

## REPORTING TO SOCIETIES OF 2019 SASP-SPSSI CONTACT MEETING

NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA, 29 APRIL-1 MAY 2019

<https://sasp.org.au/2018/09/sasp-spssi-group-meeting-2019/>

**Report by organisers and participants on the 2019 SASP-SPSSI group meeting on intergroup contact, 29 April-1 May 2019, Newcastle Australia.**



A scientific committee from across four continents and an army of junior local researchers have joined forces and run a super-successful **SASP- and SPSSI-sponsored peak international conference** on intergroup contact and social cohesion in Newcastle, Australia. Researchers and experts on social cohesion from 18 countries and 6 continents have ‘talked research’ and discussed findings from social cohesion studies and interventions, while admiring dolphins and Australian beautiful Coastal views, over three days in April-May 2019, in Newcastle, Australia.

Stefania Paolini from the University of Newcastle hosted the SASP-SPSSI group meeting on “Advances in Intergroup Contact Research”, leading a **phenomenal scientific organising committee** of eminent intergroup contact researchers from around the globe, including Linda Tropp (University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA), Liz Page-Gould (University of Toronto, Canada), Fiona White (University of Sydney, Australia), Fiona Barlow (The University of Queensland, Australia), Rhiannon Turner (Queen’s University Belfast, UK), Angel Gomez (National Distance Education University, Spain) and Miles Hewstone (Oxford University, UK).

With so many research super-stars, what was meant to be a ‘small’ group meeting, soon became a **medium-size meeting**: A total of 77 conference delegates from the *Society of Australasian Social Psychologists* and the *Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues* were able to network and discuss research across seven jam-filled conference sessions, spanning a range of topical issues in the area. Fifty researchers presented an exciting mixture of standard length papers, blitz and poster presentations for all taste. We were extra honoured to have Linda Tropp and Miles Hewstone delivering outstanding **key-note addresses** to get us started and help wrap up three days of hard work. Fiona Barlow and Linda also facilitated a super engaging **discussion session** in which early career researchers headed stimulating and collegial round-table discussions on selected themes and reported to the plenary. Everybody pitched in, including 20+ non-presenting conference participants from university staff, research students, and representatives of industry stakeholders in the social cohesion space from around Australia.

We celebrated research excellence with a series of **ECR research awards**, including best ECR presentation award to Chloe Bracegirdle (Oxford University), best blitz presentation awards by Mathijs Kros (Utrecht University) and Alex O’Donnell (Griffith University), and best poster

presentation award to Alexandra Vázquez (National Distance Education University). Through an **ECR-led mentorship scheme**, the group meeting has also provided invaluable research support across delegates' generations. It has served as a semi-structured platform for 20+ mentor-mentee pairs to connect prior to coming to Newcastle and meet up again at a mentor-mentee breakfast, sharing pleasures and tribulations of their academic journey. We will try to keep the scheme going and its participants connected into the future.



*Photo above: conference delegates take a photo opportunity at the end of three intense research days at Newcastle Beach, Newcastle Australia.*

The Newcastle meeting enjoyed a very **strong delegation of international and national delegates** of varied seniority and background: 18 countries from all continents but Antarctica were represented. Of the 50 presenting delegates, 17 were from Australia, 24 from Europe, and 9 from other destinations around the world, making it a truly international event! It has offered the 15+ Aussie local organizers (plus many more helpers) an unprecedented opportunity to brag about and share **local amenities**, making everybody feel entertained and looked after. The Traditional Custodians of the land on which we held our group meeting conducted a formal 'Welcome to *the Awabakal Country*' and almost got us in trouble with the conference hotel management with their truly evocative (outdoor but too close to the premises on a windy night!) **Aboriginal smoking ceremony**. We had an informal meet-and-greet with cocktails and tapas the first evening in front of the stunning views of the Pacific ocean at Newcastle beach. All conference delegates had a chance to try a traditional **BBQ Aussie style** on the beach after having brain-less fun with beach volley ball and various Aussie sports and fun-activities on the second evening.

#### **Feedback from Marta Beneda, PhD student at the Cambridge Department of Psychology**

Marta Beneda was happy to share her experience of the meeting with us. Her testimonial reads as follows: *"In the end of April 2019, I attended the SPSSI-SASP conference on "Advances in Intergroup Contact" in Newcastle, Australia. There I was offered a chance to present research on the positive effects of moral exemplars on openness to contact after violent intergroup conflicts, which I conducted together with my colleagues from the University of Warsaw – Marta Witkowska and Michał Bilewicz.*

*I could not have imagined a better place to present these results – the conference attracted many great researchers from across the wide field of intergroup contact research, giving junior researchers like myself a one-off opportunity to hear highly relevant feedback coming from many applicable*

*perspectives. The conversations I had after my talk have given me ideas about potential research questions I could address in my future work and different ways in which I could improve the methodology of my future studies. The conference also offered a possibility to find out about new research and directions in the field of intergroup contact research, and to learn more about studies done in different cultural contexts.*

*One of the highlights, in my opinion, was the talk given by Linda Tropp on implementing research findings into real life settings – she is an engaging and inspirational speaker. I also truly enjoyed the session on indirect contact and affect – I enjoyed learning more about e-contact or the concept of Kama Muta – the topics which I knew little about previously.*

*I also think it was an amazing idea to include a small group discussions session in the programme; it gave everyone an opportunity to get to know other researchers who work on similar topics and might be interested in potential future collaborations. It is something that should be definitely implemented by organisers of other smaller conferences.*

*Finally, apart from these positive implications for attendants' professional development, the conference was a great opportunity to socialise and relax. The program was filled with informal and fun activities, and the location of the conference venue was truly breath-taking. I do not think I have ever attended a conference where I would be so distracted by the view outside of the window – seeing pods of dolphins cutting through the waves was a wonderful experience.”*

### **Feedback from the other conference delegates**

The Newcastle meeting is something that all conference delegates seemed to have enjoyed a lot. We **surveyed all conference** delegates shortly after the meeting and heard back from 50% of them: On a 1-5 scale, ranging from ‘poor’ to ‘excellent’, the conference overall was rated 4.68 and received an average of 4.40 across 11 dimensions we assessed, including quality of the program, venue and social program.

But perhaps most telling were the many **unsolicited open-ended praises** we received. *“I can honestly say it was the most well-organised, fun, thought-provoking conference I’ve attended.”*. Another delegate praised *“the balance between academic work and social activities; the regional inspiration of the social activities; the feeling of enthusiasm and focus on research independent of career stage; the strong representation of early-career researchers”*. Also: *“I want to thank the Newcastle Group - everyone could tell that you deeply cared about the meeting and it was a great chance for many of us to come to Australia and meet Australian researchers”*.

Of course, there is still scope to improve further and consolidate **changes towards future meetings**. We feel we should share these bits too: We need more research and more researchers from non-WEIRD settings; one of the delegates said: *“I especially appreciated the quality of presentations, the science contained within those presentations, and the diversity of countries of origin of presenters (despite which, we still lacked many delegates from non-Western countries)”*. Many delegates enjoyed the *discussion time* and the opportunity to explore *designing joint projects*, including the time centred around individual tables. They *would like more of that*, even if that means cutting down on the number of talks, relying more on posters or extending the meeting of half day. All delegates appreciated the *attention given to junior scholars* and regarded that as a hallmarks of an inclusive and welcoming conference. We want to see that in the future too. As conference organizers, we regret that we surveyed all attending delegates for a variety of specific needs, but failed to directly *ask about disability* and cater for that in some of our social events. This is something we recommend future organizers to do.

### **Final comments from the conference organizers, opportunities and challenges ahead**

As conference organizers, we are proud of having had the opportunity to facilitate such a productive and successful event and hope that SASP and SPSSI will jointly sponsor many more meetings of this kind to come. **Stefania Paolini**, on behalf of the entire scientific committee, explains that: *“The conference reflects and is a testimony to the high quality of the work that many dedicated researchers, research laboratories do around the world. It has been exciting to learn about cutting-edge paradigms, methods, and analytical approaches capable of unveiling the roots of intergroup prejudice and discrimination and work to find ways to increase social cohesion in a multitude of intergroup settings, participant populations and societal contexts.”* She also added: *“The high quality gathering and its success will give further momentum to research in social cohesion. We need more good quality research that helps us get closer to the society and the world that we want to be.”*

The Newcastle specialized gathering showcased the **best research on the dynamics of intergroup contact** and social cohesion that is currently available on the international stage. It has offered senior and junior researchers a forum to discuss data from a variety of research laboratories, methods, and societal settings. With so much goodness at hand, we wanted the legacy of the Newcastle meeting to live long and produce fruits beyond Newcastle. Hence, we have captured it in a **video-library of conference presentations** that is now accessible worldwide on YOUTUBE and via the conference website at <https://sasp.org.au/2018/09/sasp-spssi-group-meeting-2019/> for wider community’s consumption and enjoyment.

The impact of the Newcastle group meeting will also reverberate to the broader community of scientists, policy makers, and practitioners through an **upcoming special issue on intergroup contact of the Journal of Social Issues** edited by Stefania Paolini, Linda Tropp, Fiona Barlow, Fiona White, Liz Page-Gould and Angel Gomez. The special issue ‘in-the-making’ will have seven core articles by brand new collaborative groups of junior and more established scholars that the meeting has helped bring together. The **core articles** will review consolidated and emerging evidence in focal areas of intergroup contact. They will identify consolidated knowledge and implications for policy and interventions of research on *contact seeking, developmental and intimacy-building processes, indirect contact and norms, generalization processes, negative contact, collective action and social change, technological and analytical advancements*. The special issue will also feature six **position and commentary papers** by pre-eminent scholars—including Tom Pettigrew, Linda Tropp, John Dixon and Shelly McKeown, Jake Harwood—helping us reflect on the state of the arts of intergroup contact research and future challenges for research and implementation.

Finally, one of the meeting delegates has helped us understand our next challenge and what future meetings might need to look like by commenting: *“I think it would be good to find ways to bring in more voices from outside the academy. In this case, that might have included people from government who handle, for example, immigration resettlement schemes or who diversity training programs in schools, or any number of other things. I think it would be good for academics to hear from such people, and for them to hear the range of academic work being done. And ultimately I hope such interactions would help generate more problem-focused research that leads to greater adoption and impact.”* We see this as an aspirational commitment for this committee and for those to come.

To learn more about the 2019 SASP-SPSSI meeting on intergroup contact, visit the conference website: <https://sasp.org.au/2018/09/sasp-spssi-group-meeting-2019/>.

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**Scientific Organizing Committee:** Stefania Paolini (the University of Newcastle, Australia), Fiona White (University of Sydney, Australia), Fiona Barlow (The University of Queensland, Australia), Linda

*Tropp (University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA), Liz Page-Gould (University of Toronto, Canada), Rhiannon Turner (Queen's University Belfast, UK), Angel Gomez (National Distance Education University, Spain) and Miles Hewstone (Oxford University, UK).*

We thank the **Local Organizing Committee** because without their tireless effort the meeting would not have been possible and would not have been so much fun. In no special order, we thank: *Yasser Saeedian, Jessica Boin, Alexander O'Donnell, Romany McGuffog, Scott Turnbull, Stephanie Hardacre, Cainan Roncati, Monica Gendi, Rebekah Bolton, Katrina Tillock, Richard Turner, Steve Quick, Oliva Evans, Timothy Lang, many help-desk helpers and Stefania Paolini for shepherding all.*

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