

Support for the Replicability of Imagined Contact Effects

Richard J. Crisp,¹ Eleanor Miles,² and Shenel Husnu³

¹University of Sheffield, UK, ²University of Sussex, UK, ³Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus

Abstract. As part of their Many Labs project Klein et al. (2014) replicated the effects of an imagined contact study carried out by Husnu and Crisp (2010). In their report the authors argue the data provides weak support for replicability. However, the effect observed was both significant and comparable to that obtained from a recent meta-analysis for the relevant outgroup. This suggests that the Many Labs project may provide stronger support for the existence of imagined contact effects than currently thought. We discuss the value in interpreting replications within the context of the existing literature.

Keywords: imagery, prejudice, imagined contact, interventions

Imagined intergroup contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009) is a new indirect contact strategy for promoting tolerance and more positive intergroup relations. As part of their Many Labs project Klein et al. (2014) replicated an imagined contact study originally carried out by Husnu and Crisp (2010). They concluded that this test revealed weak support for replicability but we suggest that further consideration of their methods and data, particularly in the context of the wider literature, might serve to moderate this conclusion.

Many Labs is not a Direct Replication

A recent meta-analysis of over 70 imagined contact studies (Miles & Crisp, 2014) revealed a robust moderate effect of imagined contact on a range of dependent variables (attitudes, emotions, intentions, behavior) and toward a range of different groups (based on ethnicity, age, religion, etc., overall $d_+ = 0.35$). Klein et al. (2014) attempted to replicate one of these imagined contact studies originally carried out by Husnu and Crisp (2010). However, in the process of implementing the Many Labs methodology, changes to original study procedures were required to adapt the original studies to the Many Labs template. In the case of Husnu and Crisp (2010) simplification of the procedure resulted in a lack of specificity regarding participants, which renders the replication effect difficult to interpret. This is because the basic imagined contact effect is that imagining contact with an outgroup member reduces prejudice toward that outgroup. As participants in the Many Labs study were not asked to report their religion, the ingroup versus outgroup status of the participants relative to the imagined targets is unknown. Given the wide net cast in the Many Labs sample it is likely that a subset of participants imagined contact with, and reported prejudice toward, their own ingroup. This could undermine the usefulness of comparisons made with the original study, and arguably limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the underlying effect.

More generally, the Many Labs project did not consider the interaction between country context and outgroup identity. The original Husnu and Crisp study examined effects on prejudice when British students imagined contact with British Muslims. In line with the notion that ingroup and outgroup identity are key to the imagined contact effect, Klein et al. (2014) modified the Muslim outgroup for their Turkish sample, who instead imagined contact with Christians. However, this modification highlights the complexity of cultural context, as Christians are far less likely to be considered as an outgroup by Turkish participants than Kurds or Armenians, who are ethnic minorities with a long history of conflict within Turkey (Bikmen & Sunar, 2013). Of course, the potential for variability in imagined contact effects as a function of culture and context is entirely consistent with what we already know from cross-cultural psychology: There are huge cultural differences in the meaning, status, and relations between what are, on the face of it, the same outgroups. Thus, the tests constituting the Many Labs replication likely encompass numerous moderators of the effect, and it is likely the single overall effect reported in the Many Labs paper masks important differences among these multiple tests. In sum, while undoubtedly valuable, we would argue that the Many Labs study is not a direct replication of the original Husnu and Crisp study. Rather, it is an important new data point in efforts to refine our understanding of the effect relating to different cultural groups, in different cultural contexts.

Many Labs Observes an Effect Size Consistent with Meta-Analytic Estimates

Klein et al. (2014) draw conclusions not only about the replicability of the original study, but about the existence of the underlying imagined contact effect. Specifically, although they obtained a significant effect, because it was

smaller than that obtained in the original study, they argue that their findings constitute weak support for the replicability of imagined contact effects. However, this conclusion does not take into account other relevant evidence concerning the existence and magnitude of these effects – particularly meta-analytic evidence.

To answer the question of whether replication attempts provide evidence for the existence of the underlying effect, the most meaningful point for comparison is arguably not the original effect size, but the effect size from a meta-analysis. Miles and Crisp's (2014) meta-analysis of over 70 imagined contact conceptual replications has already established that the true overall effect size for imagined contact is lower than that observed by Husnu and Crisp (2010; 0.86). In fact, the refined estimate for the entire sample is 0.35, with our estimate for religious groups (those tested in the current replication attempt) being 0.22. Thus the observed effect size of 0.13 in the Many Labs study is substantively different from the original Husnu and Crisp study, and from our overall estimate of 0.35, but *not* from the most appropriate comparison: The meta-analytic estimate for religious outgroups (0.22). In other words, this is a replication effect size consistent with previous meta-analytic estimates of the effect size for the relevant outgroup.

Conclusion

The investigations offered by the Many Labs paper provide important insights into the replicability of key psychological findings. However, we would not want to draw conclusions about a general effect from a single new study, no matter how large. In the case of Husnu and Crisp (2010), a wider view reveals that the observed effect size is consistent with the accumulated evidence for the effect of imagining contact with religious outgroups. We therefore suggest the current data provides converging and qualified support for imagined contact effects, while providing a

valuable template for continuing efforts to refine, clarify and define the extent and applicability of the technique.

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Richard J. Crisp

Department of Psychology
University of Sheffield
Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TP
United Kingdom
E-mail r.crisp@sheffield.ac.uk
