

You Had to Be There: Fans' National Identity in Shared Spaces at the Rio 2016 Olympics

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Diverse social contexts are often accompanied by conflict based on group identities, complex histories of oppression, and generally negative attitudes toward outgroup members. Sport, however, provides spaces in which compatible identities supersede conflicting ones, and diversity can consequently drive positive shifts in attitudes and behaviors toward others. Guided by concepts from Intergroup Contact Theory, I asked fans at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro to discuss specific factors that were relevant to their experiences at the event - factors reported in previous research to reduce prejudice and foster positive intergroup contact. At present, I focus on factors most relevant to national identity and shared, public spaces and objects. Overt, often exuberant displays of national identity played important roles in initiating positive intergroup experiences, and fan interviewees emphasized many ways that public areas and objects facilitated this contact and could have been better prepared for this purpose. These findings help develop theoretical contributions and practical suggestions and templates for organizers of intergroup contexts, particularly sporting events.