The Roles of Mediated and Direct Intergroup Contact in Shaping Attitudes Toward Immigrants

A Thesis in Psychology

by

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INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY

Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between direct contact and mediated contact with attitudes toward immigrants. Intergroup Contact Theory posits that meaningful interaction with members of an outgroup influences overall attitudes toward that outgroup and toward people perceived as belonging to that outgroup. Moreover, intergroup contact can influence attitude toward outgroups through consumption of media as well, known as mediated contact. This study tested whether positive direct contact and mediated contact with immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/of Other Spanish Origin improved attitudes toward immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border. Furthermore, the study also tested whether the influence of contact on attitudes were driven by changes in emotions and perceived threat. The participants were 249 American adults recruited through Amazon mTurk, an online survey platform. Results indicated that direct contact, but not mediated contact, had an impact on attitudes toward immigrants – and that this impact was due to the effects of contact on positive emotions and perceived threat. This study contributes to the limited literature that compares the effects of direct and mediated contact and that compares the factors influencing the effects of each kind of contact. Future studies should investigate why direct but not mediated contact had an effect.
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The Roles of Mediated and Direct Intergroup Contact in Shaping Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Immigration has long been a matter of political and cultural contention within the United States. An early example was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, in which Chinese workers were prohibited from migrating to the United States (Ngai, 2003). More recently, immigration has become central to major political debates and has been covered extensively in the news. The media, for example, has paid substantial attention to Presidential Executive Order 13769 (commonly referred to as the Muslim Travel Ban; Lowery & Dawsey, 2018), the immigration policy known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA; Dickerson, 2018), the zero tolerance policy that led to the separation of minors from their families at the southern border (Davis, 2018), caravans from Central America of more than 5,000 people who hope to receive asylum in the United States (The Associated Press, 2018), and the longest government shutdown in American history over the issue of funding for a wall at the southern border (Stolberg, 2019). These stories have often portrayed immigrants in a negative light. For instance, in October 2018, Central American migrants in the caravans were labeled as criminals, invaders, and carriers of diseases (Basu & Connor, 2018; BBC, 2018). In some cases, such negative coverage and attention has been followed by an increase in hate crimes and discrimination against immigrants (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016).

In such a divisive political environment, studying prejudice and strategies to reduce it can provide valuable insight into improving intergroup relations. The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudicial
attitudes – in particular, the connection between people’s contact with minority groups in person or via media and the attitudes they have toward those minority groups. Empirical studies have shown that contact with outgroups through face-to-face interactions (direct intergroup contact) and through consumption of media (mediated intergroup contact) are influential in the process of developing or dismantling prejudicial attitudes (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, few studies have simultaneously assessed the effects of both direct and mediated contact, and even fewer have focused on mediated contact in the context of social media specifically. Moreover, there is no research on the roles of contact in shaping attitudes toward immigrants following the 2016 U.S. presidential election—an election that transformed people’s perceptions of prejudice against outgroups (Crandall, Miller, & White II, 2018; Mitchell, Gottfried, Stocking, Matsa, & Grieco, 2017). The goal of the current research was to measure both direct and mediated contact via social media, and to gauge how such contact impacts prejudice toward immigrants entering the United States at the southern border.

Prejudice

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward members of an outgroup due to their group membership – often without any rational or sufficient justification (Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). Prejudice can develop automatically and can inform our thoughts and behaviors toward a group in ways that work outside of conscious awareness (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Prejudice develops through a number of processes.

Social Learning
Prejudice can develop through social learning. From a developmental standpoint, role models and cultural norms play a strong role in teaching prejudice (Over & McCall, 2018). Family members and peers encourage and reinforce certain attitudes and behaviors, as well as discourage and punish attitudes and behaviors with which they do not agree (e.g., punishing girls for being loud and boys for crying; Killen, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). Moreover, children pick up on cues by observing the behavior of their parents, teachers, and friends. These cues communicate to children how the adults in their lives think and feel about different groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007). These processes can lead to children developing negative attitudes toward certain groups.

**Cognitive Processes**

Prejudices also arise from basic cognitive processes. Humans constantly organize information in their surroundings into separate categories, which affect how we perceive the world (Dovidio et al., 2010). This process extends to people as well — we categorize people, for example, as either part of our group (ingroup) or as not part of our group (outgroup). These outgroups can emerge based on a variety of factors ranging from demographic features (e.g., race, gender, nationality, socioeconomic class) to superficial characteristics such as liking the same band or being part of the same group working on a class assignment. Stereotypes are a kind of schema that emerge from categorization of information about outgroup members (Dovidio et al., 2010). Stereotypes influence our judgement of other people by leading us to consider outgroups as homogeneous and, therefore, treating perceived attributes of an outgroup member as typical of the entire group (Dovidio et al., 2010). Moreover, there is a tendency to focus only on information
that reaffirms one’s preconceived notions of intrinsic differences between groups and ignore information that counteracts them (Dovidio et al., 2010).

**Motivated Processes**

Prejudice can also emerge as a response to threat. Perceived threat, whether to material resources, well-being, or to values and norms, can motivate people to develop prejudice (Norton & Summers, 2011; Zárate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). Threat increases favoritism for ingroups and negative reactions toward outgroups (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). Such a sense of threat may be especially pronounced against immigrants, who can appear as a threat to one’s culture and as competition for employment opportunities (BBC, 2018; Seate & Mastro, 2016).

In summary, the development of prejudice is complex. However, insights about the development of prejudice also suggest strategies to reduce prejudice: learning non-prejudicial information, encountering information that opposes prejudiced schemas, and generating positive affect toward outgroups can all combat prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Seate & Mastro, 2016). One overarching framework, intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999), has been invaluable in explaining how face-to-face contact between groups successfully integrates and employs these strategies to decrease prejudice toward members of outgroups.

**Intergroup Contact Theory**

Intergroup contact theory posits that meaningful contact with members of an outgroup reduces prejudice toward that outgroup (Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). Contact can powerfully shape intergroup attitudes because contact with specific
outgroup members can influence perceptions of their entire group (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). Contact here refers to repeated and meaningful interactions. For an interaction to be meaningful, it cannot be a one-way conversation or something as superficial as a passing greeting. Meaningful contact involves two cooperating individuals engaged in an active conversation (Allport, 1954). This definition of Allport’s establishes what is currently understood as positive direct contact. Allport (1954) developed his approach based on evidence that desegregation in military and schools led reduction in prejudice, which he attributed to increased positive direct contact in these settings.

**Positive Direct Contact**

Many studies have supported the influence of positive face-to-face interactions in reducing prejudice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For instance, participants who reported more positive attitudes toward Asian-Americans were likely to have higher amounts of positive contact with the group (Korol & Fietzer, 2018). Positive contact has been found to successfully predict less negative attitudes in children toward Arab Muslims (Brown, Ali, Stone, & Jewell, 2017) and toward Catholics and Protestants (Stringer et al., 2009). Goldenberg and colleagues (2016) found that even groups engaged in an intractable conflict can benefit from intergroup contact, as displayed by increased positive intergroup attitudes between Palestinian and Jewish participants following face-to-face contact. More recently, studies have found that direct intergroup contact is successful in reducing prejudice toward immigrant groups (Jones & Rutland, 2018; Murray & Marx, 2012; Voci & Hewstone, 2003, Wilson-Daily, Kemmelmeier, & Prats, 2018). For example, prior intergroup
contact with African immigrants predicted more positive feelings toward them among Italian undergraduate students and hospital workers (Voci & Hewstone, 2003). British people with more positive contact with immigrants reported lower levels of anti-immigration sentiment (Meleady, Seger, & Vermue, 2017). Intergroup contact was also found to have influenced levels of prejudice against resident foreigners in Germany (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2010).

A number of factors shape the effects of positive direct contact on intergroup attitudes. For direct contact to be meaningful and thereby effective at reducing prejudice, Allport (1954) defined several conditions. Interaction partners (a) must have equal status within the interaction, (b) should cooperate on a mutual task, (c) should share a common goal, and (d) must be exposed to norms or structures that support egalitarianism. Interdependence among interaction partners helps remove any perception of competition and stimulates cooperation (Pettigrew, 1998; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). Moreover, cooperation makes group identities less salient when the focus shifts to contributions toward the task-at-hand. Norms and structural support makes intergroup contact more likely in the first place, but also encourages the dissolution of group boundaries (Allport, 1954). These conditions have been verified through extensive research (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

More recent research has shown that meaningful direct contact reduces prejudice because it undercuts many of the psychological processes that give rise to prejudice in the first place. According to a meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008), knowledge, empathy, and anxiety are three elements through which positive contact reduces
prejudice. Learning more about one’s interaction partner and engaging in self-disclosure allows participants to notice their similarities with members of the outgroup, and reduces the impact of prior social learning and categorization that led to prejudice in the first place. Furthermore, effective positive contact involves being able to take the perspective of the interaction partner and understand their experiences. Finally, effective positive contact decreases anxiety levels among the participants regarding future intergroup contact, thus decreasing perceptions of threat. Seate and Mastro (2016) also found that perceiving the interaction partner to be typical of the outgroup and the development of positive affect toward the interaction partner are also important factors that enable contact to reduce prejudice (Seate & Mastro, 2016). Although the aforementioned conditions are not always necessary for contact to reduce prejudice, the effectiveness of the contact is increased when all the above conditions are met (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

**Negative Direct Contact**

Although intergroup contact theorists have long studied the effects of positive direct contact on the reduction of prejudice, it is important to note that intergroup contact can also increase prejudice when contact between groups is negative. Negative face-to-face interactions with an outgroup member causes one to rely more on stereotypes to refer to that outgroup (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). For instance, white college students from an Australian university were more likely to allude to an interaction partner’s ethnic identity in a description of her if a previous interaction had been negative, i.e., the interaction partner acted more distant and tense and less friendly toward the participant (Paolini et al., 2010). Furthermore, negative contact causes heightened
anxieties and negative emotions toward the outgroup, which underlies the increase in prejudice (Voci & Hewstone, 2003). This effect has also been specifically studied with regard to immigrants. For instance, negative contact with immigrants was related to more negative feelings toward them among European participants (Graf et al., 2014). Italian participants with negative contact with immigrants were less likely to have positive feelings toward them and support immigrant-friendly social policies (Vezzali et al., 2016). Moreover, people in Germany and the USA who reported more negative contact with immigrants were less welcoming of refugees and asylum-seekers (Kotzur, Tropp, & Wagner, 2018).

Negative contact is not only just as impactful as positive contact but recent research has shown that negative contact can have an even stronger impact on intergroup attitudes (Graf et al., 2014). Although positive contact has to meet certain conditions in order to reduce prejudice (as described above), evidence has shown that negative contact has no such requirements or pre-conditions that positive contact require in order to influence intergroup attitudes. Rather, negative interactions increase prejudice simply by making group memberships salient during an aversive interaction with a member of an outgroup (Paolini et al., 2010).

In summary, face-to-face interactions are potent in their ability to influence one’s perception of an entire outgroup, whether positively or negatively.

**Mediated Intergroup Contact**

Intergroup contact can occur in a variety of forms, and occurs even in the absence of direct, face-to-face interactions. Even knowing other people who have intergroup
relationships and encounters (extended contact) or imagining an intergroup interaction (imagined contact) can improve a person’s intergroup attitudes (Mutz & Goldman, 2017; Harwood, Hewstone, Amichirai-Hamburger, & Tausch, 2013). Exposure to outgroups via media consumption – known as mediated intergroup contact – can function as a potent form of indirect intergroup contact (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). When it comes to mediated contact, meeting all the aforementioned conditions of positive direct contact is not necessary to influence intergroup attitudes (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). For instance, it is unlikely for intergroup cooperation or equal status to be established in mediated intergroup interactions, yet empirical evidence nonetheless supports the efficacy of mediated contact. Media can function as contact because it acts as a source of both stereotype-supportive and counter-stereotypical information, whether accurate or not (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Moreover, it can also create a perception of how society views an outgroup and how a person should respond to members of this outgroup (Bissell & Parrott, 2013). Thus, mass media plays an important function in development of prejudice and, conversely, in the deconstruction of it.

**Positive Mediated Contact**

Media consumption can function to reduce prejudice against outgroups. For instance, watching popular entertainment such as episodes of a television show featuring gay characters (e.g., Queer Eye and Will & Grace or a stand-up special of comedian Eddie Izzard in which he identified as ‘transvestite’) resulted in reduced prejudice in the participants toward people who identify as gay or who cross-dress (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Schiappa at al., 2005). News consumption is also an influential form of mediated
contact. For instance, exposure to media featuring Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign reduced racial prejudice against Black and African Americans (Goldman, 2012). Likewise, positive news coverage of immigrants led to decreased anti-immigration attitudes in Germany (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009).

Mediated contact research has especially focused on the effects of parasocial contact, that is, the influence of witnessing intergroup contact on media such as television shows and comedy specials (Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). Such mediated contact can be especially effective because characters presented in visual media are processed similarly to face-to-face interactions by the viewers (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Schiappa et al., 2005). For instance, participants viewing a video of a positive intergroup contact between an undocumented immigrant teenager and a border patrolman had improved intergroup attitudes toward undocumented immigrants (Joyce & Harwood, 2014).

Just as researchers have studied the mechanisms that shape the effects of direct positive contact on intergroup attitudes, they have also studied the reasons that mediated contact shapes prejudice. Prior literature suggests that positive mediated contact can be especially effective in reducing prejudice because it may avoid feelings of anxiety that might occur due to the face-to-face nature of direct intergroup contact (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Positive mediated contact can also reduce anxiety stemming from prior intergroup contact, reduce negative emotions, increase positive emotions, and provide avenues to empathize toward outgroups. Taken together, these mechanisms decrease prejudice toward outgroups.
Negative Mediated Contact

Although researchers have found a number of positive effects when it comes to positive mediated contact, most research about mediated contact has focused on negative interactions. Negative media can also operate as contact and, thus, increase prejudice. Stereotypical portrayals in entertainment media are one such example of negative mediated contact. For instance, inaccurate and negative representation of people diagnosed with mental disorders in media reinforces stigmas around mental illnesses and treatment (Klin & Lemish, 2008). Historically, government-driven propaganda was aimed to influence the public into developing negative attitudes toward certain outgroups in order to generate support for war policies (Brewer, 2009).

Negative mediated contact can worsen intergroup relations for a number of reasons. Mediated contact through news consumption can invoke feelings of intergroup anxiety and threat that have a detrimental effect on intergroup attitudes (Schemer, 2012). Perceived threat can be especially pronounced against immigrants (BBC, 2018). Intergroup threats include those that are physical, economic (e.g., job competition and access to limited resources such as social benefits), and symbolic (threats to cultural values and norms). In an experimental study, a scripted news story depicting immigration as a source of threat increased anti-immigration attitudes (Seate & Mastro, 2016). Participants with previous exposure to similar news stories reported higher intergroup anxiety toward immigrants. Furthermore, negative mediated contact in the news is especially powerful for people when they are not knowledgeable about the outgroup (Schemer, 2012). This occurs because people more knowledgeable on the topic would
critically examine the media representations and are, consequently, less likely to be influenced by them.

**A Brief Comparison of Direct and Mediated Contact**

Taken together, research suggests that both direct and mediated contact powerfully shape people’s prejudice toward outgroups – for good and for ill. Direct contact is face-to-face interactions under certain conditions (equal status, cooperation, common goals, and supporting norms and structures) that influences our outgroup attitudes. Mediated contact is consumption of mass media depicting outgroup members, which influences perception of the entire outgroup. Mediated contact can occur through a variety of mediums such as print media, television, and social media. It has been found to be effective even when it does not meet the conditions that make direct contact successful. Moreover, direct contact and mediated contact are influential for different reasons. The most obvious and significant of such differences is the fact that direct contact requires a face-to-face interaction that is meaningful. By meaningful, it means that the interaction should be a conversation between two actively engaged participants. In case of mediated contact, on the contrary, the outgroup member will always be a passive entity. Moreover, interacting with an outgroup member in real life can cause anxiety around that interaction and in future interactions. Mediated contact can avoid the feelings of intergroup anxiety due to outgroup member not being physically present. Although, it is important to consider that negative mediated contact might increase intergroup anxiety in regard to future direct contact.

Despite these distinctions, the effects of both direct and mediated contact are
focused on the same elements. The changes in attitudes caused by both kinds of contact have similar underlying psychological processes concentrated on our emotions (empathy and threat) toward the outgroup, and how we categorize mentally information regarding the outgroup (knowledge). However, limited research has focused on both direct and mediated contact simultaneously and even less so when comparing the effects of both kinds of contact (see Bohman, 2015; Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016).

**Current Research**

A primary goal of the current research is to investigate how the quantity and valence of direct and mediated contact with immigrants shapes people’s attitudes toward immigrants at the Southern border. In the current socio-political atmosphere, immigration is a widely covered and controversial topic in the media. In the first 100 days of Trump’s presidency, 14% of the news coverage focused on the topic of immigration (making it the second-most covered topic behind coverage on the political competence of the president; Mitchell et al., 2017). With 45% of the immigration news stories reporting on statements from or actions by President Trump or the White House, the administration displayed an immense influence in presenting immigration as a critical issue. This influence goes beyond just affecting the content of news coverage—the 2016 U.S. presidential elections saw a change in people’s perceptions of social norms around prejudice as well (Crandall et al., 2018). Specifically, as prejudice against certain groups, including immigrants, increased, individuals judged their own level of prejudice to be lower against this new social norm. Therefore, a goal of the current study was to explore how intergroup contact theory can inform the ongoing societal debate about immigration.
Another interesting trend to emerge in recent years is the increasing use of digital formats for news consumption. In 2018, around 34% of Americans preferred accessing their news online (Mitchell, 2018). Moreover, at least 68% of Americans got their news on social media and around 20% often relied on this mode (Matsa & Shearer, 2018). Social media is distinct from other media forms in that it combines the accessibility of mass media formats and the ability to serve as a platform for one-on-one interactions (Neubaum & Kramer, 2017), and that the news stories may not be subject to fact-checking. A social networking site can be a medium for mass dissemination of emotional states through user content sharing (Hyvarinen & Beck, 2018; Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). Thus, empathy and anxiety can be generated on social media without direct interaction with another user. The interactive features of social media platforms can also magnify the influence of social mediated contact. Prior literature has established the influence of user comments on attitudes regarding certain issues on social media (Neubaum & Kramer, 2017; Winter, 2018). For instance, valence of participant attitudes toward a news topic was positively correlated with the valence of attitudes expressed in user comments on a social networking site like Facebook (Winter, 2018). Of particular importance to the current research, evidence suggests that contact via social media can effectively improve intergroup attitudes. For instance, increased frequency of online contact with outgroup members on Facebook was correlated to lower perceived social distance (Lissitsa, 2017). Moreover, reading online comments by people perceived as gay or as a friend of someone who is gay increased positive attitudes toward gay people (Kim & Wojcieszak, 2018). Therefore, one goal of the current research was to explore how
news consumption - specifically via social media - can serve as a form of mediated contact that influences intergroup attitudes toward immigrants.

The current study also compared the influence of social media mediated contact with direct contact. It focused on how the valence and amount of contact influence the impact of the contact. Although some studies have focused on the effects of mediated contact with direct contact mediating the relationship (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016; Bohman, 2015), this study is the first of its kind in comparing the effects of self-reported mediated contact through social media to the effects of self-reported direct contact on intergroup attitudes. Furthermore, no studies have attempted to compare the effects of prior and self-reported levels of both direct and social mediated contact by taking into account the \textit{valence} and the \textit{quantity} of previous contact. The current research explored the impact of contact on attitudes toward undocumented immigrants by taking all of these variables into account.

\textbf{Hypotheses}

The current study tests a number of hypotheses about the relations between (a) direct contact with Hispanic/Latino/Other Spanish Origin immigrants and (b) mediated contact with Hispanic/Latino/Other Spanish Origin immigrants via news consumption on social media sites with (c) attitudes toward immigrants crossing the United States’ southern border.

\textbf{The effects of direct and mediated contact on attitudes toward immigrants.} I predict that the valence of contact – whether direct or mediated—will impact attitudes toward

Hispanic/Latino/Other Spanish Origin immigrants will impact attitudes toward
immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border. Specifically, the amount of contact should not have a main effect on attitudes toward immigrants. Valence of contact, however, should have a main effect, such that negative contact should predict negative attitudes and positive contact should predict positive attitudes toward immigrants. I also hypothesize that the amount and valence of contact will interactively shape immigration attitudes. Specifically, the effects of valence on immigration attitudes will be amplified for those who have high amounts (rather than low amounts) of contact. Because negative contact can have a stronger impact than positive contact (Graf et al., 2014), the effect of contact is predicted to be stronger for those who report negative interactions with Hispanic immigrants than positive interactions.

An additional research question is which form of contact has a stronger effect on immigration attitudes: direct or mediated contact? On the one hand, there is reason to believe that direct contact might be stronger because face-to-face interactions have previously shown larger effects than media influence on intergroup attitudes (Neubaum & Kramer, 2017). On the other hand, it can be argued that mediated interactions might have a bigger effect, especially in the case of the valence by amount interaction because people are likely to experience more intergroup interaction through media (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). With immigration being covered widely in the news, mediated contact might be more influential than face-to-face interaction due to the high exposure to news coverage, a huge portion of which tends to be negative (Farris & Mohamed, 2018), on Hispanic/Latino/Other Spanish Origin immigrants. Thus, it is possible that either type of
contact could have a stronger effect and these differences might emerge based on the amount and valence of contact.

**The effects of direct and mediated contact on emotions and perceived threat.**
As noted, contact is likely to influence intergroup attitudes via its relation with emotions and threat (Seate & Mastro, 2016; Schemer, 2012; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Accordingly, I predict that contact (both direct and mediated contact) will influence emotions and perceived threat. In particular, the valence of contact - and not the amount of contact - should have a main effect on emotions and perceived threat. Negative contact should predict stronger negative emotions, weaker positive emotions, and greater perceived threat. Conversely, positive contact should predict weaker negative emotions, stronger positive emotions, and weaker perceived threat. Finally, the amount and valence of contact will interactively shape emotions and perceived threat, such that higher amounts of contact heighten the effects of valence on emotions and perceived threat and vice versa. As previously discussed, contact type influences how anxiety is experienced in intergroup interactions. Particularly, people are more likely to experience intergroup anxiety in a face-to-face interaction than mediated interaction. Therefore, it is conjectured that there might be differences in how emotions and perceived threat are influenced depending on prior direct and mediated contact. For instance, mediated contact might have a bigger impact on negative emotions than direct contact, and this influence might be stronger when the amount of mediated contact is high.

**The mediational role of emotions and perceived threat on attitudes toward immigrants.** Finally, I predict that the effects of contact on attitudes toward immigrants
should be statistically mediated by emotions and perceived threat. In particular, the influence of positive contact on positive attitudes would be due to the increased positive emotions, decreased negative emotions, and decreased feelings of threat toward immigrants entering the United States through its southern border. Conversely, decreased positive emotions, increased negative emotions, and increased feelings of threat should predict the impact of negative contact on negative attitudes.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited through Amazon’s MTurk platform. The survey was limited to participants who were residing in the United States at the time of survey completion, and initially included 249 adults. They received compensation of $1.00 for the completion of the survey. Of the 249 participants, 40 identified as Hispanic/Spanish/of Other Spanish Origin and were not included in the subsequent analysis because the study focused on attitudes toward outgroup and not ingroup members. Of the remaining 209 participants, 168 identified as White/Caucasian, 16 as African American/Black, 14 as Asian, 7 as Biracial/Mixed, 1 as Native American, 1 as Middle Eastern, and 2 participants did not report their race/ethnicity. Participants’ ages ranged from 20 to 79 years ($M = 37.14$, $SD = 12.22$). There were 122 participants who identified as male and 87 who identified as female. When it came to self-reported political orientation, 32.5% of participants identified as Conservative, 50.2% as Liberals, and 17.2% as neither Liberal nor Conservative.
Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire. Participants self-reported their previous direct contact with immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/of Other Spanish Origin (for brevity, I refer to these immigrants as Hispanic immigrants for the remainder of the manuscript). Participants then reported their levels of mediated intergroup contact with Hispanic immigrants by reporting their exposure to news stories on social networking sites. For both direct and mediated contact, participants reported the amount and valence of contact (i.e., whether the exposure was positive or negative). Next, participants reported their emotions and levels of perceived threat (the two mediator variables in the study) regarding immigrants who enter the country by crossing the US-Mexican border. The participants also reported their attitudes toward immigrants who enter the country through the US-Mexican border regardless of their documentation status. Finally, they reported demographic information.¹ For all the measures, please refer to Appendix A. At the end of the survey, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

**Direct Contact with Hispanic Immigrants.** Participants answered the question “To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you interact with immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin?” They responded on a five-point scale ranging from Never to Everyday. Those who choose Never \( (n = 10) \) skipped directly to the next

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¹ In addition to these measures, participants also reported their contact with immigrants in general (rather than Hispanic immigrants specifically), their general use of social media, the social media sites on which they have come across stories about immigrants, their level of interaction with social media sites for news stories on Hispanic immigrants, their attitudes about immigration policy, and their attitude strength regarding immigration attitudes. These measures, however, were not the focus of the current research.
section of the questionnaire. All other respondents answered the question “How negative or positive were your interactions with immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin?” on a feeling thermometer ranging from -100 to 100, with -100 representing Extremely Negative, 100 representing Extremely Positive, and 0 representing neutral. The participants were informed beforehand that the question refers to both documented and undocumented immigrants.²

**Mediated Contact with Hispanic Immigrants via Social Media.** Participants answered two filter questions before answering questions about mediated contact with Hispanic immigrants. Specifically, participants reported on the following questions, “How frequently do you use Social Networking Sites (like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, etc.) in general?” and “How frequently do you come across news stories focused on immigrants in general on Social Networking Sites?” Participants responded to both items on five point scales ranging from Never to Everyday. Those who responded Never to either question skipped directly to the next section of the questionnaire.

Remaining participants (n = 201) answered the question, “To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you come across news stories on Social Networking Sites focused on immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin?” Again, they reported on a 5-point scale, from Never to Everyday. Participants (n = 199) then responded to the prompt “How positive or negative is the depiction of immigrants who are

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² Although, the questions were focused on just Hispanic immigrants, it might be that the respondents considered all Hispanic people when answering the question. Even if natural born citizens were perceived as immigrant contact, it would still be considered contact because the participants consider their contact with these citizens as reflective of Hispanic immigrants.
Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin in the news stories you come across on Social Networking Sites?” using a -100 to 100 feeling thermometer.

**Emotions.** Participants reported a variety of emotional reactions (warmth, sympathy, respect, admiration, hostility, contempt, disgust; derived from Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe & Ropp, 1997) toward Hispanic immigrants by responding to seven items, “How [much X] do you feel about immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border?” Participants responded using feeling thermometers that ranged from 0 (none of the target emotion) to 100 (extreme amounts of the target emotion). A principal axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation indicated that these items loaded onto two factors based on the valence of the emotions. The positive emotion items (warmth, sympathy, respect, and admiration) loaded on one factor (eigenvalue = 4.580), and the negative emotion items (hostility, contempt, and disgust) loaded onto another factor (eigenvalue = 1.487). The responses for each scale were then averaged to generate positive emotion, cronbach's α = .95, and negative emotion, cronbach's α = .91, scales.

**Perceived Threat.** Participants reported their levels of perceived intergroup threat arising from immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border by indicating their agreement with the following statements adapted from Stephan and Ybarra (1999): “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border are undermining American values and culture,” “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border are getting more from the country than they are contributing to it,” “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border threaten the American ways,” “The immigrants entering the country through the US-
Mexican border have made the country unsafe,” “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border are threatening or negatively affecting my job,” and “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border have increased the tax burden on Americans.” Participants indicated their agreement on 0 to 100 feeling thermometers, where 0 was Not at All in agreement and 100 was Extreme Agreement. A principal axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation indicated that all items loaded on a single factor, eigenvalue = 5.02. Therefore, responses were averaged to create a single threat score, cronbach’s α = .96.

Attitudes toward Immigrants. Participants reported their attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants by responding to the question, “How negative or positive is your opinion of immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin, regardless of the status of their documentation?” on a feeling thermometer ranging -100 to 100, with -100 representing Extremely Negative, 100 representing Extremely Positive, and 0 representing neutral. They responded to the same question but for the opinion of immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border, which is the main dependent variable.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the key variables are reported in Table 1, including the maximum and minimum values on the participant scales. On average, participants reported a moderate amount of direct contact and reported moderately positive face-to-face interactions with Hispanic immigrants. On average, participants also reported
moderate amounts of mediated contact with Hispanic immigrants and reported that their mediated contact with Hispanic immigrants was slightly negative. Interestingly, participants simultaneously expressed moderate amounts of positive emotions (i.e., warmth, sympathy, respect, and admiration) and slightly less moderate amounts of negative emotions (i.e., hostility, contempt, and disgust) in regard to Hispanic immigrants. Participants also reported a mild to moderate level of threat in regard to immigration. Lastly, immigration attitudes were slightly positive but varied considerably.

The correlation between all these key variables have been reported in Table 2.

**Did Direct Contact and Mediated Contact predict attitudes toward Immigrants?**

In order to test the relationships of direct and mediated contact with immigration attitudes, mean-centered variables related to direct contact (amount, valence, and the amount by valence interaction) and mediated contact (amount, valence, and the amount by valence interaction) were entered into a regression analysis to predict attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants crossing the Southern border. As indicated in Table 3, only the valence of direct contact had a significant effect on attitudes toward immigrants entering through the US-Mexican border. Amount of direct contact had a marginally significant effect on attitudes.

The valence and amount interaction of direct contact also had a marginally significant effect in predicting attitudes toward immigrants. Specifically, for participants who reported low amounts of direct contact, valence of contact predicted attitudes toward immigrants, $\beta = .654$, $t = 4.979$, $p < .001$. For participants who reported high amounts of direct contact, valence of contact even more strongly predicted attitudes toward
immigrants, $\beta = .980$, $t = 7.351$, $p < .001$. Therefore, as reported amount of positive direct contact increased, so did the positivity of attitudes. Conversely, increases in participants’ reports of negative contact were matched by an increase in negativity of their attitudes. Interestingly, no mediated contact variables predicted attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants crossing the border.

Additional analyses tested whether the effects of direct contact and mediated contact on attitudes were significantly different. A Significance of the Difference between Two Slopes test (Cohen & Cohen, 2003; Soper, 2019) indicated that these effects were significantly different, $t (376) = 5.71$, $p < .00001$. In sum, direct contact, not mediated contact, predicted immigration attitudes.

**Did Direct contact and Mediated Contact predict Perceived Threat and Emotions?**

To study the relationship between contact and the mediators, three sets of regression analyses were conducted to predict (a) positive emotions, (b) negative emotions, and (c) perceived threat. For each, mean centered variables related to direct contact (amount, valence, and the amount by valence interaction) and mediated contact (amount, valence, and the amount by valence interaction) were entered to predict the outcome variable. See Table 4 for all results.

**Positive emotions.** Again, only valence of direct contact had a significant effect on positive emotions. Furthermore, the interaction of valence and amount of direct contact had a marginally significant effect. Specifically, for participants who reported low amounts of direct contact, valence of contact predicted positive emotions, $\beta = .291$, $t = 4.547$, $p < .001$. For participants who reported high amounts of direct contact, valence
of contact even more strongly predicted positive emotions, $\beta = .461$, $t = 7.093$, $p < .001$. Therefore, as reported amount of positive contact increased, so did the report amount of positive emotions attributed to Hispanic immigrants. On the other hand, an increase in reported amount of negative contact was related to decreases in reported positive emotions. Similar to results outlined in Table 3, no mediated contact variables predicted positive emotions.

Additional analyses tested whether the effects of direct contact and mediated contact on positive emotions were significantly different. A Significance of the Difference between Two Slopes test (Cohen & Cohen, 2003; Soper, 2019) indicated that these effects were significantly different, $t (378) = 5.72$, $p < .00001$. In sum, direct contact, not mediated contact, predicted positive emotions.

**Negative emotions.** When it came to predicting negative emotions, the valence of direct contact had significant effects. The interaction of valence and amount of direct contact also had a marginally significant impact. For participants who reported low amounts of direct contact, the valence of contact predicted negative emotions, $\beta = - .140$, $t = -2.007$, $p = .046$. For participants who reported high amounts of direct contact, the valence of contact even more strongly predicted negative emotions, $\beta = - .343$, $t = -4.828$, $p < .001$. This suggests that an increase in reported amounts of negative contact was matched by increases in reported negative emotions. Moreover, a higher amount of reported positive contact was related to lower reported negative emotions. Neither the amount or valence of mediated contact had a main effect on negative emotions. Their interaction, however, did have a significant effect. For those who reported low amounts
of mediated contact, valence of contact did not predict negative emotions, $\beta = -.032$, $t = -.456$, $p = .649$; however, for those who reported high amounts of mediated contact, valence of contact did significantly predict negative emotions, $\beta = .136$, $t = 2.762$, $p = .006$. Therefore, contact through news consumption on social media sites can predict negative emotions only when the reported amount of contact is high.

Additional analyses tested whether the effects of direct contact and mediated contact on negative emotions were significantly different. A Significance of the Difference between Two Slopes test (Cohen & Cohen, 2003; Soper, 2019) indicated that these effects were significantly different, $t (378) = 4.56$, $p < .00001$.

**Perceived threat.** A third regression analysis focused on perceived threat. The valence of direct contact and the interaction of valence and amount of direct contact each had significant effects. For participants who reported low amounts of direct contact, valence of contact predicted perceived threat, $\beta = -.172$, $t = -2.473$, $p = .014$. For participants who reported high amounts of direct contact, valence of contact even more strongly predicted perceived threat, $\beta = -.431$, $t = -6.093$, $p < .001$. Therefore, higher reported amounts of negative contact matched higher reported perceived threat from immigrants. On the other hand, as participants’ reports of positive contact increased, their reported amounts of perceived threat decreased. Again, no mediated contact variables predicted perceived threat.

Additional analyses tested whether the effects of direct contact and mediated contact on perceived threat were significantly different. A Significance of the Difference
between Two Slopes test (Cohen & Cohen, 2003; Soper, 2019) indicated that these effects were significantly different, \( t(378) = 5.21, p < .00001 \).

**Did Perceived Threat and Emotions predict attitudes toward Immigrants?**

Next, a regression analysis was run to test whether perceived threat and emotions predicted attitudes toward immigrants. When all three variables were included in the same regression, positive emotions and perceived threat - but not negative emotions - had significant effects on attitudes toward immigrants seeking to cross the Southern border (see Table 5).

A positive correlation between negative emotions and perceived threat, \( r(209) = 0.818, p < .00001 \), suggested that the effect of negative emotions may have been masked by perceived threat, so an additional regression was run including only the emotions as predictors. Analyses indicated that in this case, negative emotions were found to have a significant effect on immigration attitudes (\( \beta = -.265, t = -2.829, p = .005 \)).

**Were the effects of direct contact on attitudes mediated by positive emotions and perceived threat?**

To test the mediating role of positive emotions and perceived threat in predicting attitudes toward immigrants, a series of moderated mediation analyses were conducted with 3000 bootstrap samples (Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007; Model 2). Negative emotions were not included in the analyses due to the correlation between negative emotions and perceived threat. In the moderated mediation analyses, the same variables mentioned in the prior regression analyses were entered. Valence of direct contact was entered as the focal independent variable, amount of direct contact with Hispanic
immigrants as a moderator, and perceived threat / positive emotions as the mediator. Please refer to Table 6 for detailed results of the analyses. As predicted, perceived threat played a mediating role in the conditional relation between valence of contact and attitude toward Hispanic immigrants, but only when the amount of contact was high. Specifically, the effect of valence of direct contact on attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants was mediated by perceived threat when participants reported high amounts of prior direct contact. Moreover, positive emotions also mediated the conditional relation between valence of contact and attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants. The results for the mediating role of positive emotions were similar when the amount of contact was high and when the amount of contact was low. Therefore, the effect of valence of direct contact on attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants was mediated by positive emotions regardless of the amount of prior contact.

Discussion

Taken together, the current research supported the hypotheses when it came to the effects of direct contact with Hispanic immigrants on attitudes toward people entering the country through the US-Mexican border. Specifically, valence of direct contact predicted attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants; that is, greater positive direct contact predicted more positive attitudes (and negative direct contact predicted more negative attitudes). Moreover, the amount of direct contact amplified the influence of valence on attitudes. For those who had high amounts of direct contact, positive contact was especially predictive of positive attitudes toward immigrants. In contrast, the current research did not support the hypotheses when it came to the effects of mediated contact with Hispanic
immigrants. There was no relationship between mediated contact with Hispanic immigrants and attitudes toward people entering the country through the US-Mexican border. In sum, direct contact - and not mediated contact - had an impact on attitudes toward immigrants.

Another hypothesis was that both direct and mediated contact would have an effect on emotions and perceived threat toward immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border. Specifically, increased contact should predict less negative emotions, more positive emotions, and less perceived threat. For direct contact, analyses supported each of these predictions. Moreover, the amount of direct contact amplified the influence of valence on emotions and perceived threat; for those who had a high amount of direct contact, more positive contact strongly predicted stronger positive emotions, weaker negative emotions, and less perceived threat. Again, analyses indicated less robust effects for mediated contact. Mediated contact predicted neither positive emotions nor perceived threat. A high amount of mediated contact did predict negative emotions; that is, for those with high amounts of negative mediated contact predicted stronger negative emotions. Taken together, the hypotheses were most strongly and consistently supported for direct contact. However, in case of mediated contact, the hypotheses were mostly unsupported.

Finally, I hypothesized that the effects of contact on attitudes would be statistically mediated by emotions and perceived threat; contact with Hispanic immigrants would influence attitudes toward immigrants entering the country due to changes in levels of positive emotions, negative emotions, and perceived threat caused by
contact. Because mediated contact did not predict attitudes toward immigrants, no further analyses were necessary for mediated contact. When it came to high amounts of direct contact, analyses indicated that positive emotions and perceived threat both drove the relations between contact and attitudes toward immigrants. Specifically, high amounts of positive direct contact led to an increase in positive emotions and lower levels of perceived threat, which, in turn, shaped attitudes toward immigrants. In the case of lower amounts of direct contact, only positive emotions meaningfully drove the relations between contact and attitudes. Thus, both the mediational effects were stronger when the amount of contact was high than when amount of contact was low. In summary, these findings suggest that direct contact has a strong impact on positive emotions and perceived threat, and each can shape how an outgroup is perceived.

**Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for our understanding of intergroup contact theory and prejudice. Primarily, it affirms the role of face-to-face interactions in changing people’s outgroup attitudes. The study also highlights the role of affective mechanisms (positive emotions and perceived threat) in driving that change. Prior research has already established the role of intergroup contact in influencing attitude toward immigrants in different countries (see Graf et al., 2014; Kotzur et al., 2018; Meleady et al., 2017; Pettigrew et al., 2010; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). This study underlines that relationship between intergroup contact and attitudes toward immigrants in the current American context of immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border.
One goal of this study was to test whether direct or mediated contact would be more effective when it comes to reducing prejudice. Few studies have simultaneously considered the role of both direct and mediated contact on attitudes (see Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016) and, therefore, this research was designed to compare the effects of the two. Direct contact was more related to prejudice than mediated contact. This was a recurring theme – direct contact but not mediated contact was related to people’s emotions, perceptions of threat, and attitudes toward immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border. This finding, i.e, the lack of effect of mediated contact was unexpected. It is contrary to prior literature regarding the influence of mediated contact on prejudice in general (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Lissitsa, 2017) and on attitudes toward immigrants in particular (Seate & Mastro, 2016).

This divergence from previous findings raises interesting questions about the generalizability of effects of interpersonal contact via social media on prejudice. There was limited prior research on social media as the source of non-direct contact and none on news consumption via social media specifically. At least in this study, news consumption via social media turned out not to impact attitudes toward immigrants. One reason why consumption of news on social media, although a major source of news for many Americans, was not related to prejudice could be because that news is not considered reliable. In 2018, 57% of respondents believed that the majority of news stories they came across on social media were inaccurate (Matsa & Shearer, 2018). This mistrust in the accuracy of news content might present roadblocks when it comes to beliefs that the content is representative of the group being presented. Intergroup contact
is only effective at reducing prejudice when one perceives contact with an outgroup member to be typical of that outgroup (Seate & Mastro, 2016). If people come across news stories regarding immigrants but do not consider the stories accurate, they may not believe that the stories represent an accurate portrayal of immigrants. This perception might hinder the relationship between mediated contact and people’s attitudes.

Although this study did not find that news consumption via social media is effective as a form of mediated contact on immigrant attitudes, the prior literature has found both social media and news consumptions as effective forms of mediated contact (see Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Neubaum & Kramer, 2017; Seate & Mastro, 2016; Winter, 2018). Given the disjuncture, it could be that news consumption via social media is actually an effective form of mediated contact but the measures of the study could not accurately capture that effect. Moreover, it could also be argued that although mediated contact has been found to be successful even in the absence of the preconditions necessary for positive direct contact, that mediated contact may have its own set of preconditions that prior literature has not taken into account. Arguably, some these preconditions might be levels of trust, knowledge, and attitude strength. As previously discussed, lacking trust in the content presented by the media might hinder its influence on participant attitudes. Moreover, if someone feels strongly about the issue of immigration, they might be less likely to be persuaded with information that might conflict with their beliefs (Harwood et al., 2013). Thus, attitude strength might play a role in moderating the effects of mediated contact, despite the amount of coverage that immigration has received in recent years. Likewise, people with high levels of knowledge
on the issue of immigration have been found to be less influenced by news stories on immigration (Schemer, 2012). Therefore, it is possible for these variables (trust, knowledge, and attitude strength) to serve as some preconditions of mediated contact. For instance, a participant with high levels of trust in the news content they come across on social media and are less knowledgeable and feel less strongly about immigration might have their attitudes toward immigrants more likely to be influenced by mediated contact through news consumption on social media.

These findings also raise especially intriguing questions considering how social norms of prejudice were changed with the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Crandall et al., 2018). Crandall and colleagues (2018) noted that people perceived prejudice to have risen in general after the 2016 election and, consequently, judged their own levels of prejudice as lower in comparison. Immigration and immigrants were a large focus of news stories during and right after 2016 presidential elections (Corasaniti, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2017). Thus it would be interesting to assess how news stories might have played a role in the effect observed by Crandall and colleagues (2018) and if social media figures into this. Moreover, due to a lack of literature studying intergroup contact following the 2016 elections, it also remains to be seen whether the influence of contact on prejudice was affected due to change in the norms and perception of prejudice. For this purpose, this study could serve as a comparison to the research on intergroup contact (both direct and mediated) and attitudes towards immigrants prior to the 2016 presidential elections in order to study the impact of these shifting norms of prejudice.
Taken together, this research serves as a novel contribution to the literature on intergroup contact theory because there is little literature comparing the effects of direct and mediated contact, on contact through news consumption on social media, and on contact and prejudice in America after the 2016 presidential election.

**Practical Applications**

The findings of this study also have a number of practical implications. A take-home message of this study is the importance of direct contact over mediated contact in influencing intergroup attitudes. This pattern suggests that news consumption via social media might not be effective in modifying our attitudes, especially when compared to the stronger influence of prior direct contact.

Moreover, with direct contact being more effective at reducing prejudice than mediated contact in this study, another application could be with programs to reduce prejudice toward immigrants. This research would suggest that researchers should focusing more on expanding community-based, real-life campaigns than online programs if the goal is to influence intergroup attitudes. The campaigns can focus more on door-to-door canvassing and hosting community events (like picnics and cultural festivals) that might lead to more opportunities for direct contact. Moreover, school programs and events involving intergroup interactions between adults and students could also be beneficial. For instance, a Hispanic and Latin American month can focus on informing students more on Hispanic and Latin American history and culture and have people in the community who identify as Hispanic and/or Latino have conversations with students. Students can be introduced to Hispanic and Latin American literature and visual media in
order to supplement this direct contact experience. They can also have class projects focused on hosting a cultural event celebrating a Latin festival. Such programs incorporate important factors of intergroup contact (such as co-operation, common goals, and knowledge) and could be beneficial in improving intergroup attitudes.

Another practical implication might focus on the role of contact in influencing policy attitudes. British people with more positive direct intergroup contact with immigrants were less likely to support the United Kingdom withdrawing from the EU when surveyed prior to the Brexit referendum (Meleday et al., 2017). Moreover, negative direct contact with immigrants predicted lower support for social policies aimed at aiding immigrants in Italy (Vezzali et al., 2016). Thus, the influence of positive contact on positive attitudes can potentially lead to more positive policy attitudes toward immigrants. In the current context where the issue of migrant caravans is controversial and widely discussed, it is important to consider the problems associated with segregating immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border (Jordan & Romero, 2019; BBC, 2018; Davis, 2018). More positive effects on prejudice reduction are expected when these immigrants are allowed to be part of the debate, whether through interviews in news stories or by being resettled in neighborhoods rather than being held in detention. These effects have already been indirectly studied in the context of the United States. For instance, a survey found that Republicans living closer to the US-Mexican border were less likely to support a border wall (Jones, 2017). Living close to the border allowed people more opportunities for contact with Hispanic immigrants and for developing more positive attitudes toward them.
Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study yielded interesting insights and raised important questions, it is marked by some limitations. One characteristic that is both a strength and a limitation of the study was that it focused on a group that was being covered extensively in news at the time of data collection, and the measures could not fully account for all of the numerous complexities that may have influenced participant responses. It may also be the case that, because the measures of attitudes, emotions, and perceived threat were self-reported, it is hard to ensure the accuracy of the data. As Crandall and colleagues (2018) found, people were likely to perceive themselves as less prejudiced against the backdrop of increased prejudice following the 2016 presidential elections. Moreover, they might also be not completely aware of their level of prejudice against a certain outgroup. The study also focused on participant attitudes toward a controversial immigrant group, i.e., the undocumented status and the act of getting into the United Status through border crossing. Extraneous factors such as people’s perception of national identity, criminal behavior, and human rights might influence how differently they might view Hispanic immigrants as opposed to undocumented immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border. Moreover, if the participant’s lack of knowledge impedes their understanding the concept of undocumented immigration, their report of attitudes might also be flawed in that they might confuse the immigrant group that they need to be considering. Therefore, it is difficult to assess whether such dynamics might have affected how truthfully or correctly people reported.
Due to the complex nature of this relationship between mediated contact and intergroup attitudes, even the differences in demographic information like age, education level, and political ideology (variables which were not focused on in this study) might influence the use and effects of social media. The research did not focus on whether mediated contact would have different effects for digitally-oriented young people, for people of certain political ideologies, or for people of different education levels. For instance, more digitally-oriented participants might have reported a higher influence of media on their intergroup attitudes. Moreover, demographic differences in which social networking sites are accessed and how those sites are interacted with (whether more likes or more commenting on news stories, for instance) could also impact the influence of mediated contact on intergroup attitudes. For instance, younger populations may rely more on Instagram and Reddit than Youtube and Facebook to access news stories.

There are multiple directions this research could take in future studies. One limitation of the study was that it was correlational in nature and, therefore, one way to expand on this literature is to conceptually replicate this study using an experimental paradigm. It would be interesting to find out if there would be any change in the results when contact is experimentally manipulated, or when other factors are more rigorously controlled. It would also resolve another limitation of this study. Since the relationship between intergroup contact and attitudes toward immigrants is only studied correlationally, it is hard to tell whether the contact is influencing attitudes or the attitudes are influencing the kind of contact that is being recalled and reported by the participants. Therefore, participant attitudes might shape how they perceive their prior
interactions with an outgroup instead of the other way around and the only way to resolve this issue is conduct this study experimentally.

Moreover, this study also did not take into account the role of attitude strength and knowledge about immigration. As previously discussed, feeling strongly or being knowledgeable on the issue of immigration might inhibit the influence of media on one’s attitudes. Therefore, future research can consider how strongly and how knowledgeable participants felt about the topic of immigration in the study and how effective mediated contact is in influencing attitudes. Furthermore, only a certain group of immigrants were focused on in this study. Thus, it would also be intriguing to study whether these findings would extend to other immigrant groups, especially those that might be seen more positively (such as Canadian immigrants) or with refugees. Another situation where this study can be expanded is in group settings, such as classrooms, where the outgroup member may not be a native English speaker and require a translator to conduct direct contact. Because a translator is acting as an intermediary to the interaction, it would be interesting to determine whether the positive effects of meaningful contact are still experienced. In such a case, there might be concerns as to whether the emotions generated from the interaction might be attributed to the translator rather than the outgroup member. Would the translator need to belong to the same or similar outgroup as the outgroup member for successful intergroup contact?

Future research can also focus on whether there are any differences in how mediated and direct contact function and, thus, influence outgroup attitudes. The findings suggest that influence of direct contact on immigration attitudes was mediated by positive
emotions and perceived threat. However, this could not be assessed with mediated contact. Moreover, positive direct contact requires certain conditions to be met in order to actually influence attitudes (such as equal status and interdependence within interactions). Positive mediated contact cannot meet these conditions, but it has still been successful in influencing outgroup attitudes (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Therefore, a study attempting to understand the common factors and mediators of successful positive mediated contact could be a significant addition to mediated contact literature.

Other future research could investigate whether trust in news sources impacts the function of sources as intergroup contact. As previously stated, people reported low levels of trust in the accuracy of news they came across on social media (Matsa & Shearer, 2018). Future studies might look into whether trust is an important factor in mediated contact. Specifically, in case of news sources and other non-entertainment media, such as reality television and autobiographies, the accuracy of content might influence effectiveness of contact in a manner similar to the effectiveness of positive direct contact being reliant on the outgroup member being considered as typical of that outgroup.

Taken together, there are some limitations to this study, such as its non-experimental nature, the issue with ensuring accuracy of self-report by participants, and the study not accounting for differences in certain demographic features, attitude strength, and knowledge on the issue in the participants. However, this research also highlights multiple avenues for further expansion in the contact literature, such as comparing mediators of direct and mediated contact and studying the role of content...
accuracy in mediated contact via news consumption. Future research can also focus on the replication of this study by focusing on different immigrant groups, by conducting it experimentally, and by assessing direct contact when intermediaries (like translators) are involved.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms prior findings on the effectiveness of direct contact on improving attitudes toward immigrants. This study also highlights the role of emotions and perceived threat in driving the relations between contact and these attitudes. The research also explored whether news consumption via social media relates to immigrant attitudes and found that it did not have a meaningful effect. Thus, this research highlights the fact that although direct contact continues to be a highly effective method of influencing attitudes, there is still further research to be done on the effectiveness of mediated contact and the factors affecting it. Immigration is still a widely covered and highly contentious topic in news stories. As the country gears up for another presidential election, it is important to be cognizant of the efficacy of intergroup contact as a means to improve group relations, and to reduce conflict in an increasingly polarized society.
References


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Southern Poverty Law Center (2016, November 29). *Ten days after: Harassment and intimidation in the aftermath of the election*. Retrieved from


Table 1

*Descriptive findings on key variables of the study*

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Table 2

Correlation between key variables of the study

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Table 3

*Relationship of Direct and Mediated Contact with Attitudes toward Immigrants*

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*Note.* Significant effects are in bold.
Table 4

*Relationship of Direct and Mediated Contact with Positive Emotions, Negative Emotions, and Perceived Threat*

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<th>Perceived Threat</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediated Contact (Valence)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediated Contact (Amount x Valence)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Significant effects are in bold
Table 5

Relationship of Emotions and Perceived Threat with Attitudes toward Immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Threat</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-3.19</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Significant effects are in bold

Table 6

Indirect Effects of Direct and Mediated Contact on Attitudes toward Immigrants through Positive Emotions and Perceived Threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Amount of Direct Contact</th>
<th>High Amount of Direct Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boot coefficient</td>
<td>CI (Lower, Upper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Threat</td>
<td>-0.0085</td>
<td>-.0731, .0373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>0.2443</td>
<td>.1169, .3816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Significant effects are in bold
Appendix A

Informed Consent

Welcome! Thank you for your interest in our research. Before you proceed, please read the following information and indicate your willingness to participate.

We are conducting our research on perceptions of immigrants in the United States of America. Please pay close attention to the questions and answer them to the best of your knowledge. Thank you again for participating in our study.

Direct Contact

The following questions are going to ask about your face-to-face interactions with immigrants. In the following questions, we are referring to both documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants. Documented immigrants are immigrants who are in the country with valid permits and/or visas. They also include people who have received their green card or citizenship. They are sometimes referred to in the media as legal immigrants. Undocumented immigrants are immigrants who are in the country, for example, without legal permits or have overstayed their visa. They are sometimes referred to in the media as illegal immigrants. In summary, we are asking about your face-to-face contact with immigrants regardless of the status of their documentation.
To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you interact with people who are **immigrants**?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Participants who select an option other than ‘Never’ will answer the following question]

How negative or positive were your interactions with **immigrants**? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 0 +100

[-----------------------------------------------]

To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you interact with **immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin**?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Participants who select ‘Never’ will be taken to the Mediated Contact section. The rest of the participants will answer the following question.]
How positive or negative were your interactions with immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Other Spanish Origin? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 0 +100

----------------------------------------

Mediated Contact

The following questions are going to ask about news stories you have seen about immigrants. Again, in the following questions, we are referring to both documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants. In short, we are asking about the news stories you have seen regarding immigrants, regardless of the status of their documentation.

How frequently do you use Social Networking Sites (like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, etc.) in general?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you come across news stories on these Social Networking Sites?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Participants who select ‘Never’ will be taken to the Immigrant Attitudes section. The rest of the participants will answer the following questions]

To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you come across news stories focused on immigrants in general on Social Networking Sites?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Participants who select ‘Never’ will be taken to the Immigrant Attitudes section. The rest of the participants will answer the following questions]

How positive or negative is the depiction of immigrants in general in the news stories you come across on Social Networking Sites? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 0 +100

[---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------]
To the best of your knowledge, how frequently do you come across news stories on Social Networking Sites focused on immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Participants who select ‘Never’ will be taken to the Immigrant Attitudes section. The rest of the participants will answer the following questions]

How positive or negative is the depiction of immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin in the news stories you come across on Social Networking Sites?

Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 .......................... 0 ........................................ +100

Which Social Networking Sites do you frequently use? Please select all the options that apply. If needed, please also select the ‘Other’ option to list any sources that you depend on and that are not listed.

- □ Facebook
- □ Instagram
- □ LinkedIn
On which Social Networking Sites do you frequently come across news stories focused on immigrants? Please select all the options that apply. If needed, please also select the ‘Other’ option to list any sources that you depend on and that are not listed.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Other: ____________

How often do you click the ‘like’ or ‘upvote’ button on news stories about immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin posted by someone else?
| How often do you comment or reply to news stories about **immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin** posted by someone else? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Often | Everyday |
| ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| How often do you share news stories about **immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin** posted by someone else? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Often | Everyday |
| ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| How often do you post news stories about **immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin**? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Often | Everyday |
| ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
Emotions

The following questions refer to immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border who are NOT entering through check-points. Some of these people do so because they claim that it is unsafe to return to their country and therefore wish to legally request protection (aka to request asylum). Other people do so for a variety of other reasons (work, family, etc.).

How warmly do you feel about immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all Warm and 100 is Extremely Warm.

0

100

How much hostility do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Hostility at all and 100 is Extreme Hostility.

0

100

How much sympathy do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Sympathy at all and 100 is Extreme Sympathy.
How much contempt do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Contempt at all and 100 is Extreme Contempt.

0  

How much respect do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Respect at all and 100 is Extreme Respect.

0  

How much disgust do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Disgust at all and 100 is Extreme Disgust.

0  
How much admiration do you feel for immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is No Admiration at all and 100 is Extreme Admiration.

Perceived Threat
To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border are undermining American values and culture.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border are getting more from the country than they are contributing to it.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.
To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The **immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border** threaten the American ways.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.

0

[---------------------------------------------------------------]

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The **immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border** have made the country unsafe.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.

0

[---------------------------------------------------------------]

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The **immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border** are threatening or negatively affecting my job.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.

0

[---------------------------------------------------------------]
To what extent do you agree with the following statement? “The immigrants entering the country through the US-Mexican border have increased the tax burden on American.” Please select an option from the following scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 is Not at all and 100 is Extremely.

0 100

[-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------]

Attitudes toward Immigrants

How negative or positive is your opinion of immigrants who are Hispanic/Latino/Of Other Spanish Origin, regardless of the status of their documentation? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 0 +100

[-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------]

How negative or positive is your opinion of immigrants seeking to enter the country through the US-Mexican border? Please select an option from the following scale ranging from -100 to 100, where -100 is Extremely Negative, 100 is Extremely Positive, and 0 is Neutral.

-100 0 +100

[-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------]
**Immigration Policy Attitudes**

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *Immigration laws should be strict.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *Immigration laws should be lenient.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *Immigrants who are in the country without legal permits should be deported.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *The country should accept more people trying to enter the country from the US-Mexican border.*
To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *The country should accept less people trying to enter the country from the US-Mexican border.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *The country should build a wall at its borders.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *The government should spend more on border security.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Position on Immigration

To what extent are your positions on immigration important to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

To what extent are your positions on immigration something that you care a lot about?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent are your positions on immigration important compared to others issues that you are dealing with right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent are your positions on immigration connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To what extent are your positions on immigration a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent are your positions on immigration a moral stance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

To what extent are your positions on immigration based on a moral principle?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Considerably</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic Measures**

What is your age?

[Text box]
What is your racial/ethnic identity?

[Text box]

Do you identify as Hispanic/Latino/of Other Spanish Origin?

○ Yes
○ No

What is your gender identity?

○ Male
○ Female
○ Other: __________

What is your country of citizenship?

[Text box]

How would you describe your political orientation?

○ Conservative
○ Liberal
○ Neither liberal nor conservative

[If a participant selected either conservative or liberal, then they will answer the next question]

You indicated you were [conservative/liberal]. How [conservative/liberal] are you?

○ Slightly
○ Moderately
○ Very
What is your current employment status?

○ Employed full time

○ Employed part time

○ Student

○ Unemployed

○ Retired

○ Homemaker

Which of the following best describes your household situation?

○ My household has a hard time buying the things we need.

○ My household has just enough money for the things we need.

○ My household has no problem buying the things we need and sometimes we can also buy special things.

○ My household has enough money to buy pretty much anything we want.

Thank you for participating in our study! Your responses are appreciated.