which the two types of mediated contact, vicarious and parasocial, can help reduce prejudice toward a given outgroup.

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Erratum

Correction to Wong et al. (2022)

The article entitled "Theorizing prejudice reduction via mediated intergroup contact: Extending the intergroup contact theory to media contexts" by N. C. H. Wong et al. (*Journal of Media Psychology*, *34*, 89–100, https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000338) contains an error on the first (p. 89) and on the last page (p. 100) where a co-authors' name has been misspelled.

The correct name of the 3rd author should appear as follows:

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The publisher regrets any inconvenience or confusion this error may have caused.

Reference

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