

« The social psychology of intergroup contact and prejudice»

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Prejudice reduction has been a central value in social psychology for almost a century. Theory and research in the discipline often assumes that prejudice underlies intergroup conflict and suggests that prejudice reduction should be the objective of social psychological interventions. These values and assumptions are expressed most clearly in contact theory, which argues that intergroup contact under optimal conditions can reduce prejudice. But social psychology is in the midst of an upheaval as the prejudice reduction orientation is subject to growing criticism amid calls for a more concerted focus on social change. This workshop will consider two bodies of research that are implicated in this upheaval. First, a growing body of contact research has shown 1) that power matters in situations of asymmetrical contact, 2) that minority and majority groups have different and strategic interests in contact, and 3) that optimal contact and prejudice reduction have different political consequences for majorities and minorities. Second, research in a number of different traditions of scholarship suggests that social inequality can be sustained by positive, ambivalent, benevolent and paternalistic attitudes, by helping, and by common ingroup identification. In addition to reviewing these arguments, the workshop will also outline an approach for studying the way contact, prejudice and tolerant attitudes can function to secure unequal social worlds.