THE INFLUENCE OF IMAGINED CONTACT AND BASEBALL TEAM IDENTIFICATION: SOUTH KOREANS’ PREJUDICE TOWARD JAPANESE INDIVIDUALS

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INTRODUCTION

Prejudice appears broadly in society and is perhaps most prominently manifested in the areas of race (Quillian, 2006), gender (Gorman, 2005), religion (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), age (Posthuma & Campion, 2009), and sexual orientation (Herek & Capitanio, 1996), among others. This is also the case in the sport and physical activity context, where athletes, coaches, administrators, and fans who differ from the typical majority face prejudice and the associated negative outcomes (for an overview, see Cunningham, 2015). Particularly in the United States, several authors have shown that historically, Whites generally hold unfavorable impression toward Black teammates (Schuman, Steeh & Bobo, 1985; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). In addition, Cunningham and Sagas (2005) demonstrated that African American assistant coaches of men’s college basketball teams faced discrimination in the hiring and selection process.

While prejudice reduction techniques have largely focused on Western societies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, 2006), prejudice is not an issue specific to a particular ethnic group or culture. Instead, all ethnicities, across cultures, can and do express prejudice. For example, peoples in the Northeast Asia, especially in Korea, have a strong tendency to maintain a negative attitude toward Japanese people (Park, 2008). Anti-sentiments toward Japanese people can be traced back to 1910 when Japan colonized Korea (Lee, 1985). During the colonial time period between 1910 and 1945, Japan not only killed many Korean residents, but they also extracted a tremendous amount of material and human resources out of Korea. For instance, many school boys were forced to take part in the World War II. In the meantime, young Korean girls were often raped and mobilized for sexual slavery by Japanese troops (Chinkin, 2001).
Although 70 years have passed since the end of Japanese colonization, the victims of sex slavery and their family still suffer from physical pain and emotional abuse. In particular, the government of Japan still has not officially apologized to the victims for past aggression, and denies the enforced sex slaves during the colonial time period (Spitzer, 2012). As a consequence, the relationship between Korea and Japan has worsened in that respect. The two countries expressed indignation against each other, and constant diplomatic conflicts have emerged until today (Yi, 2006).

It became even worse when the Japanese government officials continuously worshiped Yasukuni shrine (Yi, 2006; Sturgeon, 2006). Yasukuni shrine is a temple where Japanese people worship their ancestors including war criminals who were responsible for World War II. This political activity has stoked indignation among persons outside Japan, including persons in Korea and China. As a result, some Korean government officials and Korean people consider Yasukuni shrine worship as a provocation by Japanese government officials, including Prime Minister Abe Shinjo.

These and other factors contribute to Koreans’ prejudice toward Japanese persons (Park, 2008). Further, some Korean people have a bias against even Korean-Japanese who were born and raised in Japan. For example, Sung-hoon Choo, also known as Akiyama Yoshhiro, was a member of Korean amateur judo team till 2001, but he gave up his career in South Korea because of the discrimination by Koreans who were involved in judo. Although he was born and brought up in Japan, he is biologically Korean (fourth generation Korean Japanese). But his father wanted his son to maintain his Korean identity and had him take a Korean name: Sung-hoon Choo. Consequently, while he had been playing judo in Japan, he had not been fairly treated by Japanese judo players (Yoo, 2011).

Given the pervasiveness of prejudice across ethnicities and cultures, and the relative lack of attention devoted to prejudice reduction in Eastern cultures, the purpose of this study is to identify strategies to reverse these trends and reduce the prejudice Koreans hold toward Japanese. Specifically, in drawing from imagined contact theory (Crisp & Turner, 2012; Miles & Crisp, 2014), we focus on the Korean’s negative attitudes toward Japanese people. Specifically, we asked participants to imagine a positive interaction within the context of baseball. We predicted that participants who imagined positive contact with a Japanese pitcher playing on a Korean baseball team would express less prejudice than their counterparts. In addition, we add to the extant literature by considering the potential moderating effects of team identification (Branscombe & Wann, 1992). We examine the degree to which highly identified Korean baseball fans can reduce negative feelings toward Japanese people when a Japanese player represents their favorite professional baseball team in Korea.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prejudice Reduction Techniques

Given the pervasiveness of prejudice, many scholars have advanced strategies for improving intergroup relationships. The contact hypothesis, formulated by Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998), is one of the most successful ways to lessen bias when in-group members begin to have the opportunity to interact with out-group members. According to this theory, contact between in-group and out-group members allows for reduced intergroup anxiety and prejudice. The end result is more positive intergroup relations.

In addition to specifying interactions among members of different groups, Allport (1954) originally called for four conditions of contact. These included institutional support, the possibility of close contact, equal status among group members, and cooperation. Pettigrew (1998) also noted the importance of potential friendship. More recently, researchers have moved away from considering these as necessary conditions for prejudice reduction, but instead, view them as possible factors that would help facilitate better intergroup relations. The contact hypothesis, has received a substantial amount of scholarly attention and played a key role for reducing prejudice and establishing a positive intergroup relation (Couture & Penn, 2003; Cunningham, 2015; Herek & Capitario, 1996; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, 2006; Sigelman & Welch, 1993). Gibson and Claassen (2010) also observed that after intergroup contact, people’s attitudes toward racially different others improved, although the results may vary in different racial groups. Within sports context, Brown et al. (2003) found that the majority of White student athletes contained negative feelings against Black student athletes before participating in high school team sports. However, these negative attitudes subside once the players participated together on a team. One of the White student athletes who participated in McKinney’s (2006) qualitative research was able to build a positive relationship with fellow Black teammates on a college football team that was mostly comprised of Black student athletes. Eventually, direct contact provided positive cross-racial experience to both in-group and out-group members. Finally, Welty Peachey and colleagues have shown that facilitated intergroup contact can help reduce bias and enhance change agent self-efficacy among elite level athletes (Welty Peachey, Cunningham, Bruening, Cohen, & Lytras, 2015).

While the contact hypothesis has received considerable support, there is one potential limiting factor: intergroup contact, as espied by Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998), requires people to be in the same physical proximity. However, this is not always possible, nor advisable. Crisp and Turner (2012) assert that “in highly segregated settings, or where there is an embedded history of conflict and discrimination, one simply might not know anyone who has an out-group friend” (p.12). This can be interpreted that when cultural exchange is
locked by political tension, (e.g., North and South Koreans, Jews and Palestinians), actual contact could not be a possible suggestion. Due to the difficulties of accumulating the two groups, several researchers have begun to introduce a simple way of preventing prejudice toward out-group people: imagining the intergroup contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009, 2012; Stathi & Crisp, 2008; Turner, Crisp & Lambert, 2007; Turner & West, 2011).

Imagined contact theory (Crisp & Turner, 2012) is an outgrowth of Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis. The authors recognized the benefits of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice, and noted that there are times when actual contact might be inadvisable (due to the threat of violence) or impossible (because of geographic distance). Instead, people imagine interactions with people different from the self-interactions that are positive and where new information is learned can result in similar bias reductions. Across a variety of studies and target groups, including people who differ based on religion, sexual orientation, race, age, and psychological health, imagined contact has been shown to reduce intergroup anxiety and prejudice (for an overview, see Crisp & Turner, 2012; Miles & Crisp, 2014). Turner, Crisp and Lambert (2007) point out that after positive imagination contact, the participants who had initially held negative feelings toward the outsiders, developed warmer attitudes toward them. In their work, imagined contact helped facilitate more positive outcomes toward the elderly and lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Turner et al., 2007). Other researchers have also observed that the negative emotions between in-group and out-group members could be reduced through a continuous imagination contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009; Stathi & Crisp, 2008; Turner & West, 2011). Miles and Crisp’s (2014) meta-analytic study is perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of imagined contact. They found that imagine contact can help various types of prejudiced groups to become favorable towards certain out-group people. This result was on par with Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) meta-analytic work focusing on intergroup contact with physically present out-group members. Both studies clearly indicate that both interactions, imagined contact and actual contact, can be effective approaching methods for stereotyped people to improve relationships with new members.

Lee and Cunningham’s (2014) study represents the only work we have identified to examine imagined contact within the sport context. They asked Korean and American students to imagine two scenarios: one in which they played an enjoyable game of basketball with a person who they later found out was gay, and the other involving a basketball game with a friend. Among Koreans, those in the experimental condition experienced less intergroup anxiety and less prejudice toward gay men than did those in the control group. The same pattern, however, was not observed among US participants. The authors suggested that the lack of familiarity
Koreans had with lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals allowed for the benefits of imagined contact to be realized.

**Current Study**

Drawing from imagined contact theory, we examined how Korean participant reactions differ when a Japanese pitcher represents one of Korean professional baseball teams. Past researchers have effectively used the principles of intergroup contact to reduce prejudice (see Ellison & Powers, 1994; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman & Anastasio, 1994), but as previously noted, there are potential concerns with groups with a history of hostility interacting with one another. Imagined contact is also a viable alternative. Inspired by a recent article by Husnu and Crisp (2010), this paper applied similar procedures from their experiment, while targeting different racial groups. In Husnu and Crisp’s study, Turkish Cypriot participants who were assigned in the experimental group were willing to more openly interact with Greek Cypriots than those respondents who were assigned in the control group. Consistent with this premise, we applied this procedure to Koreans, examining whether imagined contact with Japanese individual affected Koreans’ attitudes toward them. We did so within the baseball context, with the Japanese person serving as a pitcher for the participant’s favorite team. Specifically, we hypothesized that persons who imagine contact with a Japanese pitcher will experience less intergroup anxiety than persons in the control condition (H1).

Of course, other factors might also affect the relationship, including the individual’s identification with the sport team. According to Branscombe and Wann (1992), highly identified sport fans have a tendency to contain more sense of loyalty with their favorite sports team and players compare to those who are mediocre sport fans. They also found out that sport followers considered their favorite athlete players as a positive in-group member (Branscombe & Wann, 1992). Further, highly identified fans are likely to closely follow the team and view the team’s successes and failures as reflective of their own. Their research outcome is applicable to a similar sport environment as well as intergroup attitudes. For example, when strongly identified Korean baseball fans imagine a Japanese player representing their favorite Korean professional baseball team, it is expected that they would positively stand by for the Japanese player because that player is on their favorite team. Thus, the individual would take on in-group status (see also, Zhu, Shen & Hillman, 2014). As a result, the negative relations between Koreans and Japanese individuals will turn out to be positive ones. Thus, we predicted that fan identification will moderate the relationship between imagined contact intergroup anxiety, such that anxiety will be lowest among highly identified fans who imagine contact (H2). Lastly, we hypothesized that the indirect effects of condition on prejudice, via intergroup anxiety, will be moderated by fan iden-
tification, such that the strength of mediation is stronger for people with high fan identification than for their counterparts (H3).

METHOD

Participants

Data were collected from Korean undergraduate students (N = 210) enrolled at a private university located near Seoul, Korea. The sample contained 141 men and 69 women. Most (n = 141, 67.1%) of the participants were first year students, followed by 38 (18.1%) sophomores, 18 (8.6%) juniors, 10 (4.8%) seniors, and 3 (1.4%) graduate students. The type of major varied widely, with the three most common including physical education (n = 35, 16.7%), electrical engineering (n = 26, 12.4%), and mechanical engineering (n = 16, 7.6%). The mean age of the students who took part in the survey was 21.05 years (SD = 1.63).

Procedures

Multiple copies of questionnaires were randomly distributed to students who signed in at an official sports activity club in the university mentioned above. We provided an English version of questionnaire to be approved from the IRB (Institutional Review Board), and then, the English version was translated into Korean for the participants who were not comfortable to read the questions in English. We used translation and back translation to ensure both versions were the same. The imagined contact experiment was based on Turner and West's (2011) guidelines and the participants were assigned either in the experimental group or in the control group. Participants assigned in the experimental group imagined a scenario as following: "We would like you to take two minutes to imagine yourself meeting a Japanese pitcher who is playing for your favorite baseball team for the first time. Imagine that the interaction is relaxed, positive and comfortable." Persons who did not list a favorite team were excluded from subsequent analyses. For the control group, they imagined a scenario as following: "We would like you to spend the next two minutes imagining yourself meeting a stranger for the first time. Imagine that the interaction is relaxed, positive, and comfortable."

At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to fill out what they have imagined and thought about. More specifically, respondents were instructed to "write down as many things as you can about the interaction you just imagined," as developed by Turner and West (2011, p. 196). Following this process, the participants completed a post-experiment questionnaire, with the items listed in the following section.

Measures

After the experiment, respondents of the two conditions completed post-experiment questionnaires. The survey packet contained items to measure the demographics, team identification, feel-
ing thermometer, and intergroup anxiety measurement scale.

**Demographics.** Participants provided their age, major field of study, sex, number of friends who were Japanese and years they had been a fan of their favorite baseball team.

**Team Identification.** We measured team identification using the seven-item scale developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993). Participants answered questions such as, "How important is it to you that your favorite baseball team wins?" and "How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of your favorite baseball team?" They evaluated each question from 1 (less involved) to 8 (highly involved). The reliability (α = .92) was acceptable.

**Feeling Thermometer and Intergroup Anxiety.** We used the Feeling Thermometer to assess prejudice toward Japanese individuals. This is a widely used scale by various researchers (see Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo & Kosterman, 1997). This test asked participants to describe their feelings toward different racial groups in a temperature from 0 (cold) to 100 (warm). The groups included Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese and Thais. The other groups were included as buffer responses. We analyzed the results only for feelings toward Japanese individually.

Furthermore, intergroup anxiety measurement scale generated by Stephan and Stephan (1985) was included in the survey. Participants answered questions as following: "Please indicate how you would feel when interacting with a Japanese person" The questionnaire was 7 point rating scale and participants marked their feelings from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) in each of the following categories: comfortable (reversed), threatened, confident (reversed), anxious, at ease (reversed), and awkward. The reliability was modest (α = .60), and we discuss this possible limitation in the Discussion.

Finally, we instructed respondents to explain whether the imagined contact had influenced their attitude toward Japanese people. On the last page, respondents indicated their demographic information and reported how long they have been a fan of their favorite baseball team.

**RESULTS**

The results show that Korean participants had few Japanese friends (M = 1.36, SD = .71), and scored relatively low in baseball fan identification (M = 3.73, SD = 1.56). Moreover, anxiety toward Japanese individual was also low (M = 3.75, SD = .75). Mean scores, standard deviation and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. We tested the hypotheses through moderated mediated regression, following Preacher, Rucker and Hayes (2007) guidelines. We controlled for the number of Japanese friends, sex, years as a fan, and age. Results are presented in Table 2.

With Hypothesis 1, we predicted that participants who imagined contact with a Japanese pitcher would experience less intergroup anxiety than participants in the control condition. However, this
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
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<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Japanese friends</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sex</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. Years a fan</td>
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<td>-22</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4. Age</td>
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<td>-23</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Condition</td>
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<td>-.53</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Fan identification</td>
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<td>-.19</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>7. Anxiety</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Prejudice</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean (%)</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>61.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>23.53</td>
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Notes. r ≥ |.19|, p < .05. Condition coded as 0 = control, 1 = experimental. Sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.

Table 2
Results of Moderated Mediation Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Mediator Variable (Intergroup Anxiety) Model</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese friends</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years a fan</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition (C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fan identification (Ft)</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>C X Ft</td>
<td>.21</td>
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</table>

Dependent Variable (Prejudice) Model

<table>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>T</th>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese friends</td>
<td>-2.28</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>-86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years a fan</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-1.65</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition (C)</td>
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<td>15.31</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan identification (Ft)</td>
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<td>2.47</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C X Ft</td>
<td>-1.71</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>-.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intergroup Anxiety</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>5.09***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Conditional Effects at SDO = -1 SD, mean, and +1 SD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Fan Identification</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Fan Identification</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Fan Identification</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was not supported. As seen in Table 2, contact was not associated with intergroup anxiety ($B = -.70, SE = .52, p = .18$).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that fan identification would interact with condition to predict intergroup anxiety. As seen in Table 2, the interaction term was significant ($B = .21, SE = .11, p < .05$). We plotted the interaction using Cohen's (2003) method, with the results shown in Figure 1. When fan identification was low, imagined contact was associated with less intergroup anxiety ($B = -.77, p = .008$). However, when fan identification was high, imagined contact was associated with more anxiety ($B = .74, p < .001$). Even though the interaction term was significant, the direction was different than expected; thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that the indirect effects of condition on prejudice, via intergroup anxiety, will be moderated by fan identification, such that the strength of mediation is stronger for people with high fan identification than for their counterparts. As seen in Table 2, this was supported, as the strength of mediation was strongest for persons who were strongly identified with their team ($B = 6.66, SE = 3.01, p < .05$).

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential of imagined contact
in reducing intergroup bias within the sport context. Although the majority of scholars in previous studies claimed that the imagined contact delivers positive intergroup relations for both in-group and out-group members (Crisp & Turner, 2009, 2012; Stathi & Crisp, 2008; Turner, Crisp & Lambert, 2007; Turner & West, 2011), we found imagined contact had no direct effect on intergroup anxiety. It is possible that because Japanese individuals are highly stigmatized within the Korean setting, the anxiety and prejudice were too great to overcome. Others have observed as much. For instance, West, Holmes and Hewstone (2011) argued that "while positive imagery increases positive affect more than verbal processing, it is also true that negative imagery increases negative affect more than verbal processing alone" (p.408). In their research, participants assigned in the imagine contact group imagined an intergroup interaction with schizophrenics, while participants assigned in the control group were asked to think about schizophrenics in general. The results revealed that imagine contact group had higher intergroup anxiety rates against schizophrenia than the control group (West, Holmes & Hewstone, 2011). This indicates that when participants holding strong hostility against a certain out-group in the beginning stage, in-group members cannot be cured by infusing short-term mental simulation.

The main effects were qualified by a condition-by-identification interaction. In our research, intergroup anxiety increased among highly identified Korean baseball fans who were asked to imagine a Japanese pitcher playing for their favorite baseball team; on the other hand, among persons not strongly identified with their team, imagined contact allowed for improvements in anxiety. It is possible that highly identified individuals sought to maintain the intergroup boundaries on their favorite team. There is some evidence to support this claim. Cunningham (2015), for instance, has argued that sport can often create more stereotypes and encourage people to stay only in their familiar social boundary. Wann, Peterson, Cothran and Dykes (1999) claimed that supporters who show high loyalty and patriotic spirit for their team would be willing to be violent to the player or coach of a rival team. Finally, Lee (1985) pointed out that "competitive rivalry may foster socially divisive attitudes which increase the possibility of social conflict and intergroup hostility" (p. 39).

On the other hand, imagined contact appeared to be effective in reducing intergroup anxiety among weakly identified participants. For these persons, the connection with the team was not as strong, so strong associations with the team members might not have been as relevant. As a result, the imagined contact served to reduce intergroup anxiety among these persons.

Collectively, these findings suggest several points. First, Korean participants in our study prefer to watch other Koreans on their favorite baseball teams, especially when they are strongly identified with that team. More broadly, these findings suggest that people intergroup
biases are likely to manifest when people are strongly motivated to maintain intergroup differences. Such is the case with strongly identified baseball fans (Cunningham, 2015; Lee, 1985; Wann et al., 1999) and likely also applies in other cases, such as when identification with a social identity (e.g., one's race) is strong.

Finally, consistent with theory (Crisp & Turner, 2012; Miles & Crisp, 2014), we observed that intergroup anxiety was positively associated with prejudice toward Japanese individuals. Importantly, the level of identification with the baseball team moderated this association, as the link was strongest for highly identified. This finding again points to the unique psychological processes among highly identified fans (Wann & Branscombe, 1993); in this case, their anxiety associated with having an ethnic outgroup member on their team is strongly associated with prejudice directly toward those persons.

Contributions, Limitations and Future Directions

This work make several contributions to the extant research. This research contributes to the small but growing number of studies examining prejudice reduction techniques within the sport context. Given the various forms of prejudice and discrimination in sport (Cunningham, 2015), more research is needed to examine possible reduction techniques. We also show that the positive effects of imagined contact (see Crisp & Turner, 2012; Miles & Crisp, 2014) has boundaries. While there is clear promise in this visualization technique, we cannot expect it to be effective in all instances. As we have shown in this study, imagined contact was effective in reducing intergroup anxiety among weakly identified persons, but among those with a strong identification with the team, it actually increased anxiety and strengthened prejudice toward Japanese individuals. More research is needed to examine other boundary conditions.

In addition to the contributions, there are potential limitations. First, some might be critical of sampling only students. However, as students are also key fans and in the age of a desired stakeholder group (Stevens, Lathrop, & Bradish, 2005), such concerns might be overstated. Second, the length of the experiment, while consistent with the methods used in previous studies, was relatively short. It is possible that using extended imagined contact methods might have reduced bias, even among strongly identified team fans. Third, the intergroup anxiety measure had a low reliability, and this might limit the generalizability of the findings related to this measure. Finally, we focused on a generalized form of expression of anxiety and prejudice toward Japanese people in general. It is possible that a more context-specific focus—that is, Japanese baseball players—would yield different results.

Remaining cognizant of these limitations, there several avenues for future research. The most fruitful, we suggest, is consideration of additional boundary constraints to imagined contact. In this
study, we identified identification with the baseball team as a moderator, while others have observed that familiarity with the out-group (Lee & Cunningham, 2014) and high levels of stigmatization (West, Holmes & Hewstone, 2011) might limit the effectiveness of imagined contact. As the theory continues to develop, it will be important to consider additional factors that both strengthen and limit imagined contact's effects. Second, more work is needed in the sport context. As prejudice and discrimination are pervasive in many areas of sport, imagined contact and other techniques might hold promise for making sport a more welcoming environment. It is incumbent upon scholars to determine the efficacy of such approaches.

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