

# New research advances understanding of negative social contact

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New research, by the Department of Psychology at Durham University, has found that negative social contact among people of differing societal or cultural groups can have a disproportionate negative effect on broad

social cohesion within communities.

The research, led by Professor Stefania Paolini, analyzes 70 years of research into the psychological effects of intergroup [social contact](#). The findings are [published](#) in the *Psychological Bulletin*.

These group contacts include interactions between people from different social groups, such as racial, ethnic or [religious groups](#), and can take place anywhere from talking in the street to more formal gatherings.

## **The psychological effects of social interactions**

It is well established in [social psychology](#) that face-to-face interactions between people of differing social groups can contribute to [social cohesion](#). This is through reducing prejudice, increasing mutual trust, and improving behavioral intentions.

This breakthrough research takes a fresh look at the negative impacts of social contact, analyzing the effects of when the experience may not go as well.

## **The impacts of negative social experiences**

Negative social experiences in our lives worsen our responses to those different from us, more so than neutral or positive experiences mute or improve such responses. This being known as negativity bias.

Data analyzed by Professor Paolini's research team found evidence for negativity bias from these kinds of interactions, demonstrating that [negative impacts](#) can far outweigh the positive.

## **Advancing understanding of negativity bias**

The paper advances understanding of the impacts of negativity bias and highlights the need for more coordinated introductions and contacts between social groups, where the opportunities for the social contact to go well can be maximized.

Crucially, the research determined these adverse impacts were less pronounced where people had less opportunities to opt out of the contact or were motivated to engage in it.

The team behind the research believes it provides a step change to the psychological understanding of intergroup social contact in real world-settings. Also, with the potential to help shape more effective policies and interventions in the areas of desegregation, mainstreaming, [social integration](#) and peacebuilding around the world.

**More information:** Stefania Paolini et al, Negativity bias in intergroup contact: Meta-analytical evidence that bad is stronger than good, especially when people have the opportunity and motivation to opt out of contact., *Psychological Bulletin* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/bul0000439](https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000439)

Provided by Durham University

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