

## BRIEF REPORT

# Using Video and Contact to Change Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians

**Jonna J. Cooley**

Phoenix Center

**Gary J. Burkholder**

Walden University

Prejudice against gay men and lesbians has continued to fuel negative attitudes that are perpetuated by stereotypes and by validation from those within one's own social group. While there has been some research regarding the impact of contact on attitudes, the present study expands the theoretical approach of Allport and the empirical work of researchers such as Herek to examine the impact of adding media to interactive contact with lesbian and gay individuals. Participants were placed into one of three treatment groups: control, video only, and video plus contact with gay men and lesbians. The sample included 106 undergraduate students from a Midwestern U.S. community college. Students in all groups completed the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men scale prior to treatment, immediately following the treatment, and again one week later. Repeated measures analysis of covariance for trend analysis and multivariate analysis of covariance using change scores were used to test the impact of the treatment on attitudes; gender was included as a second main effect. Results indicated that contact and interaction did have an effect on the decreasing negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, as reflected in the change scores of the video-plus-contact group compared with the change scores of the control group. Attitude change scores for the video-only and the video-plus-contact-and-interaction groups were not statistically different, however. The implications for positive social change, via the vicarious contact method of the ever-popular media, include decreasing negative attitudes in group settings such as schools and workplace settings, thus creating more affirming environments for gay men and lesbians.

**Keywords:** *attitudes, contact, gay, lesbian, media*

## Introduction

Commonalities in definitions among researchers studying prejudice (Aronson, 1980; Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Meyer, 2003) include irrationality, incomplete information, and projection of fear onto others. Allport (1954) noted in early research that the most common source of prejudice lies in the needs and habits that reflect the significant influence of ingroup memberships upon the development of personality. Pettigew (1997) noted two points in relation to prejudice as it applies to ingroup and outgroup membership. First, prejudice is ultimately an intergroup phenomenon, and second, prejudice carries with it an implication that ingroup members should be treated more favorably than outgroup members. Mazziotta, Mummendey, and Wright (2011) showed that indirect (that is, not

involving direct interaction) forms of cross-group contact has the potential to influence the attitudes of the outgroup members as well. This may include imagined contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009) and contact with media sources (Poluck, 2009; Strick, von Baaren, & van Krippenburg, 2011).

## Contact Theory

Contact theory suggests that prejudice can be reduced by promoting equal-status interaction between groups (Allport, 1954). The success of contact in lowering prejudicial attitudes has been demonstrated in a number of studies, including those focused on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Herek, 2000), negatively stigmatized groups (Werth & Lord, 1992), racial and religious segregation in the schools (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005), one-time contact between boys on different sports teams (Krosnick, Boniger, Chuang, Berent, & Carnot, 1993), contact between individuals representing different nationalities (Wagner, Hewstone, & Machlert, 1989), outcome on self-perception of African American males (Ward, 2004), and views toward the elderly (Abrams & Bryant, 2006).

Gays and lesbians differ from many stigmatized groups, particularly in terms of the ability to conceal the stigmatized status (Conley, Devine, Rabow, & Evett, 2002). Research has shown that the experiences of individuals with the concealable stigmas, such as socioeconomic class, religion, or gay or lesbian identity, differ from those whose stigmas are apparent, such as physical handicaps or race, in a number of ways (Frale, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Granfield, 1991). For example, those with an identifying characteristic that can be concealed tend to function better socially because they do not always feel the outgroup stigma; however, they also simultaneously tend to feel more isolated, have fewer social contacts, and perceive less support. In the long run, gay men and lesbians may suffer more from their stigmatization because their status isn't always well defined or identifiable; thus, there is not necessarily an accessible social support system (Conley et al., 2002).

Increased exposure to gay men and lesbians in the media might theoretically serve as a means for attitude change. There has, for example, been some research demonstrating the positive effects of media contact on alcohol use (Gibbons et al. 2010), violence (Krahe et al., 2011), and smoking (Wills et al., 2010); however, studies that explore the impact of media contact on attitudes towards gay men and lesbians are needed to confirm this. Earlier research also indicates that merely reading an article or book does little to change one's attitude, as such contact lacks the personal connection (Haddock, Rothman, & Schwarz, 1999; Haugtvedt, 1997); therefore, the purpose of the present study was to extend current research by exploring the impact of contact, including direct contact enhance with media contact, on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

## Methods

### Participants

Instructors teaching introductory psychology courses were contacted for permission to use their classes for the study; six instructors agreed to allow participation of their students. The intervention was completed before content regarding same-sex sexuality was discussed as part of the curriculum. The university's Institutional Review Board approved the study.

### Design

The six classes (each consisting of 15 to 20 students) were randomized into one of three groups: Control (Con), Video Only (V), and Video Plus Contact (V+C). Each student was given a consent

form that provided information necessary to make an informed decision about participation. Students in the Con group had no information related to the lives of gay men and lesbians. Those in the V and V+C groups viewed a video, *Jim In Bold*, featuring young gay men and lesbians talking about their lives, their families, and their problems; the intent of the video was to portray the gay youth as typical teens. Students in the V+C group received, in addition, exposure to three gay male and three lesbian volunteer presenters of the same general age as the audience (22 to 24 years of age), who interacted with them and answered questions. At the start of the class, and again at the end, students in all groups completed the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gays Scale (ATLGS; Herek, 1984a) in order to assess any short-term change in attitudes. All students again completed the ATLGS one week post intervention to assess longer-term attitude change.

### **Instrumentation**

ATLGS (Herek, 1984b; 2000) is comprised of 20 items, half addressing attitudes toward lesbians and half addressing attitudes toward gay men. Items include information related to authoritarianism, perceived social support of personal opinions toward lesbians and gay men, gender role and family traditions, religiosity, and contact with lesbians and gay men. Item responses were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). Items were recoded as needed such that lower ATLGS scores indicated less negative attitudes. Items were summed to create scale scores for the ATLGS (theoretical range 20 to 140). Herek also created the scale such that separate subscales representing attitudes toward gay men and attitudes toward lesbians could be also assessed. These subscales range in score from 10 to 70. Research has demonstrated the ATLGS to be reliable and valid and have yielded values of Cronbach's alpha ranging from .92 to .96 (Herek, 2000; Lance, 2002; Pettigrew, 1998).

### **Statistical Analysis**

Initially, we conducted tests for differences in the dependent variables (ATGLS and the two subscales) by treatment group to ensure balancing across groups and to ensure potential covariates were included where necessary. Next, change scores between pretest and immediate posttest and pretest and the posttest given at the one-week follow-up were calculated; differences in change scores by the three groups were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). The tests were performed using two dependent variables: the change score involving the difference between pretest and immediate posttest (P-IPT) scores and the change score involving the difference between pretest and the one-week follow-up posttest (P-1WFU) scores. We also tested the models using classic repeated measures analysis of covariance. Overall, the results were not different, so we report here the analysis of change scores. Results of the other analyses are available from the first author upon request.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Information**

One hundred thirty-two participants took part in the data collection; however, due to incomplete or missing data, 22 participants were excluded. Four who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were excluded to eliminate bias; thus, 106 participants were included in the study for the purposes of data analyses. The sample was 60% female. The race/ethnicity mix included 88% White, 10% African American, and 2% other. Ages of participants varied from 18 to 41 ( $M = 20.06$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ). Approximately 70% of participants reported having a gay man or lesbian in their family. Sixty-one

percent identified as freshman and 39% sophomore. The majority of the participants were psychology, criminal justice, and nursing majors (56%). Table 1 presents demographic data by group.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics (n = 106)**

	Group 1 (Con) (n = 28) % (n)	Group 2 (V) (n = 37) % (n)	Group 3 (V+C) (n = 41) % (n)
Female	43% (13)	73% (27)	56% (23)
Race			
White	72% (20)	91% (34)	91% (37)
Black	21% (6)	6% (2)	7% (3)
Asian / PI	7% (2)	3% (1)	2% (1)
Year in College			
Freshman	43% (12)	65% (24)	59% (24)
Sophomore	57% (16)	35% (13)	41% (17)
Age			
18	18% (5)	40% (15)	37% (15)
19	43% (12)	32% (12)	37% (15)
20	18% (5)	11% (4)	7% (3)
21	11% (3)	8% (3)	5% (2)
22	0% (0)	3% (1)	2% (1)
23	3% (1)	0% (1)	0% (0)
25 +	7% (2)	3% (1)	12% (5)
Identify Gay/Lesbian in Family			
No	68% (19)	81% (30)	63% (26)
Yes	32% (9)	19% (7)	37% (15)

Note: Con = Control; V = Video Only; V + C = Video Plus Contact; PI = Pacific Islander.

### Pretest Group Difference Analyses

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square tests of independence were used to determine pretest group differences on key demographic variables of gender, age, and knowing someone in the family who is gay or lesbian. Gender ( $F [1,105] = 4.20, p = .04$ ) and knowing someone who is gay or lesbian ( $F [1,105] = 17.6, p = .00$ ) were statistically different by group and were included in MANCOVA models. ANOVA was used as well to test differences among groups on pretest score of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The overall ANOVA showed no differences— $F (2,104) = .10, p = .90$ —indicating that groups at the outset were statistically balanced on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men.

### Statistical Assumptions

The test of equality of covariance matrices was examined and found to be statistically significant for the P-IPT difference scores (Box's  $M = 74.6, F [6,1884] = 10.73, p = .00$ ) and the P-1WFO difference scores (Box's  $M = 382.3, F [24, 8006] = 14.3, p = .00$ ); therefore, Pillai's trace was the statistic used to determine the overall significance of the MANCOVA. Analyzing between subjects' effects indicated that, for the P-IPT difference scores, group was statistically significant: Pillai's trace = .23,  $F (6,194) = 4.25, p = .00$ . Gender was not statistically significant: Pillai's trace = .03,  $F (3, 96) = .84, p = .48$ . The test for the group x gender interaction showed a trend toward significance; Pillai's trace = .12,  $F (6, 194) = 2.08, p = .057$ .

For the P-1WFU difference score test, the analyses of between subjects' effects indicates group was statistically significant: Pillai's trace = .17,  $F(6, 1884) = 3.03$ ,  $p = .007$ . The main effect of gender (Pillai's trace = .05,  $F[3, 96] = 1.62$ ,  $p = .19$ ) and the interaction effect (Pillai's trace = .06,  $F[6, 194] = 1.00$ ,  $p = .42$ ) were not statistically significant. Table 2 shows the mean change scores and their standard deviations for the two difference score dependent variables.

**Table 2: Mean Change Scores (and Standard Deviations) on the ATGLS**

Dependent Variables	Con <i>M (SD)</i>	V <i>M (SD)</i>	V+C <i>M (SD)</i>
P-IPT Difference	.19 (1.13)	6.94 (11.7)	10.23 (12.1)
P-1WFU Difference	-.27 (1.46)	4.78 (8.54)	6.77 (13.1)

Note: Con = Control; V = Video Only; V + C = Video Plus Contact.

### Pairwise Comparisons

Post-hoc comparisons were analyzed using the least significant difference method ( $p < .05$  as the criterion). For immediate and one-week follow-up changes, change scores for the V and the V+C groups were statistically different from the Con group, but the two treatment groups were not statistically different from each other. This suggests that these interventions are effective, but that adding video to a contact scenario does not necessarily enhance the effect.

## Discussion

Little research has demonstrated the impact of video/media on changing attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The present study was undertaken to examine the impact of video, through the use of video only and video in addition to contact, on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among young college students. The results support attitude change; however, they do not necessarily support that video adds a different component to the traditional contact situation. Results from this study reveal that video had as much of an impact as the video and the contact. This is consistent with findings from other studies that support the impact of visual media (Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2000; Riggle, Ellis, & Crawford, 1996) and support the benefits of contact found in previous studies (Burkholder & Dineen, 1996).

What is important to note in the present study is that ATLG change scores were similar for both V and V+C groups, indicating that the video was as effective as the contact. Bonds-Raacke, Cady, Schlegel, Harris, and Firebaugh (2007) noted in their research on media's influence on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians that, at the time of Allport's initial work, media had little significance. The technology was new, few people had access, and the Production Code of 1934 excluded gay men and lesbian characters from Hollywood films (which may incidentally have contributed to a cultural heterosexism). Chia (2006) noted that today's youth are influenced more by media, either firsthand or via peers, than by any other means. This provides one explanation for how face-to-face contact and contact through a video can have similar results, in terms of effecting attitudes.

### Limitations

There are some limitations that must be noted. The sample size was relatively small and nonrandom; however, preintervention analyses supported few systematic differences between groups on variables of interest (gender and knowing someone who is a gay man or lesbian were found to be different and included as covariates). It is also possible that the relatively small sample sizes were

not sufficient to detect potential effects. Replication with larger sample sizes would be important as well as with participants who are not college students (to improve generalizability). Additionally, the second follow-up period was of relatively short duration, and there was some evidence of a degradation of attitude improvement over time. Future researchers should examine longer-term follow-ups to assess maintenance of change or to identify time points that would benefit from additional contact.

### Implications for Practice

Understanding the nature of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and the impact of media and contact on changing attitudes is important. Evidence suggests that both can be effective in changing attitudes, at least in the short term. Thus, the findings support including contact interventions in classroom settings. It also appears that the media is indeed an important vehicle for attitude change; thus, television programming should continue to include more positive lesbian and gay characters, as well as more identified lesbian and gay news anchors. Finally, trainings for professionals who specialize in diversity education should incorporate more media and contact interventions.

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