

Parallel Lives: 25 Years On

Exploring the Drivers of Interethnic Contact in the UK

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The Cantle Report (2001)

- Cantle Report (2001) revealed deep divisions in UK towns and cities
- Communities described as living “parallel lives” due to ethnic segregation
- 25 years on, ethnic clustering in neighborhoods remains strong (MHCLG, Casey Review, 2016)
- 50% of UK adults have no friends from other ethnic groups (The Challenge, 2019).





The Benefits of Intergroup Contact

- Positive interactions between different ethnic groups - known as *intergroup contact* – fosters tolerance and mutual understanding
- Decades of research show that the more we mix and interact with other groups, the more accepting and open-minded we become.
- Heralded as “*our best hope*” for improving race relations



Drivers of Intergroup Contact Engagement

- The Government's *Integrated Communities Strategy* highlights the importance of understanding what encourages people from different backgrounds to connect.
- Most past research has focused on what happens **after** people mix—like reduced prejudice—rather than what helps bring them together in the first place.
- This research will flip the focus, looking at what drives people to engage with others from different groups in the first place.

Project Team

- Project was co-designed between academics and Belong
 - PI: Rose Meleady, Professor of Psychology, University of East Anglia
 - Co-I Shelley McKeown-Jones, Professor of Psychology, University of Oxford
 - Co-I George Leckie, Professor of Social Statistics, University of Bristol
 - Co-I Jo Broadwood, Belong - The Cohesion and Integration Network
 - Researcher: Hannah Peetz, University of East Anglia
- + **Stakeholder group** including representatives from local and national government, civil society sectors and independent practitioners.

Project Objectives

1. Understand how personal and environmental factors combine to shape people's willingness to interact with people from different ethnic groups
2. Investigate whether different factors lead to positive vs. negative interactions between groups
3. Explore whether the reasons for engaging in contact differ between ethnic majority and ethnic minority group members

More Diversity ≠ More Intergroup Contact

- For people to interact across ethnic groups, they first need to live, work, or study near each other.
- However, just being in the same place doesn't mean meaningful contact will happen—opportunities alone aren't enough.

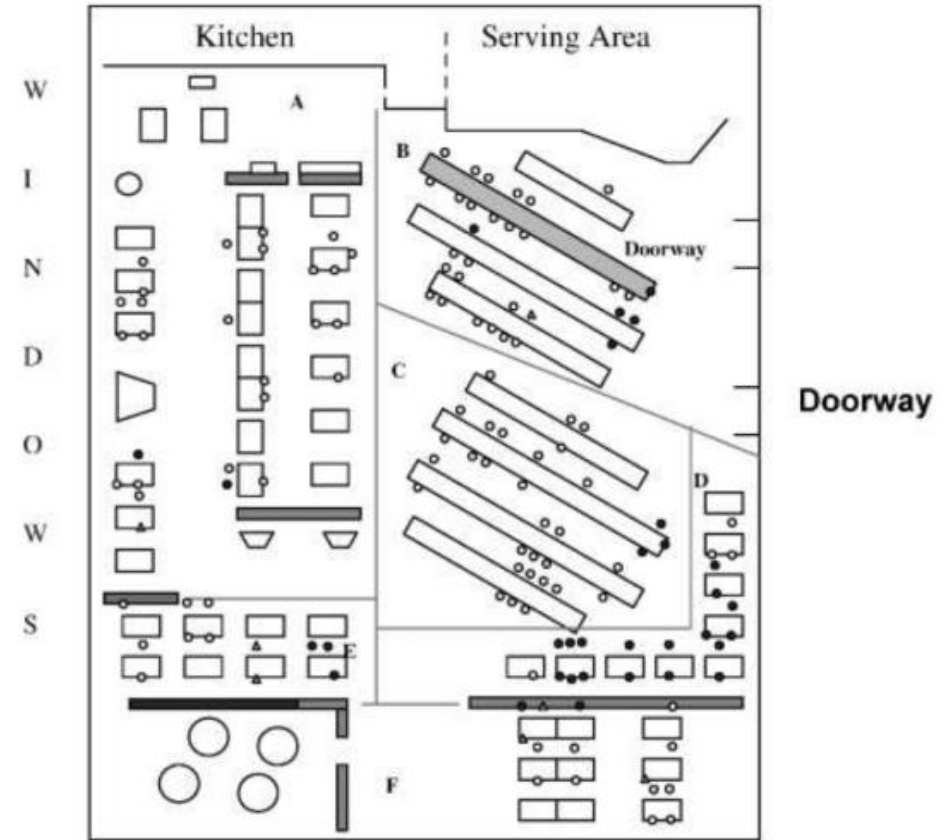


Figure 2. Asian and White seating at 12:45 p.m. on day 4—where black dots indicate Asians, colourless dots indicate Whites and triangles indicate people from other ethnic backgrounds.



- Our research will explore how environmental and psychological factors combine to predict how much they interact with people from different ethnic groups
- **Key question:** When and for whom does greater ethnic diversity led to more contact?
- Psychological predictors include:
 - personality factors
 - political views
 - ideology
 - ethnic identification
 - Attitudes towards diversity/ perceptions of threat/perceived discrimination
- Contextual predictors include:
 - ethnic composition of the neighbourhood
 - local racial hate crimes
 - voting rates
 - social infrastructure

What makes contact positive vs. negative?

- Existing research mostly looks at willingness to engage in contact, not the *quality* of those interactions.
- Positive interactions improve social cohesion by reducing prejudice.
- Negative interactions can increase prejudice
- Some factors may specifically predict positive contact (e.g., perspective-taking, positive expectations).
- Other factors may increase negative contact (e.g., intergroup anxiety, high rejection sensitivity).

Do different factors drive contact-seeking for different groups?

- Past research has mostly focused on ethnic majority group members' willingness to engage with minorities.
- Different factors are likely to influence contact decisions for minority group members.
- Majority group members may avoid contact due to perceived physical or cultural threats
- Minority group members may avoid contact due to concerns about losing a distinct social identity

Research Workpackages



Phase 1 : Secondary analysis of existing panel data

Goal: Identify what drives intergroup contact using existing UK-wide longitudinal data

Understanding Society dataset (~40,000 participants; large ethnic minority sample)

Examines how individual traits and local context interacts to shape contact engagement

Compares ethnic **majority and minority experience**

Explore bidirectional relations (e.g. does threat shape contact, and vice-versa)?

Research Workpackages

Phase 2 : New Panel Survey

Goal: Uncover drivers of both **positive and negative** intergroup contact

Follows 2000 UK adults (oversampling Black and Asian respondents) over 12 months

Measure additional factors like empathy, perspective-taking, values, rejection-sensitivity, intercultural competence.

Tests whether some factors led to better contact, while others predict worse encounters

Research Workpackages

Phase 3: In-Depth Local Diary Studies

Goal: Capture real-time contact in 5 key '**Integration Areas**' (e.g., Bradford, Walsall)

14-day diary on daily intergroup encounters: frequency, quality, setting, who initiated

Focuses on areas where **social cohesion is most needed**

Identifies factors shaping **everyday contact dynamics**

Examines how one day's experience influences the next



Project Outcomes

- Results will be shared through academic papers, policy briefings, roundtables, and public events
- Our findings will:
 - Uncover key drivers of contact across different groups and regions
 - Support targeted, context-specific interventions:
 - **High-diversity areas:** Reduce threat perceptions, foster trust and safety
 - **Low-diversity areas:** Build intercultural skills and confidence
 - Help ensure more people benefit from positive intergroup contact in a diverse society



- Thanks for your attention
- Over to our collaborators and your questions...
- Questions or thoughts after the session? I'd love to hear from you: r.meleady@uea.ac.uk