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Imagined contact facilitates acculturation, *sometimes***: Contradicting evidence from two**

socio-cultural contexts

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Abstract

Objective. Imagined intergroup contact has been shown to be an effective tool to improve intergroup relationships in various settings, yet the application of the strategy among minority group members and across cultures has been scarce. The current research aimed to test imagined contact effects on minority group members' acculturation strategies (contact participation and culture maintenance), perceived discrimination, feelings of belongingness, and social acceptance across three studies conducted in the UK (Study 1) and Turkey (Study 2 and 3).

Method. The sample consisted of Eastern Europeans in Study 1 ($N = 63$) and Kurds in Study 2 and 3 ($N = 66$ and 210, respectively). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (control vs. imagined contact) and completed measures of acculturation, perceived discrimination, general belongingness, and social acceptance.

Results. Findings showed that while imagined contact significantly reduced perceived discrimination and culture maintenance, and increased contact participation and social acceptance among Eastern Europeans (Study 1), it reduced social acceptance and contact participation among Kurds recruited from a conflict-ridden homogeneous setting (Study 2). With a larger and more heterogeneous sample of Kurds (Study 3), these effects occurred only among those with higher ingroup identification. Moreover, in all studies social acceptance mediated the effects of imagined contact on contact participation and perceived discrimination.

Discussion. Findings offer important insights about the use of the imagined contact strategy among minority group members and imply the need to take into account the context-dependent nature of contact strategies.

Keywords: Imagined contact; acculturation; discrimination; minority; identification

Imagined contact facilitates acculturation, *sometimes*: Contradicting evidence from two socio-cultural contexts

Thanks to ample research examining contact effects on intergroup processes, it is now known that contact reduces prejudice and improves intergroup relationships, especially under the right conditions (e.g., Allport, 1954; Hodson & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Moreover, there is now consistent information about which social psychological mechanisms explain the contact-attitude association and which factors play a pivotal role in the effectiveness of contact on intergroup relationships. For example, reduced intergroup anxiety and increased empathy have been found to explain how intergroup contact reduces negative outgroup attitudes, while group status and contact valence have been indicated to moderate this association (e.g., Dovidio, Love, Schellhaas, & Hewstone, 2017; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). More recent research trends in this field have been directed towards examining a) the role of indirect forms of contact on intergroup relationships (Dovidio, Eller, & Hewstone, 2011), b) contact's benefits for minority group members (Tropp, Mazziotta, & Wright, 2017), and c) the impact of socio-cultural environment in which contact is experienced (e.g., Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Stathi, Husnu, & Pendleton, 2017; Tropp, Hawi, O'Brien, Gheorghiu, Zetes, & Butz, 2017).

Acknowledging the above trends in the literature, it is especially important to consider how indirect contact interventions may promote acculturation and social integration among minority group members in various socio-cultural contexts. Previous direct and indirect contact studies have often focused on the reduction of prejudice among dominant group members, whereas the role of contact on the social integration of minority group members has only recently started to attract scholarly attention. On one hand, minority group members still

encounter pervasive discrimination that is often a critical antecedent of negative psychological

health outcomes (e.g., Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014), while on the other hand,

they confront complex psychosocial processes that involve merging into the society by engaging

in contact with dominant group members and successfully maintaining a heritage culture that is

part of their social identities. These two processes that are often referred to as 'contact

participation' and 'culture maintenance' are, in turn, suggested to be strong indicators of

minority groups' psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997; Ward, 2008). Thus,

we argue that it is important to explore if, and how, imagined contact, which is an effective

alternative to direct contact in segregated settings (Husnu & Crisp, 2010), impacts minority

groups' acculturation, as the implementation of the strategy can provide an initial step toward

promoting social integration. Across three studies, the current research aims to test imagined

contact effects on contact participation and culture maintenance, as well as perceived

discrimination among two minority groups recruited from two different socio-cultural contexts,

Eastern Europeans in the UK and Kurds in Turkey.

Imagined contact theory

Recent intergroup contact literature has shown that, instead of direct contact strategies

which require contact between group members to be face-to-face and intimate, indirect contact

strategies which do not necessitate the presence of any actual contact may offer a practical, yet

efficient way of providing many of the benefits of direct contact such as improved outgroup

attitudes, behavioral intentions, and intergroup trust (for meta-analysis see Miles & Crisp, 2014).

In particular, imagined contact (Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007) which consists of the mental

simulation of a positive intergroup encounter has recently attracted contact researchers' interest.

The growing literature on imagined contact research has shown that asking participants to

imagine a pleasant and interesting conversation with an outgroup member is likely to reduce implicit and explicit prejudice (Turner & Crisp, 2010; Vezzali, Capozza, Stathi, & Giovannini, 2012), intergroup anxiety (Turner, West, & Christie, 2013), stereotyping (Stathi, Tsantila, & Crisp, 2012), and perceived threat (Bagci, Piyale, Bircek, & Ebcim, 2017), while promoting contact self-efficacy (Stathi, Crisp, & Hogg, 2011), outgroup trust (Vezzali, Capozza, Stathi, et. al, 2012), positive behavioral intentions (Husnu & Crisp, 2010; Stathi, Cameron, Hartley, & Bradford, 2014), cooperation (Kuchenbrandt, Eyssel, & Seidel, 2013), humanization (Prati & Loughnan, 2018), and outgroup projection of positive traits (Stathi & Crisp, 2008). A meta-analytic research study including 70 studies indicated imagined contact effects to be robust, even in the absence of some moderators, showing the substantial influence of the strategy in various intergroup contexts (Miles & Crisp, 2014).

Imagined contact among minority group members. Although imagined contact research has flourished in recent years (Miles & Crisp, 2014), the application of the strategy among minority group members has been scarce. The direct contact literature has shown that although minority status group members also benefit from intergroup contact, these effects are often weaker relative to majority group members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Since minority group members experience greater levels of intergroup anxiety and perceive discrimination to a greater extent (e.g., Pinel, 2002), and often engage in intergroup contact for different reasons compared to majority group members (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006), they are less likely to enjoy intergroup contact and consequently less likely to benefit from contact effects (Pinel, 2002; Stathi & Crisp, 2008). Nevertheless, direct intergroup contact may also influence intergroup processes among minority group members by improving their outgroup attitudes and reducing intergroup anxiety and perceived discrimination (e.g., Dixon, Durrheim,

Tredoux, Tropp, Clack, & Eaton, 2010; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Mahonen, & Liebkind, 2011; Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997).

The perspective of minority group members has been even less studied in indirect contact research. Stathi and Crisp (2008, Study 1) examined the effect of imagined contact on projection of positive traits to the outgroup among Indigenous (ethnic minority) and Mestizo (ethnic majority) people in Mexico and found that the strategy increased outgroup projection of positive traits only among majority group members. A further study by Bagci, Piyale, and Ebcim (2018, Study 3) tested the effects of imagined contact among Kurds in Turkey and found that imagined contact did not improve outgroup attitudes towards the majority Turks, but reduced perceived discrimination (marginally) and intergroup anxiety, and increased perceived positive outgroup attitudes from the majority group. These findings suggest that the imagined contact strategy may also change intergroup processes among minority group members, although it may not directly improve positive outgroup attitudes and behaviors towards the majority group.

The role of socio-cultural context in imagined contact. Previous direct contact literature has made considerable effort to test the effects of contact in various socio-cultural settings. Researchers have suggested that intergroup contact may be an even more important predictor of intergroup attitudes in settings characterized by a history of violence and conflict (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013). Direct positive contact has been shown to lead to greater reconciliation support, greater levels of forgiveness, and greater trust in contexts such as Northern Ireland, South Africa and Cyprus, where conflict and segregation have been inseparable aspects of intergroup relationships for several years (e.g., Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Stathi et al., 2017). Less is known about how the socio-cultural context may influence the effects of imagined contact, but

the benefits of the strategy have been suggested to be even more pronounced when direct positive contact is not likely to occur naturally. For example, Husnu and Crisp (2010) tested imagined contact effects in Cyprus and suggested that imagined contact may be especially important in socially segregated societies. Paolini, Harwood, Rubin, Husnu, Joyce, and Hewstone (2014) tested imagined contact effects in Southern Arizona and Cyprus and demonstrated that the valence-salience effects of imagined contact were reduced among participants with positive and extensive direct contact in the past. This suggests that imagined contact may lead to a diverse range of outcomes in various socio-cultural settings, where intergroup relationships are characterized by different levels of conflict.

Imagined contact and acculturation. Although previous imagined contact researchers have focused on an extended range of outcomes (see Miles & Crisp, 2014), these outcomes were often based on the perspective of the majority group, aiming at reducing explicit and implicit prejudice (e.g., Vezzali et al., 2012). While this approach has provided ample support for the benefits of imagined contact in changing majority group members' attitudes towards the minority group, it cannot address whether the strategy can successfully target variables more closely related to minority groups, for example acculturation variables. According to Berry's acculturation model (1997), acculturation may be assessed along two dimensions; a) the extent to which minority groups desire to maintain their culture (i.e., culture maintenance), and b) the extent to which minority groups desire to have contact with majority group members or the majority society in general (i.e., contact participation). A successful adaptation to the host culture often occurs as a result of an integrationist acculturation strategy, in which minority groups strive to maintain their heritage culture, while at the same time connecting with the majority group members.

Findings in the literature have shown intergroup contact to be related to acculturative tendencies among minority and majority group members (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2004). Surprisingly, only few studies have empirically tested the association between intergroup contact and social integration (Bastian, Lusher, & Ata, 2012). Moreover, the majority of the relevant research studies have often examined the role of acculturation strategies on intergroup relations and contact, and investigated whether contact was related to acculturation preferences among majority group members (Gonzalez & Brown, 2017; Sam & Berry, 2010). For example, Gonzalez, Sirlopu, and Kessler (2010) showed that intergroup contact was associated with acculturation preferences among Peruvians in Chile and that minorities favoring integration and assimilation styles reported more contact with native Chileans. Zagefka and Brown (2002) found that integration strategy led to more favorable intergroup attitudes among immigrants in Germany. Other research demonstrated that minorities' culture maintenance was related to more negative outgroup attitudes among majority group members (Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Zagefka, Brown, Broquard, & Martin, 2007). Directly testing the association between contact and acculturation preferences in a longitudinal study, Gonzalez and Brown (2017) demonstrated that cross-group friendships with Peruvians (minority group) increased preference for minority culture maintenance among Chilean students (majority group) through increased trust towards Peruvians.

Nevertheless, previous studies provide only limited knowledge about how contact may affect acculturation preferences among minority group members. Importantly, there is no research to date that explores the potential role of imagined contact on acculturation preferences. Previous research has shown imagined contact to promote future contact intentions towards immigrants (Vezzali et al., 2012) and increase the tendency to approach other group members

rather than avoiding them (West et al., 2011), which suggests that the strategy is likely to promote approach intentions which are closely linked to contact participation. On the other hand, the role of imagined contact on culture maintenance is less straightforward. We propose that imagined contact will lead to lower levels of culture maintenance (such as interest and value in one's own culture, desire to engage in same-culture contact), based on previous research showing that contact is associated with higher social distance from the ingroup (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010). This suggestion is based on the premise that intergroup contact would lead to a less ethnocentric view of the world and thereby increase 'deprovincialization', a process which involves distancing oneself from the ingroup (Brewer, 2008; Pettigrew, 1997). Furthermore, research has shown that when seeking to promote their groups' goals, some minority groups favor one-group representations in their interactions with the majority group, which tangentially corresponds to assimilation preferences (Guerra, Rebelo, Monteiro, & Gaertner, 2013). Thereby, imagined contact with the outgroup is likely to result in a similar effect, where minority group members would be less likely to desire maintaining their heritage culture after being exposed to a successful imagined intergroup experience.

Imagined contact and perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination is a prevalent aspect of intergroup relationships in many social contexts where status differences are visible. Evidence from direct contact literature has shown intergroup contact to directly reduce perceived discrimination among minorities (Dixon et al., 2010; Tropp, Hawi, Van Laar, & Levin, 2012), and cross-group friendships to buffer the negative effects of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being (Bagci, Rutland, Kumashiro, Smith, & Blumberg, 2014). Therefore, it could be expected that imagined contact would also lead to lower perceived discrimination. In fact, Bagci et al. (2018, Study 3) has shown that imagined contact reduced (marginally)

perceived discrimination among ethnic Kurds in Turkey. We aimed to replicate this finding and extend it by testing this hypothesis among another ethnic minority group recruited from a different socio-cultural context and examining processes that mediate the potential effect of imagined contact on perceived discrimination.

Underlying processes: Social acceptance and belongingness

We further investigated whether the effects of imagined contact on acculturation preferences and perceived discrimination would be explained by increased social acceptance and belongingness. Research shows that ethnic minority groups often feel isolated and rejected, especially in settings where they are surrounded by majority group members (e.g., Branscombe, Scmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Indeed, studies with minority group members have emphasized that one of the reasons why minority group members avoid intergroup contact is because they fear exclusion and discriminatory attitudes (e.g., Pinel, 2002). Minority group members may display a significant amount of intergroup anxiety and thereby refrain from engaging in further intergroup experiences (e.g., Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Stephan, 2014). Direct contact strategies, in addition to reducing discrimination and negative outgroup attitudes, may also combat these feelings by providing positive expectations from the part of the majority group (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). For example, Mendoza-Denton and Page-Gould (2008) demonstrated that direct contact can improve feelings of belongingness of ethnic minority students at predominantly White universities.

Research has also indicated intergroup contact to be associated with intercultural (Tawagi & Mak, 2015) and relational inclusiveness (Kawabata & Crick, 2008). Moreover, it has been found that imagined contact facilitated intercultural communication and the integration of students in academic exchange programs (Vezzali, Crisp, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, &

Gaertner, 2015), and increased positive expectancies from the outgroup (Bagci et al., 2018). The above provide initial evidence for the role of imagined contact on feelings of social acceptance and belongingness. Hence, we hypothesized that imagined contact will produce positive psychological outcomes among minorities, especially regarding their perceived social acceptance by the majority group and feelings of belongingness.

Overview of studies

The aim of the current research was to test imagined contact effects on acculturation preferences (culture maintenance and contact participation), perceived discrimination, general belongingness, and social acceptance among two minority groups recruited from two socio-cultural contexts, Eastern Europeans in the UK (Study 1) and ethnic Kurds in Turkey (Study 2 and 3). The current research extends knowledge in imagined and direct contact literatures not only in terms of investigating imagined contact among minority group members and in relation to acculturation variables, but also exploring our research questions cross-culturally using two different societies. Previous research examining direct and indirect contact effects cross-culturally is rare, but indispensable given the context-dependent nature of contact strategies. The two settings in our study are different in terms of various cultural and socio-political factors, but above all as regards the history of the intergroup relationships. While the UK context is characterized by subtle and mainly non-violent forms of intergroup discrimination, the Turkish context is characterized by open and prolonged conflict between the groups, providing an opportunity to compare imagined contact effects across two distinct intergroup settings.

We suggest that imagining a positive intergroup encounter would lead minority group members to have greater willingness to participate in the larger society, i.e. contact participation (such as liking the dominant society, interacting with and learning more about the other culture,

etc.) and reduce culture maintenance (such as interest and value in one's own culture, etc.) and perceived discrimination. We further expect that social acceptance and belongingness would mediate these effects. While high levels of belongingness and social acceptance should be negatively associated with perceived discrimination (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Verkuyten, 1997), these processes should relate to higher willingness to participate in the larger society and lower effort to maintain heritage culture by providing self-confidence and efficacy to succeed in the host country (e.g., Detrie & Lease, 2007). Therefore, we predict that imagined contact will increase social acceptance and belongingness which will in turn a) increase contact participation, b) decrease culture maintenance, and c) decrease perceived discrimination.

Study 1

Study 1 aimed to test our research questions among the Eastern European community in the UK. Over the past few years, the relatively stable economy in the UK compared to other European Union countries has attracted a large number of economic immigrants. The 2004 expansion of the European Union further facilitated the movement of large waves of immigrants to the UK, predominantly coming from Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. In 2015, 29% of EU immigrants in the UK were Polish (Wadsworth, Dhingra, Ottaviano, & Van Reenen, 2016), while Eastern Europeans in general are among the most prevalent minority groups in the country. Integration and lay perceptions regarding acculturation are pivotal for Eastern European immigrants; in depth interviews with Eastern Europeans in Scotland, for example, suggested that creating connections with host communities can be a challenge for the immigrant group (Shubin & Dickey, 2013). Spencer, Ruhs, Anderson and Rogaly (2007) further found that Eastern (and Central) European immigrants spend little time with British people, and that one in four

participants had not established social connections with the host community two years after their move to the UK; rather, they worked and socialized with other immigrants.

Social psychological research focusing on Eastern Europeans in the UK is largely absent, so it is crucial to shed light on strategies that can enhance successful acculturation in the British society. Recently, the social climate surrounding the referendum regarding the UK's exit from the European Union, the so-called Brexit, has been rather negative for minorities living in the country. In particular, debates on what constitutes "Britishness" have arisen and have directly targeted the suggested benefits of multiculturalism (Lowe, 2017), while hate crimes against minority groups have increased (Corcoran & Smith, 2016), with Eastern Europeans often being victimized (Taylor, 2016). In this context, it is important to understand processes that predict and underlie acculturation preferences among members of this minority group and examine whether imagined contact may be an effective strategy to facilitate Eastern Europeans' acculturation in the British society.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited a total of 64 Eastern European participants (M_{age} = 33.27, SD = 10.64, 24 males and 40 females). The majority of the participants indicated their ethnic background to be Polish (79.7%), followed by Lithuanian (6.3%), Hungarian and Bulgarian (each 4.7%), Romanian (3.1%), and Croatian (1.6%) backgrounds. The mean subjective socio-economic status in the sample was 2.34 (SD = 2.92) on a range from 1 (*poor*) to 4 (*wealthy*).

Data were collected online through social media and the internet with the help of a research assistant who promoted the study among Eastern Europeans living in the UK. Ethical

approval for the research was obtained by the lead University and participants were given a detailed informed consent highlighting ethical procedures involved in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to two conditions ($N_{control}$ = 34 and $N_{contact}$ = 30). In the imagined contact condition, participants were asked to think about a random midday sitting in a familiar café, where they meet an unknown British person and start a conversation for 20-30 minutes. Participants were asked to imagine that the contact they had with the British stranger was *pleasant* and *interesting*; and they were then given two minutes to describe this encounter in writing with as many or as few details as they wanted (see Bagci et al., 2017; Stathi & Crisp, 2008 for a similar procedure). In the control condition, participants were asked to engage in the mental imagery of a hiking trip, and were also given two minutes to write down details of their imagined script (Stathi & Crisp, 2008).

Measures

All measures were responded on a Likert point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Acculturation. Acculturation was measured along two dimensions: *contact participation in the larger society* and *culture maintenance* (Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, & Haslam, 2015). While the participation component included eight items which assessed the extent to which participants are interested in joining the dominant culture (e.g., "I would like to live in an area where there are British people"), culture maintenance included nine items measuring the extent to which participants are inclined to maintain their heritage culture (e.g., "I enjoy going to gatherings or parties from people of my own nationality"). Both scales were found to have good reliability (α = .77 and .83, respectively).

Perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination was measured by a four-item scale previously used by Verkuyten and Yildiz (2006). Example items were: "Discrimination against minorities has increased in recent times" and "In general, minorities are treated unequally in British society". The scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .87$).

Belongingness. We measured belongingness by the 12-item General Belongingness Scale by Malone, Pillow, and Osman (2012). Items assessed the general level of social inclusion participants perceived (e.g., "I feel connected with others" and "I feel isolated from the rest of the world (R)"). One item was discarded, because it reduced reliability ("I have close bonds with family and friends"). The overall scale showed good reliability after the exclusion of this item ($\alpha = .76$).

Social acceptance. Social acceptance was assessed by the public self-regard component of the Collective Self-esteem Scale designed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992); the measure consisted of four items assessing the level of social acceptance perceived by minority group members in the society (e.g., "Overall, my ethnic group members in general, are considered good by British people"). The reliability of the measure was good ($\alpha = .78$).

Manipulation checks and covariates. To ensure that the two conditions were comparable in terms of difficulty and interest, participants were asked to answer to what extent they found the mental imagery task difficult and interesting. Results indicated that condition had a significant effect on difficulty of the task, $t(62)= -3.13$, $p = .003$. The imagined contact condition ($M= 3.83$, $SD = 1.66$) was perceived as more difficult to imagine compared to the neutral condition ($M= 2.59$, $SD = 1.52$). Therefore, the difficulty of the task was added as a covariate in further analyses. The difference between the imagined contact and control condition in terms of interest was non-significant, $t(62) = -.07$, $p = .94$. We further considered English *language*

proficiency (rated from 1 = *low* to 7 = *high*) as a covariate, since previous research has shown

language proficiency to predict acculturation preferences (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder,

2006). Importantly, we also added *previous contact* with British people as a covariate, using a

single item: "Generally speaking, in your everyday life how much contact do you have with

British people?", measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a lot*). This variable has been previously

shown to be relevant in imagined contact studies (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2016), and it is important

to demonstrate any potential results of imagined contact above and beyond existing contact with

the outgroup.[1]

Results and Discussion

Group differences. A MANCOVA analysis was conducted to test the effect of condition

on belongingness, social acceptance, perceived discrimination, contact participation, and cultural

maintenance after controlling for difficulty of the task, previous contact, and language

proficiency as covariates. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of condition, $F(5,54)=$

3.33, Wilks' Lambda = .76, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .24$. Univariate effects showed that condition had no

significant main effect on belongingness, $F(1,58) = .16$, $p = .69$, $\eta^2_p = .003$, whereas it had a

significant effect on social acceptance, $F(1,58)= 5.25$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .08$, perceived

discrimination, $F(1,58)= 5.15$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .08$, contact participation, $F(1,58)= 5.98$, $p = .02$, η^2_p

= .09, and cultural maintenance, $F(1,58)= 4.76$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .08$. Compared to the neutral

condition, imagined contact condition led to lower levels of perceived discrimination ($M_{contact} =$

4.16, $SD= 1.53$; $M_{control} = 4.52$, $SD = 1.23$) and culture maintenance ($M_{contact} = 3.81$, $SD= 1.25$;

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[1] An initial examination of group differences revealed that participants in the control group ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.10$) and imagined contact condition ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.04$) were not different in terms of language proficiency, $t(62) = -1.69$, $p > .05$, whereas previous contact ratings were significantly higher in the imagined contact condition ($M = 6.43$, $SD = .90$) compared to the control condition ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.37$), $t(57.41) = -2.33$, $p < .05$.

$M_{control}$ = 4.35, *SD* = 0.80). On the other hand, participants in the imagined contact condition

reported higher levels of social acceptance ($M_{contact}$ = 4.79, *SD*= 1.06; $M_{control}$ = 4.44, *SD* = 1.17)

and contact participation ($M_{contact}$ = 5.99, *SD*= 0.62; $M_{control}$ = 5.60, *SD* = 0.82) compared to the

control condition. Figure 1 illustrates means and standard deviations across groups.

----------------------------Insert Figure 1----------------------------

Indirect effects. Three different mediation analyses were performed using PROCESS

Macros (Model 4, Hayes, 2013). Since condition was not significantly related to belongingness,

we did not include this variable as a mediator in further analyses. Models included condition as

the independent variable, social acceptance as the mediator, and contact participation, cultural

maintenance, and perceived discrimination as dependent variables. Also, previous contact,

language proficiency, and difficulty of the task were added as covariates. We applied the

bootstrapping procedure (5000 samples) using 95% confidence intervals to test for indirect

effects.

In our first model predicting contact participation, condition (coded as 0 = control and 1

= contact) was a significant predictor of social acceptance (*B* = .69, *p* = .02). In turn, the

association between social acceptance and contact participation was also significant and positive

(*B* = .21, *p* = .01). Further bootstrapping results indicated a significant mediation (*B* = .15, *SE* =

.10, 95% CI [.02, .44]). Our second mediation model predicting culture maintenance indicated

that none of the covariates significantly predicted the dependent variable. Findings further

showed that social acceptance was not a significant predictor of cultural maintenance (*B* = .16, *p*

= .20). In turn, the mediating effect of social acceptance on the relationship between condition

and cultural maintenance was not significant (*B* = .11, *SE* = .12, 95% CI [-.07, .44]). In a final

model predicting perceived discrimination, social acceptance was a significant predictor of

perceived discrimination ($B = -.50$, $p = .001$). Further bootstrapping analysis indicated that social acceptance significantly mediated the relationship between condition and perceived discrimination ($B = -.35$, $SE = .26$, 95% CI [-1.06, -.02]).

In summary, as hypothesized, we found imagined contact to have consistent significant effects; Eastern European participants who imagined a positive intergroup encounter with an unknown British person reported greater willingness to participate in the larger society and lower willingness to maintain heritage culture, lower levels of perceived discrimination, and higher levels of social acceptance. Moreover, social acceptance significantly mediated the effect of condition on contact participation and perceived discrimination, such that imagined contact increased contact participation and decreased perceived discrimination through enhancing the perception of social acceptance. Although Study 1 provided strong evidence for the effectiveness of imagined contact among minority group members, it depicted only a specific socio-cultural context and a specific minority group. We aimed to extend these findings by replicating our study in a substantially different context with a different ethnic minority group.

Study 2

In Study 2, we focused on the complex Turkish-Kurdish interethnic relationship in Turkey. The Kurdish population in Turkey makes up almost 18% of the total population (Konda, 2011) and constitutes the largest ethnic/cultural minority group in the society. The majority of Kurdish people live in the Eastern and Southeastern parts of Turkey, where they form the numerical majority of the population, although the numbers have also increased in the West of Turkey as a result of mass displacements of some Kurdish groups. The minority status assigned to the Kurdish community is not official and the use of Kurdish language has been banned for years, leading Kurdish people to become a part of the Turkish national group (e.g., Uluğ &

Cohrs, 2017). The assimilationist attitudes of the Turkish government over the years have led

Kurdish group members to be an oppressed minority culture (e.g., Bagci & Çelebi, 2017;

Bikmen & Sunar, 2013; Yeğen, 1996). As a result, although different conflict narratives such as

the denial of the conflict, the terrorism frame, or the nation state frame have been distinguished

to characterize the conflict (Çelik & Blum, 2007), mass killings from both sides and the

displacement of many others to different cities have resulted in the gradual deterioration of

Turkish-Kurdish relationships, which have fluctuated over the years due to different socio-

political approaches in the government (e.g., Çelebi, Verkuyten, Köse, & Maliepaard, 2014).

Data for this study were collected in 2017 from *Cizre*, which is a small town located in the

Southeast of Turkey. In 2016, Cizre, was exposed to heavily armed conflict encounters between

separatists groups and the Turkish military which has led to mass killings from both sides and

displacement of thousands of people to other cities and towns (Kamer, 2016).

Social psychological research investigating Kurdish ethnic minority groups' experiences

in the conflict has been scarce (but see Bagci & Celebi, 2017; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2016), but showed

Kurds as a stigmatized minority group for whom perceived discrimination is a prevalent aspect

of social life (Icduygu, Romano, & Sirkeci, 1999). A recent national survey demonstrated that

many Kurds may not freely affirm their ethnic identities (Konda, 2011) and report holding

negative outgroup stereotypes (Bilali, Çelik, & Ok, 2014). Other research has shown that direct

contact, in the form of cross-group friendships, was associated with positive outgroup attitudes

and support for multiculturalism among the Kurds (Bagci & Celebi, 2017). Bagci et al. (2018,

Study 3) have previously tested the effects of imagined contact among this group and

demonstrated imagined contact to reduce intergroup anxiety and perceived discrimination

(marginally) and increase perceived positive outgroup attitudes. Hence, these findings suggest

that imagined contact may be an effective strategy that can potentially change the intergroup perceptions and acculturation strategies of this minority group.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 67 participants who self-identified as Kurdish took part in the study (M_{age} = 31.62, SD = 9.71, 42 males, 24 females, and 1 unknown). The mean subjective SES measured on a scale from 1 (*poor*) to 4 (*wealthy*) was 2.21 (SD = .67). Participants were recruited through online questionnaires with the help of research assistants who collected data in public places. Participants were allocated randomly to two different conditions ($N_{control}$ = 35 and $N_{contact}$ = 32). Similar to Study 1, participants were provided with informed consents stating the ethical procedures involved in the study, and were debriefed and thanked upon completion of the study. Both imagined contact and control conditions were exactly the same as in Study 1, except that in Study 2 participants imagined interacting with an unknown Turkish person during the imagined contact scenario.

Measures

All responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The same measures as in Study 1 were used. Specifically, acculturation preferences (see Study 1) were measured on two dimensions, *contact participation in the larger society* and *culture maintenance*. One item was discarded from the participation scale ("I don't want to learn more things about the Turkish culture") which resulted in satisfactory reliability (α = .77 for contact participation and α = .86 for culture maintenance). *Perceived discrimination* was measured by four items and assessed the extent to which participants felt discrimination in

the society (see Study 1, α = .93). *Belongingness* was measured by 12 items (see Study 1) and showed excellent reliability (α = .93). *Social acceptance* was measured by the public self-regard component of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-esteem Scale (see Study 1, α = .64).

Manipulation checks and covariates. As in Study 1, participants were asked to answer to what extent they found the task difficult and interesting. Independent sample t-tests revealed that condition has a significant effect on both difficulty, $t(65)= -2.97$, $p = .004$, and interest, $t(37.54)= 6.28$, $p < .001$. Results showed that the task in the imagined contact condition was perceived to be more difficult ($M_{contact} = 3.32$, $SD= 1.89$; $M_{control} = 1.91$, $SD = 1.96$) and less interesting by participants ($M_{contact} = 4.94$, $SD= 1.52$; $M_{control} = 6.71$, $SD = 0.52$). Therefore, difficulty and interest were considered as covariates for further analyses. We further included previous contact and Turkish language proficiency (see Study 1) as covariates. We also added a measure of ethnic identity (measured prior to manipulation) in the covariate list, as it is a critical aspect of interethnic relationships in the context of Turkish-Kurdish conflict and has been previously found to play a role in the process of acculturation (Liebkind, 2006). To measure ethnic identity, a six-item MEIM (Multiple Ethnic Identity Measure, Homma, Zumbo, Saewyc, & Wong, 2014) was used (e.g., "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group"). The scale's reliability was excellent (α = .97).[2]

Results and Discussion

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[2] An examination of initial group differences showed that conditions were similar in terms of ethnic identification, $t(58.74) = -1.96$, $p > .05$ ($M_{contact} = 5.61$, $SD = 1.22$; $M_{control} = 5.08$, $SD = .95$) and language proficiency, $t(64) = .75$, $p > .05$, ($M_{contact} = 5.84$, $SD = 1.14$; $M_{control} = 6.03$, $SD = .87$); whereas there was a significant difference in terms of previous contact ratings, $t(50.65) = -3.01$, $p < .01$, ($M_{contact} = 5.28$, $SD = 1.55$ and $M_{control} = 4.32$, $SD = .94$).

Group differences. A MANCOVA analysis with difficulty and interest of the task, previous contact, language proficiency, and ethnic identification as covariates were performed in order to test the effects of imagined contact manipulation on belongingness, perceived discrimination, collective self-esteem, contact participation, and cultural maintenance. Results indicated that condition had a significant multivariate main effect, $F(5, 55)= 4.55$, Wilks' Lambda $= .71$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .29$. A further investigation of each dependent variable demonstrated that condition had a significant main effect on social acceptance, $F(1, 59)= 7.27$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, and a marginally significant effect on participation in the larger society, $F(1, 59)= 3.75$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2_p = .057$. However, the effect was in the opposite direction from the hypothesized one. Compared to participants in the control condition, participants in the imagined contact condition reported lower levels of social acceptance ($M_{contact} = 3.73$, $SD= 1.47$; $M_{control} = 4.56$, $SD = 0.78$) and lower levels of contact participation ($M_{contact} = 4.40$, $SD= 1.05$; $M_{control} = 4.74$, $SD = 0.81$). There were no significant main effects on belongingness, perceived discrimination, and culture maintenance. Figure 2 displays means and standard deviations across conditions.[3]

----------------------------Insert Figure 2----------------------------

Indirect effects. Three mediation analyses were performed using PROCESS Macros (Model 4) to investigate the mediating effect of social acceptance on the relationship between condition and contact participation, cultural maintenance, and perceived discrimination after controlling for the difficulty and interest of the task, previous contact, language proficiency, and ethnic identification as covariates. In a first model predicting contact participation, condition

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[3] In additional analyses, we checked whether previous direct contact and ingroup identification moderated the effects of imagined contact on perceived discrimination and acculturation variables. None of the moderation analyses emerged as significant.

(coded as 0 = control and 1 = imagined contact condition) was negatively associated with social acceptance (B = -1.22, p = .009) and social acceptance was in turn significantly associated with contact participation (B = .26, p = .006). The indirect effect of condition on participation through social acceptance was also significant (B = -.32, SE = .20, 95% CI [-.83, -.03]), suggesting the significant mediational role of social acceptance. In a second mediation model, we tested whether social acceptance mediated the effects of imagined contact on culture maintenance. Social acceptance was negatively associated with culture maintenance (B = -.35, p = .001). The mediational path on culture maintenance through social acceptance was significant (B = .43, SE = .18, 95% CI [.15, .89]). A final mediation test on perceived discrimination indicated that social acceptance was negatively associated with perceived discrimination (B = -.60, p < .001). The indirect effect between imagined contact and perceived discrimination via social acceptance was significant, (B = .74, SE = .29, 95% CI [.24, 1.45]). Therefore, imagined contact was negatively related to culture maintenance and perceived discrimination through reduced social acceptance.

In summary, Study 2 investigated whether the suggested hypotheses in Study 1 would replicate among a different minority group recruited from a different socio-cultural context. Findings demonstrated that, contrary to Study 1 which showed imagined contact strategy to promote contact participation and social acceptance and reduce culture maintenance and perceived discrimination among Eastern Europeans in the UK, imagined contact led to decreased perceptions of social acceptance among the Kurds, and social acceptance was in turn positively associated with contact participation, and negatively associated with culture maintenance and perceived discrimination. The findings of Study 2 are also inconsistent with previous research indicating imagined contact to decrease perceived discrimination and improve perceived majority group's outgroup attitudes among Kurds (Bagci et al., 2018). Therefore, we conducted

Study 3 with the aim of clarifying the inconsistent results and contributing to a better understanding of the conditions under which imagined contact facilitates or hinders acculturative processes.

Study 3

Compared to Study 2, Study 3 included a more diverse and representative sample of Kurds recruited from both Eastern and Western parts of Turkey, which should help eliminate context-bound effects, allow greater heterogeneity among participants and thus, generalizability of results. We also further suggest that one primary variable that would moderate the effects of imagined contact on acculturation preferences and perceived discrimination would be ingroup (ethnic) identification. Although Study 2 did not provide evidence for the moderating role of ingroup identification, this study included participants solely from a specific, conflict-ridden town in the East of Turkey, where Kurds constitute the numerically dominant group in the region. In Study 3, we collected data from a larger and more heterogeneous sample of Kurds in Turkey to allow a more stringent test of the role of ingroup identification as a moderator. In fact, ingroup identification is especially important in the Turkish-Kurdish context and in relation to Kurds' acculturation preferences, since Kurds represent an oppressed minority group that has been forced to assimilate over the years and has been fighting for the affirmation of its ethnic group identity (Bagci & Çelebi, 2018). Previous research has shown that direct and indirect contact effects on outgroup attitudes may be moderated by strength of ingroup membership, yet relevant studies provide mixed results. Stathi and Crisp (2008) showed that imagined contact effects on attitudes are less effective among those with higher ingroup identification, suggesting that high identifiers can be more resistant to contact strategies that involve close intergroup relationships. Other research has suggested that ingroup identification may render intergroup

differences even more salient during imagined contact and thereby make the strategy more effective among high identifiers (Bagci et al., 2018).

To our knowledge, no previous research has tested if ingroup identification moderates the imagined contact effects on acculturation and perceived discrimination among minority group members. Yet, ingroup identification should be a particularly relevant construct as regards acculturation tendencies, since it is a strong predictor of minority group members' host country identification (Nesdale & Mak, 2000) and support for multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Based on the findings of Study 2, we argue that ingroup identification will moderate the effects of imagined contact on acculturation preferences and perceived discrimination. Specifically, we expect to replicate the mediational path found in Study 2 only among high identifiers, since imagined contact is more likely to backfire among high identifying minority group members, for whom imagined contact would make intergroup differences more salient. Hence, we tested a moderated mediation model, in which imagined contact would affect acculturation and perceived discrimination through social acceptance and belongingness, and these mediational pathways would be moderated by ingroup identification.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A community sample of Kurdish adults ($N = 210$, 132 males, 78 females, $M_{age} = 27.10$, $SD = 7.73$; $M_{SES} = 2.12$, $SD = .75$) were recruited online from various cities in Western and Eastern parts of Turkey (e.g., Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Mersin, Diyarbakır, Van) with the help of research assistants (via snowball sampling). Participants were allocated randomly to one of two conditions ($N_{control} = 100$ and $N_{contact} = 110$), following the same procedure as in Study 1.

Measures

The same measures as in Study 2 were used.[4] The reliabilities for the main scales were satisfactory (α's ranging between .73 and .91). Ingroup identification was measured prior to the manipulation and was tested as a moderator.

Manipulation checks and covariates. The two conditions significantly differed in terms of task interest, $t(208) = 3.16$, $p = .002$ ($M_{control} = 5.11$, $SD = 1.89$; $M_{contact} = 4.27$, $SD = 1.95$), but not difficulty. As in Study 2, language proficiency, direct contact, and interest in task were used as covariates.

Results and Discussion

We initially conducted a MANCOVA to examine the main effects. The multivariate effect of condition was significant, $F(5, 200) = 2.79$, Wilks' Lambda = .94, $p = .02$, $\eta^2_p = .07$. Among univariate effects, there was a significant effect of condition on perceived discrimination, $F(1,204) = 6.57$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .03$; participants in the imagined contact condition reported greater level of discrimination ($M = 6.33$, $SD = .86$) compared to the ones in the control condition ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.25$), see Figure 3.

----------------------------Insert Figure 3----------------------------

To examine whether imagined contact affected contact participation, culture maintenance, and perceived discrimination via belongingness and social acceptance and whether ingroup identification moderated these mediations, PROCESS Macros (Model 8, Hayes, 2013) were used. The first model with contact participation as the dependent variable showed that

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[4] For the social acceptance measure, one item was discarded, since it reduced the overall reliability of the measure.

ingroup identification was directly and significantly associated with belongingness ($B = .30$, $p < .001$) and social acceptance ($B = -.23$, $p = .01$), but not with contact participation. Ingroup identification moderated the effects of imagined contact on social acceptance ($B = -.42$, $p = .02$), but not on belongingness. Findings demonstrated that imagined contact did not have a significant effect on social acceptance when ingroup identification was low ($B = .28$, $p = .23$), but decreased social acceptance when ingroup identification was high ($B = -.48$, $p = .04$). In turn, social acceptance was significantly associated with contact participation ($B = .27$, $p < .001$). The index of moderated mediation was significant ($B = -.11$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [-.23, -.02]). Conditional indirect effects indicated that social acceptance significantly mediated the association between condition and contact participation only when ingroup identification was high ($B = -.13$, $SE = .07$, 95% CI [-.31, -.01]).

A second model with culture maintenance as the dependent variable demonstrated a similar pattern; ingroup identification was positively associated with culture maintenance ($B = .52$, $p < .001$). Social acceptance, but not belongingness, was also negatively related to culture maintenance ($B = -.15$, $p = .01$). The moderated mediation was significant ($B = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.008, .13]) such that the mediation through social acceptance was also only significant for those with higher ingroup identification ($B = .07$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.0003, .18]). A final analysis with perceived discrimination as the dependent variable indicated that ingroup identification was significantly associated with higher perceived discrimination ($B = .21$, $p = .005$). Both belongingness and social acceptance were negatively associated with perceived discrimination ($B = -.16$, $p = .02$ and $B = -.26$, $p < .001$). The moderated mediation was significant (B = .11, SE = .06, 95% CI [.02, .24]) such that the mediational path from condition

to perceived discrimination via social acceptance was only significant among those with higher levels of ingroup identification ($B = .13$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI [.01, .32]).

Overall Study 3 provided evidence for the critical role of ingroup identification on acculturation outcomes and perceived discrimination, and showed that imagined contact reduced contact participation and increased perceived discrimination and culture maintenance through reduced social acceptance among those with higher ingroup identification. These findings are in line with previous research showing that people with high ingroup identification are not only more resistant to contact strategies (Stathi & Crisp, 2008), but even *reactive* to imagined contact as indicated by more negative integrational responses.

General Discussion

The current research placed, for the first time, imagined contact research in the acculturation context and tested the effects of the technique on acculturation preferences, perceived discrimination, belongingness, and social acceptance among two ethnic minority groups. Despite the rapidly growing literature on imagined contact, research that tests the technique among minority group members has been largely neglected (for exception, see Bagci et al., 2018, Stathi & Crisp, 2008). Additionally, cross-cultural research on the effectiveness of intergroup contact strategies is largely absent. We aimed to shed light on minority group responses to imagined contact by looking at Eastern European people in the UK (Study 1) and Kurdish people in Turkey (Study 2 and 3).

Study 1 showed that in the UK, imagined contact led to a significant decrease in perceived discrimination and culture maintenance, and a significant increase in contact participation and social acceptance among the Eastern European minority group. Moreover, it

was found that social acceptance significantly mediated the effects of imagined contact on reduced discrimination and increased contact participation. These findings provided initial evidence for the critical role of imagined intergroup contact on a minority group's perception of their own group by the majority and on willingness to participate in the larger society. In Study 2, we focused on an ethnic minority group with completely different social traits, recruited from a conflict-ridden society, Kurds in Turkey. The Turkish-Kurdish interethnic context is based on prolonged conflict that has spread to various layers of the society over the years. Hence, although imagined contact which involves a *positive* and *pleasant* intergroup encounter between the two groups has been suggested to be a beneficial strategy in improving positive intergroup relationships in conflict settings (e.g., Bagci et al., 2018; Husnu & Crisp, 2010), contact strategies may not unconditionally lead to positive intergroup perceptions among ethnic Kurds, who constitute a historically oppressed minority group in Turkey (Bagci & Çelebi, 2017). Hence, as opposed to our initial hypothesis, not only imagined contact was non-significant on the majority of our dependent measures, but it also *reduced* the sense of social acceptance which was then related to contact participation, culture maintenance and perceived discrimination among Kurdish group members recruited from a conflict-ridden Kurdish-dominated area. Partly replicating findings in Study 2 and including a larger and more heterogeneous Kurdish sample, Study 3 demonstrated that these effects occurred mainly among Kurds with higher ingroup identification.

The fact that we have opposing findings in the two settings is theoretically interesting and could be explained by various mechanisms. First of all, although direct contact literature has suggested contact to be even more effective in situations where perceived conflict is high and when groups are exposed to personal intergroup violence (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Tropp

et al., 2017), a more realistic outlook at the application of intergroup contact in real-life settings

has shown the possibility of the detrimental effects of contact, such as increased prejudice,

especially in threatening intergroup contexts (e.g., Bagci & Çelebi, 2017; Dixon, Durrheim, &

Tredoux, 2005; Pettigrew, 1997). The fact that negatively valenced contact may have negative

outgroup outcomes has now started to attract more attention from researchers (e.g., Graf, Paolini,

& Rubin, 2014); and contact, even in its strongest form such as cross-group friendships, may

have detrimental effects on outgroup attitudes under specific circumstances (Bagci & Çelebi,

2017) and may become counterproductive among minority groups by changing their conflict

perceptions (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017). In the context of Kurdish-Turkish relationships, perhaps

contact between the distinct groups is perceived as predominantly negative, thus the effect of the

imagined contact strategy backfired. Another explanation of our results may come from looking

into the historical oppression of the Kurdish group in the Turkish society. Over the years, the

general acculturation pattern of Kurdish people in Turkey has been assimilation rather than

integration (although the extent is arguable, see Ergin, 2014; Heper, 2007), probably making this

minority group more reactive to contact strategies. Confirming the latter explanation, Study 3

further demonstrated that these negative effects of imagined contact on acculturation and

discrimination were only pronounced among people with higher levels of ingroup identification.

Overall, findings suggest that imagined contact effects may have yielded the expected

results in a social context where structural differences are less salient (Eastern Europeans in the

UK), but backfired in a conflict-ridden context (Kurds in Turkey) where group membership,

ethnic identification and structural differences are critical aspects of intergroup relationships,

especially among minority groups (Bagci & Çelebi, 2017; Ergin, 2014). In the latter context, it

appears that the mental simulation of contact with the majority group accentuated the lack of

social acceptance as perceived by the minority, which then led to less intention to integrate in the dominant society, and higher motivation to maintain cultural heritage. However, our research further demonstrates that these effects are not only dependent on the socio-cultural context, but also on the importance individuals attribute to their ethnic group membership, even within the same socio-cultural context. Hence, these findings suggest that although imagined contact may be a useful technique to promote positive intergroup relationships across various settings (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2009; Miles & Crisp, 2014), it is crucial to take into account the specific social environment where various contact strategies are implemented, as well as individual factors such as ingroup identification.

Contrary to our initial hypothesis, we found that in both contexts imagined contact was not effective on the sense of belongingness. Previous studies in direct contact literature have shown cross-group friendships to be related to the sense of belongingness; Mendoza-Denton and Page-Gould (2008) found that African American college students who have White cross-group friends at predominantly White universities reported increased belongingness in the university. Other research has shown cross-group friendships among children to be related to social inclusion in the classroom (Kawabata & Crick, 2008). The reason why imagined contact effects were non-significant on belongingness may be explained by the fact that we focused on general belongingness rather than belongingness to a specific social environment such as school and university.

Although social acceptance mediated the effects of imagined contact on contact participation, we did not find the same association as regards culture maintenance for the Eastern Europeans. One reason for this may be because we only used the public self component of collective self-esteem measure, which assesses the level of social acceptance by other groups in

terms of group membership. Since this construct is about the perception of the outgroup members' attitudes, it may not necessarily relate to how much one's own cultural heritage is maintained. Alternatively, perceiving social acceptance by the outgroup may simply not relate to how much minority group members relate to their heritage culture in the UK setting. In fact, research on social categorization suggests that among minority group members the importance of both the majority (host) and the minority (ethnic) identities are of paramount importance (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2008). On the other hand, we found the effects of imagined contact on culture maintenance to be mediated by social acceptance among the Kurds, suggesting that in contexts where ethnic identities are more conflicting, social acceptance and culture maintenance are more closely linked.

Our research extended previously studied outcomes in imagined contact literature by examining imagined contact in the context of acculturation. We not only measured acculturation preferences, but also introduced novel mediators of the imagined contact effects. Past research has shown acculturation to be a critical process for minority group members' adaptation to the host culture, and acculturative stress to constitute a major source of concern for the psychological well-being and self-esteem of minority group members (e.g., Crockett, Iturbide, Torres Stone, McGinley, & Raffaelli, 2007; Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994; Williams & Berry, 1991). Hence, imagined contact may be a promising tool to engage minority group members to social integration and intergroup communication. In line with this suggestion, Study 1 demonstrated clear evidence for the effectiveness of imagined contact on acculturation preferences among Eastern Europeans in the UK. Nevertheless, we need to note that imagined contact increased contact participation, but also decreased culture maintenance among members of this minority group. Although some minority groups may favor assimilation as a way to gain

acceptance and increase collective and individual status, we argue that a long term successful acculturation process most likely occurs as a result of the integration strategy, which requires individuals to build close relationships with host culture members, as well as to maintain their own culture's heritage (e.g., Berry et al., 2006). Future research can explore ways to facilitate both these acculturation dimensions in an effort to promote integration.

Findings demonstrated the need to design contact strategies specific to the target minority group and take into account the role of group identification. For example, for Kurdish people who may often experience a high level of discrimination and threat in intergroup interactions, contact scenarios may involve additional elements that increase social inclusion. Research has found common ingroup identity to be an important add-on to the standard imagined contact instructions (Vezzali, Stathi, Crisp, Giovannini, Capozza, & Gaertner, 2015). Consistently, in the Turkish-Kurdish context, the common Muslim identity may function as an inclusive category involving both Turkish and Kurdish group members (Bikmen & Sunar, 2013; Baysu, Coşkan & Duman, 2018) and thereby improve the effectiveness of the standard imagined contact scenario. The critical role of ingroup identification in Study 3 also highlights the differential effects of imagined contact not only across cultures, but also across individuals, which suggests that imagined contact strategies should take into account the interplay between contextual and individual factors.

A further research avenue that would be relevant to minority groups specifically relates to whether imagined contact can affect collective action tendencies among minority group members. Recent research in intergroup contact literature has demonstrated that contact may have some unintended consequences among ethnic minority group members such as decreasing minority group members' motivation to act collectively on behalf of their ingroup (e.g., Wright

& Lubensky, 2009). In particular, it has been found that intergroup contact may decrease the perception of discrimination and thereby deter minority group members from collective action (Tropp et al., 2012). Since imagined contact reduced perceived discrimination and culture maintenance and increased contact participation and social acceptance in Study 1, it is possible that it also reduces collective action among Eastern Europeans in the UK, by providing a (perhaps false) expectation of group equality and social inclusion. On the other hand, imagined contact may be less likely to reduce collective action among ethnic Kurds for whom collective selves are more likely to be threatened as a result of contact.

A number of limitations of the current studies should be acknowledged. Although we focused on two different minority groups in two different socio-cultural settings, the two groups also differ in a number of other aspects such as the length of stay in the home country; while the majority of Eastern Europeans are recent incomers to the host country, the majority of Kurdish people recruited in this study have been residents and citizens in Turkey since at least two or three generations. Nevertheless, previous research has shown the importance of acculturation among both recent immigrants and more permanent national minority groups in plural societies (e.g., Berry, 1991), and has demonstrated acculturation theories to be applicable among minority groups from various generations (e.g., Noels & Clement, 2015). Moreover, the two groups differ in terms of perceived status differences with the majority group, which are likely to be more pronounced in the Turkish context. Historically, the Kurdish group has been an oppressed minority group and Turkish-Kurdish relationships offer a unique intergroup relationship context with more salient power asymmetries (e.g., Bagci & Çelebi, 2017). Although we have not accounted for these, we consider them characteristics of the distinct socio-cultural contexts that we examined here. Future research can tackle these more explicitly and examine whether, for

example, imagined contact affects newcomers (such as new immigrants and refugees) versus more established minorities (such as various ethnic minorities, second and third generation immigrants) differently. From a methodological perspective, our sample sizes in Study 1 and 2 were relatively low due to our difficulty in recruiting participants from both minority groups. However, our post-hoc G*power analyses demonstrated an acceptable level of power for both studies[5]. Further research could investigate the same associations with larger samples and replicate the findings in particularly conflict-ridden contexts.

Finally, our manipulation checks indicated that participants perceived the imagined contact scenario to be more difficult to imagine than the control scenario in general. Previous research has demonstrated cognitive difficulty to be a critical variable in the application of the imagined contact strategy and cognitively more difficult imagined contact scenarios to be less effective in improving outgroup attitudes (West & Brückmüller, 2013). In our research, we controlled for the reported difficulty in imagining the scenario, however further research may examine how cognitive difficulty influences the effectiveness of imagined contact, as well as ways to overcome this barrier.

In conclusion, the current research aimed at extending previous knowledge on imagined contact among minorities by testing the effectiveness of the strategy in relation to desire for culture maintenance and participation in the larger society, as well as perceived discrimination, belongingness and social acceptance in two different socio-cultural settings. Our results showed that imagined contact may indeed have a significant impact on how minority participants feel

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[5] A post-hoc G*Power analysis was run for eacy study to examine achieved power. Results showed that in Study 1 (*N* = 63), for an effect size of .24, alpha rate of .05, including two groups and five dependent variables, achieved power was .83. In study 2 (*N* = 66), for an effect size of .29, alpha rate of .05, including two groups and five dependent variables, achieved power was .92. In Study 3 (*N* = 210), for an effect size of .32-.59, including 8 predictors and alpha rate of .05, power was determined to be .99.

about their group and their acculturation preferences in both settings, albeit in opposite

directions. These findings demonstrate the importance of the context-dependent nature of

intergroup contact and the need to consider the larger socio-cultural environment in the

implementation of various contact strategies.

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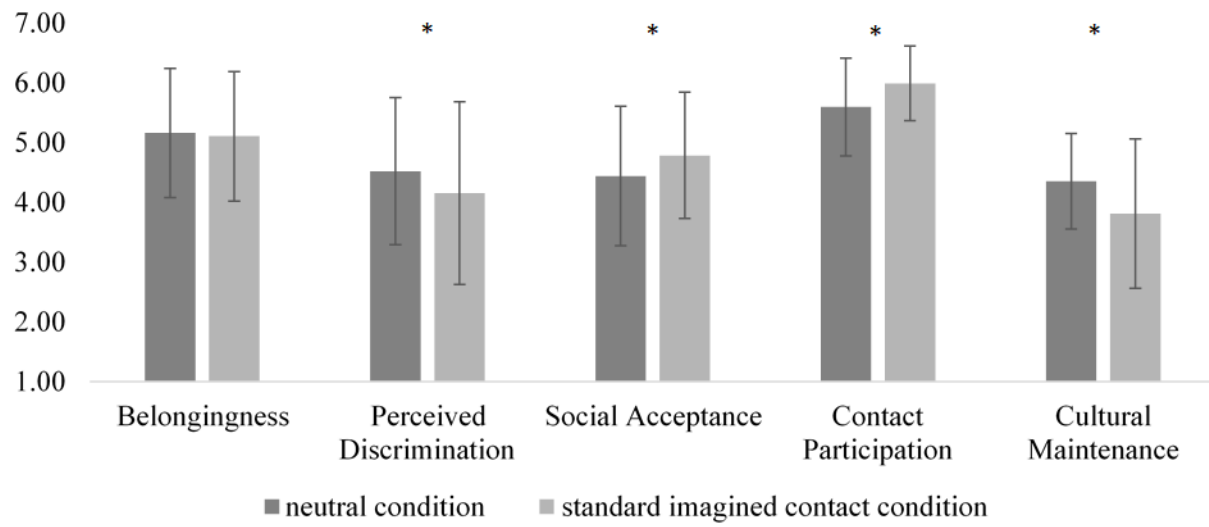
Figure 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Eastern Europeans, Study 1.

Note. *p < .05.
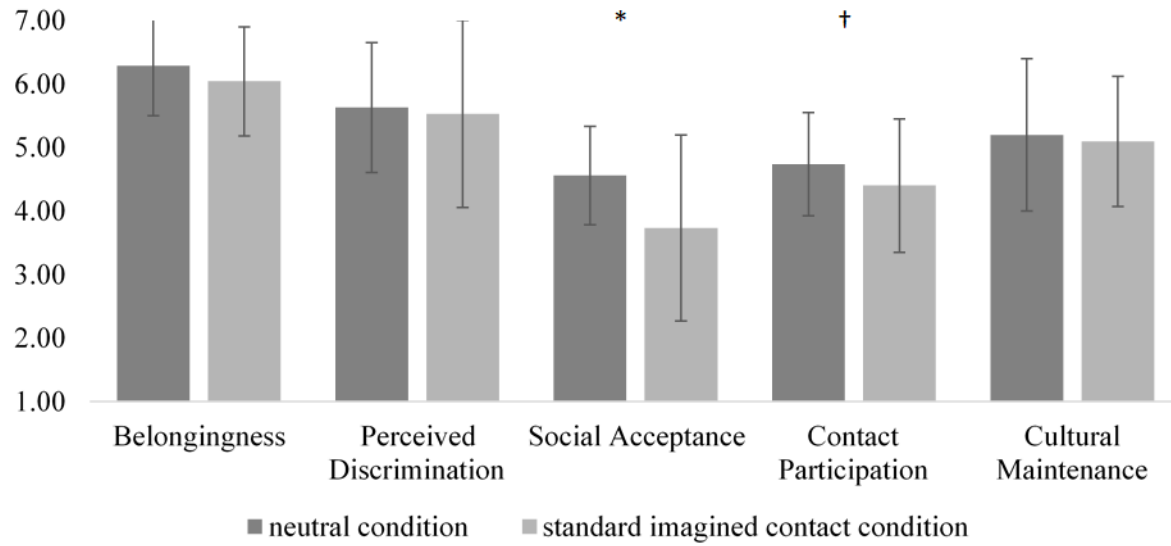
Figure 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Kurds, Study 2.
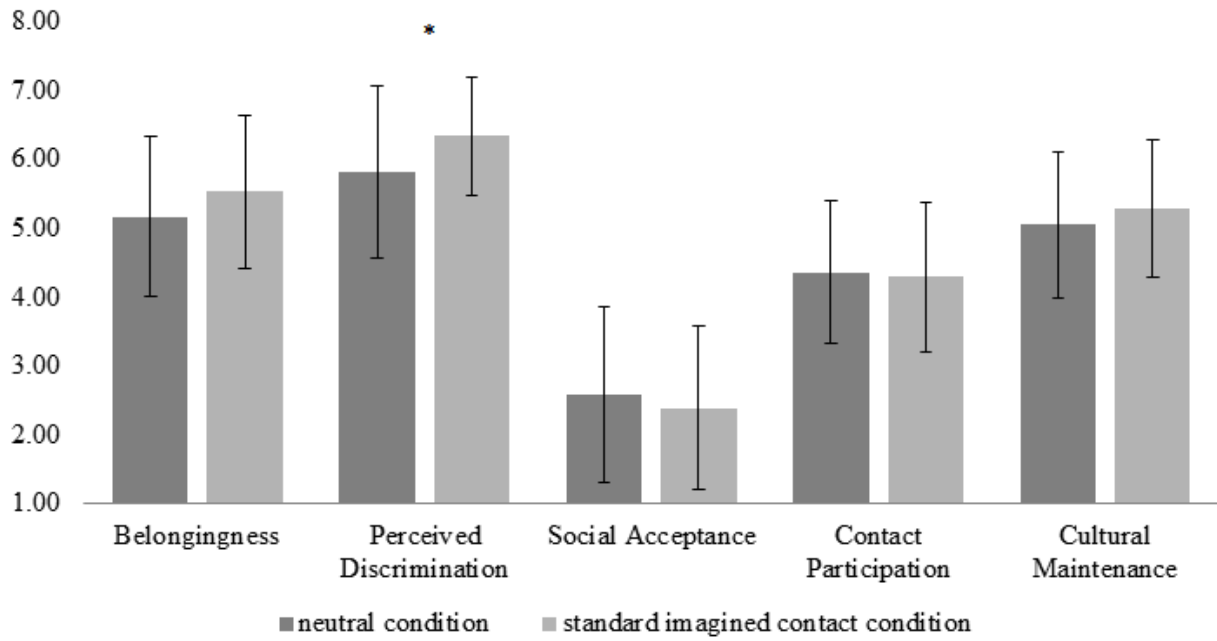
Note. †*p* < .10, **p* < .05.

Figure 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Kurds, Study 3.

Note. *p < .05.