Honours Research Abstract

Intergroup commensality and conflict: Altering perceptions of intergroup relations

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Aim of this Research

The primary aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between intergroup food sharing, conflict, and perceptions of intergroup relations.

The primary aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between intergroup food sharing, conflict, and perceptions of intergroup relations. Previous research had found that observed food sharing increased positive perceptions of intergroup relations. However, research to date had focussed on relatively benign out-groups and had not investigated whether observed food sharing could alter perceptions of intergroup relations when conflict between groups was present. Anglo Australian attitudes towards a currently negatively regarded group (Arabs) and a comparison group (Indians) were explored. It was hypothesized that observed food sharing would decrease negative perceptions of out-group member, that Arabs would be perceived more negatively across the conditions, and that the relationship between observed food sharing would be moderated by whether conflict was present. 232 Anglo Australian participants, primarily form community groups, were primed with photographs and vignettes depicting an Anglo Australian couple dining with either an Indian or Arab couple at a social event. The couples were portrayed in one of three food sharing conditions: sharing traditional Anglo Australian food; sharing traditional Arab or Indian food; not sharing food where each couple consumed their own traditional food. In addition, half of the participants were exposed to a newspaper article describing an attack on a local church by Indian or Middle Eastern youths in order to prime conflict between the groups. ANOVA results provide support for the first hypothesis.
with more positive affect, less negative affect, and less negative stereotypes attributed to Indians when they were seen sharing food. Food sharing influenced attitudes to multiculturalism for Arabs. Arabs were perceived more negatively than Indians with more stereotypical terms attributed to them. The final hypothesis received limited support, with conflict and food sharing having differential effects for Indians and Arabs. Findings are discussed in light of theoretical research into food practices, conflict, prejudice, and contact. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are provided.