

An Intergroup Threat Theory Approach to Support for Political Movements, Symbols, and Candidates

Benjamin Anjewierden, Sophie Timin, Corinne Harris, Joseph Pang, & Christopher Aberson

Introduction

- We examined how, through realistic and symbolic threat, positive and negative contact relate to feelings toward political figures and movements.
- Intergroup Threat Theory (ITT) states that **contact** with an outgroup can impact **perceptions of threat** related to that group. In turn, these threats relate to **greater prejudice**. Based on this framework, we hypothesized that:
 - H_1 : Positive contact with African Americans (AAs) relates to more positive feelings for Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Joe Biden, and less positive feelings toward the Confederate Flag and Donald Trump. (H_2) The inverse is true for negative contact.
 - H_3 : Positive Contact experiences with AAs relate to less feelings of realistic and symbolic threat from AAs. (H_4) The inverse is true for negative contact.
 - H_5 : Feelings of symbolic and realistic threat relate to less positive feelings for BLM and Biden, and more positive feelings toward both the Confederate Flag and Trump.
 - H_6 : Threats mediate the contact-feelings relationships for each of the four targets.

Methods

Participants

- We sampled non-African American students from a public university in northern California.
- The sample ($N = 254$) self-identified as 49.6% lower, 34.3% middle, and 16.1% upper class.
- The majority were female (71.5%), liberal (57%), and age 18 to 23 (74.7%, $M = 22.1$).

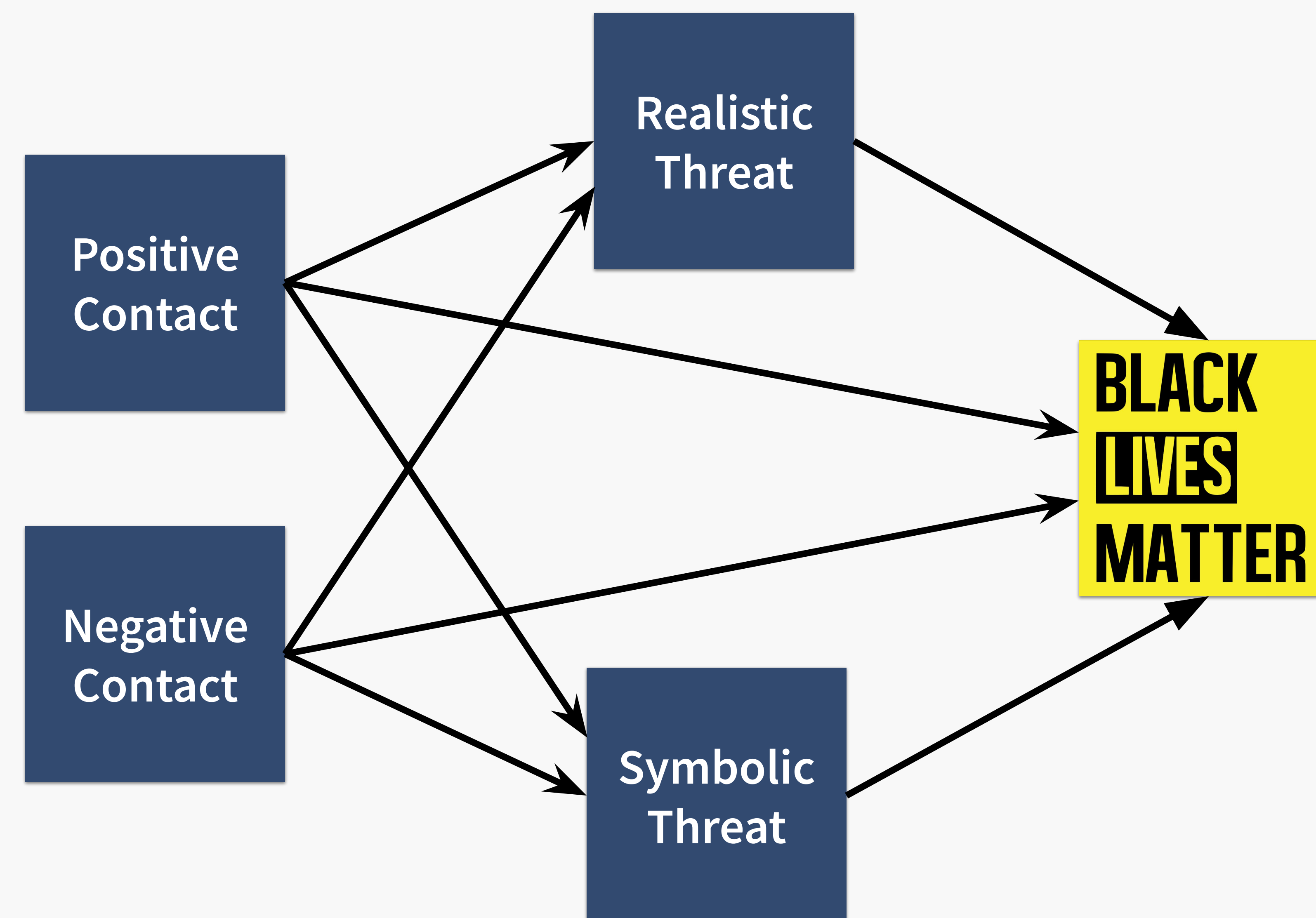
Procedure

- Participants responded to a one time online survey.

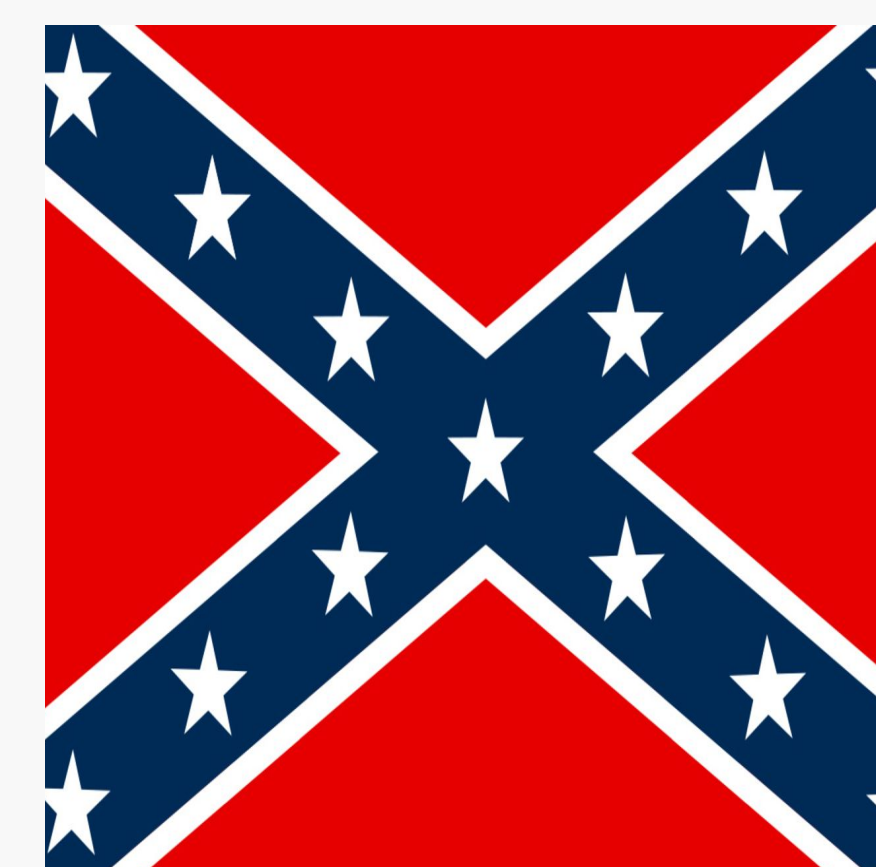
Measures

- Positive contact with African-Americans. One item.
- Negative contact with African-Americans. One item.
- Perceptions of Realistic Threat from African-Americans. Nine items.
- Perceptions of Symbolic Threat from African-Americans. Nine items.
- Feelings toward Political Figures and Movements. Four items related to feelings toward four images.

Perceptions of **realistic threat** mediate the relationship between **positive contact** with African-Americans and **feelings toward Black Lives Matter**.



How do you feel toward the following images?



Results

- Positive contact with AAs related to more favorable feelings toward Biden ($b = 2.44, p = .03$) and BLM ($b = 4.18, p < .001$), and less favorable feelings toward the confederate flag ($b = -2.06, p < .001$).
- Realistic threats related to more favorable feelings toward Trump ($b = 7.15, p < .001$) and the Confederate Flag ($b = 3.15, p = .001$), and less favorable feelings toward BLM ($b = -8.12, p < .001$).
- Symbolic threats related to more favorable feelings toward BLM ($b = 3.59, p = .03$).
- The relationship between positive contact and feelings toward BLM was mediated by realistic threat ($ab = 2.41, 95\% CI[1.10, 3.72]$).
- The relationship between positive contact and feelings toward BLM was mediated by symbolic threat ($ab = -1.01, 95\% CI[-1.99, -0.04]$).
- The relationship between positive contact and feelings toward the Confederate Flag was mediated by realistic threat ($ab = -0.97, 95\% CI[-1.62, -0.32]$).

Discussion

- There was mixed support for our hypotheses.
 - Both **positive contact** and **realistic threats** significantly **predicted feelings** toward the majority of the presented images.
 - Surprisingly, negative contact wasn't linked to feelings toward any of the images. Moreover, the only symbolic threat measure that was significant was related to feelings toward BLM in the opposite of the anticipated direction.
- Lack of support for some hypotheses may be due to an unrepresentative sample and a **floor effect** for some items that led to a lack of responses. Additionally, we cannot determine causality.
- Findings suggest that the **Intergroup Threat Theory framework** may go beyond evaluations of outgroups and **extend to political figures and movements**. Future studies should examine other political subjects.