

## **The Role of Fulbright Program in Building Positive Perception and Ally Image of the U.S. Among Pakistani Scholars**

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This study was aimed at exploring the role of Fulbright program in building perception about U.S. and Americans among Pakistani Fulbright scholars. While a host of theory and research had been growing on contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), application of contact hypothesis to cultural exchange programs based on foreign policy intended to develop peace and affective ties between nations has been limited. This research gap was filled by this study that focused on the impact of direct contact on perception and image of the U.S. in the context of the U.S. and Pakistan Fulbright program. Pakistani Fulbright scholars (81 men, 67 women; Mean age = 23 years; Range 21-29), with low-contact and high-contact were compared with respect to their perceptions of a prototypical American and the U.S. as an international entity. Compared to participants with low-contact ( $n = 52$ ), participants with high-contact ( $n = 96$ ) had developed a higher positive perception of a prototypical American. Furthermore, compared to participants with low-contact, those with high-contact perceived the U.S. significantly more as an ally and less as an imperialist-enemy

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nation. Participation was controlled through selection for the Fulbright program and no previous visits to the U.S. Discussion has focused on possibilities for foreign policy and peace related implications of the Fulbright program.

*Keywords.* Intergroup contact, Fulbright program, positive outgroup perception, ally image

Over past few decades, diplomatic relations between the United States (U.S.) and Pakistan have experienced many ups and downs. Relationship between the two countries became more tense and ambivalent when the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan accepted responsibility for terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001. Pakistan became a strategic ally of the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for launching a war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Under the government of General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan aided the U.S. in the war against terrorism. At the same time historical and cultural ties to the Afghans, and some public support for their neighboring country placed Pakistani government in an extremely difficult and hesitant foreign policy position (Mazzetti & Lander, 2013). Under these circumstances, at various points in time, the U.S. seriously questioned the loyalty of Pakistani government. In such circumstances, public opinion moved against the U.S. government when the NATO started drone attacks in Pakistani tribal and border areas, and still there are few signs of change in American ambivalence as well. Even higher drop in confidence of Americans for the Pakistani government came after Osama Bin Laden was found and killed just a few kilometers away from the capital of the country, Islamabad (Mazzetti & Lander, 2013).

Simultaneously, there is also positive diplomatic engagement among the two countries that engages Pakistani young adults through the Fulbright program. Pakistan's Fulbright program is in its 66<sup>th</sup> year of operation in Pakistan; it is one of the largest in Pakistan and oldest in the world. Fulbright program for Pakistani scholars is considered to be important in terms of number of scholars and possibilities for collaboration among Pakistanis and Americans. This program offers grants to qualified Pakistani graduate scholars to study at the graduate level in the U.S. (Fulbright Scholar Program, 2018). In 2011, US Consul General William Martin announced that the number of grants for Pakistani to be doubled for next years. He expressed his concern over strain of mistrust and misperception among people of two countries. He said that there are several misperceptions about each other among Pakistanis and Americans that can only be diminished with programs like Fulbright. This policy decision made Pakistani

Fulbright program among the biggest Fulbright exchange programs (Fulbright Scholar Program, 2018). In light of such outstanding initiatives as Fulbright program, it would be vital to assess psychological impact of contact among Pakistanis and Americans which is the heart of this program.

### **Intergroup Contact**

The contact hypothesis, which first appeared in Allport's book, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), proposes that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact is an effective way to reduce prejudice between groups. According to Allport, intergroup contact is especially effective in reducing prejudice under four conditions: 1) when both groups have equal status, 2) when they have common goals, 3) when there is the potential for intergroup cooperation and acquaintance, and 4) when there is a common support of authorities.

Since, the conceptualization, there have been many studies that focused on exploring the direct effects of contact on the prejudice and discrimination among the groups. Initial empirical work on the effects of contact on changing perceptions of out-groups dates back to 1950s, where psychologists focused on segregated and non-segregated housing projects. For instance, Deutsch and Collins (1951) found that white housewives of non-segregated neighborhoods expressed more positive attitudes towards African Americans whereby they favored interracial housing when they had higher contact compared to those who lived in the segregated neighborhoods.

Brown, Vivian, and Hewstone (1999) found contact effects outside strictly neighborhood areas and outside the US. For instance, in one of the initial studies conducted in Europe with data from six European countries where the participants were asked to nominate someone in another country of the European Union followed by the ratings indicating the contact they had with the nominated person. In all the samples it was consistently found that contact had a significant impact such that the respondents having salient relationship (high-contact) with the nominated person had high positive outgroup attitude. On the contrary, supporting the contact theory, those with the nominations with low salience there was low positive attitude towards the outgroup.

In another survey by Gonzalez and Brown (2003), respondents from four European countries rated the quantity and quality of the contact. This rating was done for someone from each of four outgroup countries included in the sample. This study was the first one to include ratings for those contact persons on personal characteristics

such as hard-working, arrogant, intelligent, etc. The participants rated their own country as well as the four out-group countries. The individual descriptions were operationalized as the positive effect they felt towards outgroup. They found that both quantity and quality of the contact were strongly associated with positive effect toward foreigners. The researchers concluded from their data that the effects were stronger when the out-group was more salient in international relations with their home country.

More recent empirical research supporting the contact theory on meta-analytic level (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) has started to explore the process behind how direct contact reduces prejudice. It is suggested that intergroup contact enables group members to empathize (perspective taking & empathic concern) with members of outgroup, and negative perceptions and attitudes declines over time (Brambilla, Hewstone, & Colucci, 2013). Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) conducted an extensive meta-analyses of more than 500 studies, establishing that intergroup contact reduces prejudice through reducing intercultural anxiety, and increasing outgroup empathy.

### **Outgroup Anxiety**

Outgroup anxiety has been conceptualized as high arousal linked to individual's expectations of being discriminated, rejected, or threatened by outgroup members (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). It has also been shown that, compared to interpersonal encounters, anxiety could be higher in intergroup encounters (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). When interacting with majority group members whom people have not had much contact with, an individual may experience anxiety because of meta-stereotypes about one's own group. This might activate various concerns, such as they would be taken advantage of (Stephan & Stephan, 1989; Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1997).

Some of the most prominent studies on this construct of anxiety that have focused on the deleterious effect were conducted by Islam and Hewstone (1993). This study investigated intercultural anxiety between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh (Muslim Majority & Hindu Minority). Findings showed a negative correlation between the level of contact and anxiety and this lower anxiety was a predictor and a mediator for less positive attributes of the outgroup.

Greenland and Brown (1999) explored the concept of intercultural anxiety among 236 British and Japanese students; all in their own countries of origin using their contact with the people from other country and their intercultural anxiety. They found support for

the assumption that the higher the level of contact the lower was participants' intercultural anxiety and their negative perception about the outgroup.

Following similar measures and outgroup contexts, there is also a growing body of research suggesting that group interactions can attenuate intercultural anxiety (Paolini, Hewstone, Voci, Harwood, & Cairns, 2006; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Some research suggests that people may come to value intergroup contact by seeing it as an opportunity to expand their self-growth (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006).

Intercultural anxiety and resulting negative expectations may also result in avoidance (see Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998), which in turn would hinder the process of further contact and possibility of generating positive intergroup relations. Several studies have shown that cross group interactions could be charged with intercultural anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1989). During intergroup contact, there is a wide variety of personal and group level concerns and evaluations, therefore, it is inevitable to not experience anxiety and discomfort (Migacheva & Tropp, 2013) and people are inclined to avoid it whenever they can (see Butz & Plant, 2011).

In addition to intercultural anxiety, outgroup empathy is a central aspect in inter-group relations. Empathy is generally conceived of as consisting of two components. First, an effective response that often but not always, entails sharing other person's emotional state. Second, it is conceived as a cognitive capacity for taking perspective of the other person, maintaining a distinction between the self and the other person (Jackson, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2005).

### **Outgroup Empathy**

Outgroup empathy is an important correlate of how members of a group perceive outgroup members; it emerges as a crucial mediator between contact and prejudice reduction (Batson et al., 1997). Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) explored the role of contact in producing empathy for the outgroup. In addition to intercultural anxiety was used as a mediator while seeing the impact of contact on prejudice (negative perceptions) about the outgroup. The study found a positive relationship between the level of contact and empathy where empathy was found to be a positive mediating variable for reducing prejudice about the outgroup whereas intercultural anxiety was the negative mediator. This shows that contact with the out group may enable people to empathize with outgroup concerns and take their perspective, which, in turn, could improve intergroup attitudes and thus relationships (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Most of the research on contact theory has focused on attitudes of majority members towards minority group members (Binder et al., 2009). Some research found that positive effects of contact are very weak among minority groups compared to majority groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Possibly due to different expectations of the part of majority and minority group members can experience the contact situation altogether differently (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Shelton, 2003). Specifically, minority members could be relatively more sensitive toward status imbalances thus rendering the positive effects of contact more difficult to emerge (see Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010; Reicher, 2007).

### **Image of Outgroup**

A less explored and yet critical aspect involved in intergroup relations is the image of outgroup, which refers to how people perceive and represent outgroup members. International image theory (Herrmann, Voss, Schooler, & Ciarrochi, 1997) proposes that perceived relations between two nations lead to the development of distinct outgroup images and behavioral tendencies towards outgroup members. Researchers have found at least five outgroup images across cultures – enemy, ally, dependent, imperialist, and barbarian (Bilali, 2010).

An enemy outgroup image involves people perceiving that the outgroup nation is motivated by self-interest, is opportunist, and evil and that the outgroup leaders are highly capable but untrustworthy; Relationship is perceived as incompatible and involves perceptions of threat and distrust. In contrast, ally outgroup image involves perceiving that there is interdependence between the nations, such as sharing common goals, having similar capability and status. An outgroup barbarian image involves perceiving the outgroup nation as destructive, intimidating, and irrational, and led by highly emotional leaders. An image of the outgroup as dependent involves perceiving the other nation as dependent, disorganized, ineffective, incapable, and in a need for guidance. Finally, the imperialist image of the other nation involves perceiving the other nation as exploitative, dominating and controlling (for review See Alexander, Brewer, & Livingston, 2005).

There is a clear research gap in the empirical findings on naturally occurring groups and institutionally formed groups. As suggested by our review, research on the contact theory has shown the positive effects that contact can have on reducing prejudice, and reinforcing positive attitudes towards outgroup members. Most of this research has focused, however, on the majority group members'

attitude towards minorities and only in domestic contexts, namely racial or gender-preference and other group divides within a given society. Research in the context of international policy such as that of Pakistan-U.S. relations has thus not only an applied and context-specific value, but it also begins to fill the gap in the body of literature on the contact theory.

In our literature review, we found that research on the minority group's perception of the majority group is scarce, but also this work is limited to exploring contact effects among domestic groups. We could not find any study solely focused on exploring effects of contact on intergroup perception and possible implications amid a foreigner minority group living among a local majority. Even though it would be significant to understand the perception of a foreigner minority groups in general and particularly when there is a national level investment on this group, in the form of Fulbright funding. Therefore, we think that studying Pakistani Fulbright scholars, being a foreigner minority and living among majority (Americans), with relatively good opportunities when it comes to being in the graduate school not having to pay for the tuition fee and get free health insurance and living allowances, offer a unique sample to study effects of direct contact on perception of minority.

In order to focus on perception of the minority we have integrated some variables from previous literature on contact research and also developed some new measures to meet our exploratory and sample specific needs. As reviewed in the following paragraphs, we assume that important variables to explore perception of the Fulbright Pakistani scholars, as foreigner minority group members, would allow for investigation of how typical outgroup member (a typical American in this case) is perceived, and what would be the image of outgroup as a whole group/nation. This gives us more comprehensive analyses of the process of how contact with Americans would affect perception of Americans, image of the U.S. as a country, empathy and anxiety associated with outgroup.

Considering the current politically charged atmosphere between Pakistan and the U.S. and importance of the cultural exchange programs, it is timely and policy relevant to explore intergroup contact theory in Pakistani foreign minority, future and current Fulbright scholars. Our research explored how different levels of contact of Pakistani scholars with Americans effect their perceptions of Americans as an outgroup. More concretely, this research included two groups of Pakistani scholars: Those with low U.S. contact, who have no direct contact and have never traveled to the U.S. but have

qualified for Fulbright scholarship; scholars with high-contact were those who have been to the U.S. as Fulbright scholars.

Building on previous contact research, we posited that the high-contact group would have more positive perception of outgroup (better outgroup image and more positive representations of a typical American) than the low-contact group. More specifically, Fulbright scholars already living in the U.S., compared to scholars with low-contact with Americans, will report higher scores on positive representations (traits of stereotypical Americans), and more positive image of outgroup (e.g. perceiving it more as an ally and less as an imperial-enemy). We also postulate that contact would produce these positive effects through higher outgroup empathy and lower intercultral anxiety and, as previous research has pointed out (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Based on the review of the literature and our speculations, we have following testable hypotheses for this paper:

1. Participants with high contact, compared with low contact, will have higher positive perception of Americans and lower negative perception of Americans.
2. Participants with high contact, compared with low contact, will have higher perception of the U.S. as an ally, and will have lower perception of the U.S. as an imperial-enemy.
3. Participants with high contact, compared with low contact, will indicate higher intergroup empathy for Americans and lower intercultural anxiety towards Americans.
4. From the binary pathway of contact (low vs. high), positive and negative perception towards Americans will be mediated through empathy and intercultural anxiety.
5. From the binary pathway of contact (low vs. high), ally and imperial-enemy image of the U.S. will be mediated through intergroup empathy and intercultural anxiety.

Overall, most of the constructs studied in this study were acquired or adapted from the previous research literature, however, representation of a typical outgroup member was specifically developed for this study through focus groups with both groups. We also adapted scales for the image of out group to best fit the needs of the current study.

## **Method**

A cross-sectional study using mixed methods was designed in which participants were asked to fill out several measures about

representation of the outgroup, image of the U.S. We also measured outgroup empathy and intercultural anxiety in order to explore underlying mechanism through which contact would affect perception of outgroup (Americans) and image of the outgroup (the U.S.) is affected.

## Participants

A total of 148 Pakistani scholars (81 men, 67 women; Mean age = 23 years; Range = 21-29) were selected for the study; 52 participants had low-contact level with Americans, whereas 96 participants had high-contact level. Following upon previous literature, instead of calling this group as no contact we label it as low-contact group. In low-contact group, there were scholars from Pakistan, who have qualified for Fulbright program, but had never travelled to the U.S. The high-contact group consisted of the Fulbright Pakistani scholars who had on an average stayed for a year in the U.S.

## Instruments

**Perceptions of prototypical Americans.** A set of traits was developed through two focus groups with Fulbright scholars. These traits were used to assess representations of a typical outgroup member, typical American. Perceptions of prototypical Americans were measured using ratings of positive and negative traits that were based on focus groups conducted with Fulbright scholars. For this purpose, we included 33 traits such as fair, aggressive, rude, cooperative, moral, wasteful. These traits also include the list of traits used by Gonzalez and Brown (2003). We made the list rather exhaustive through two focus groups before data collection. Likert Scale anchors for these evaluations were from 1 = *least endorsement* to 7 = *most endorsement* of the traits. The positive traits loaded on a single factor with the exception of two traits (spiritual, sociable), which were excluded from the analysis due to lower factor loadings, we conducted a post data focus group in which it was verified that these traits were relatively vague compared to others, therefore, based on extremely low factor structure parameters the traits were excluded. These traits were generated a reliable cumulative score, which was labeled as *Positive Perception* of Americans (16 items:  $M = 3.97$ ;  $SD = 1.30$ ;  $\alpha = .95$ ). Except for one trait (robotic), the negative traits loaded on a single factor generating reliable cumulative scores measuring negative perception of the U.S. (14 items:  $M = 3.77$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ;  $\alpha = .88$ ). The cumulative score was labeled as *Negative Perception* of Americans.

**Image Scale.** Image of the outgroup (ally, enemy, dependent, & imperial) was assessed using adapted version of Image Scale on image theory of international relations (Alexander et al., 2005). Items of three subscales (Ally, Enemy, & Imperialist) were used (example items: ‘America values cooperative solutions to problems and tries to avoid conflict’ (Ally); ‘American objectives are self-centered and harmful to others’ (Enemy); ‘Americans are arrogant and are convinced they are superior to other nationalities’ (Imperialist). Subscale for measuring U.S. as a dependent nation was excluded as U.S. may not be seen as a dependent nation by the participants. Anchors for the statements were Likert scale ratings from 1 = *least endorsement* to 7 = *most endorsement* of each item. Higher scores mean higher attitudinal attributions.

The composite scores of ally image were called *U.S. ally*, items loaded on a single factor ( $\alpha = .83$ ,  $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ). Enemy and imperial image items loaded on a single factor and their combined composite score of imperial and enemy image was called *U.S. imperial-enemy* ( $\alpha = .79$ ,  $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = .97$ ).

**Outgroup Empathy Scale.** Empathy with Americans was measured using Outgroup Empathy Scale (adapted from Davis, 1983 using committee approach). The scale consisted of fourteen items, including items like: “*I often have concerned feelings for Americans who are less fortunate than me*”. Empathy towards the outgroup was measured with Likert scale ratings from 1 = *least endorsement* to 7 = *most endorsement* of each statement. All items loaded on a single factor and were averaged into one composite score ( $\alpha = .90$ ,  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). High scores indicate more empathy.

**Intercultural Anxiety Scale.** Intercultural anxiety was assessed using adapted version of The Intercultural Anxiety Scale (adapted from Stephan & Stephan, 1989 using committee approach). This scale included items such as: “*Going to a small party where there will be American people*”. Each statement was answered with Likert scale ratings from 1 = *least endorsement* to 7 = *most endorsement*. Intercultural anxiety (with Americans) was measured with seven items. All loaded on a single factor and averaged into a composite score ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ).

## Procedure

All the participants were reached out through the candidate lists and alumni lists of Pakistani Fulbright grantees and those who were just selected for interviews. The sampling procedures were therefore convenience and snowball sampling. Low-contact participants filled

out paper questionnaires in various gateway orientation programs in Islamabad-Pakistan and Austin-Texas, where as high-contact participants filled out the online questionnaire via Qualtrics. While this is not an ideal situation, for the medium co-varied with group, it was a constraint that we need to accept due to the inaccessibility of the sample via other means. The chances of obtaining responses by scholars in the high-contact group increased by offering of incentives; for each group there was an incentive to win five lotteries each worth \$ 50.

## Results

All results were analyzed using SPSS-23 and Process Macro. To begin with, data regarding relationship between participants' contact level was analyzed using *t*-tests and general linear models to find how level of contact perceptions of Americans.

Table 1

*Summary of Mean Comparisons for Dependent Variables (N = 148)*

Variables	High-contact group (n = 96)		Low-contact group (n = 52)		<i>t</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		Lower	Upper	
Positive perception	4.52	.99	2.91	1.15	9.01**	.71	1.32	1.50
Negative perception	3.56	1.04	4.15	.99	3.33*	-.85	-0.17	0.57
U.S. ally	3.67	1.17	2.89	1.12	3.59**	-1.08	-0.51	0.68
U.S. imperial-enemy	3.74	1.02	4.54	.65	4.99**	.34	1.21	0.93
Intergroup empathy	4.70	.85	3.43	1.08	7.59**	.91	1.62	1.30
Intercultural anxiety	3.55	1.37	4.35	1.34	3.32*	-1.27	-.032	.59

\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .00$ .

A *t*-test for the level of contact (high vs. low) showed a significant difference in *perception of prototypical Americans*. High-contact group perceived a typical American more positively than participants in low-contact group which suggests empathy for outgroup increases with higher contact. Another *t*-test for the level of contact (high vs. low) showed a significant mean difference in the negative perception of Americans. High-contact group perceived a

typical American less negatively than participants in low-contact group indicating that having high-contact with Americans reduces intercultural anxiety.

Regarding *outgroup image*, results showed a significant difference in means of perceiving the U.S. as an ally of Pakistan. High-contact group perceived the U.S. more as an ally than participants in the low-contact group which suggests perception of the U.S. as an ally country with higher contact. The *t*-test for the level of contact showed a significant difference in means of perceiving the U.S. as an imperial enemy as well. High-contact group perceived the U.S. less as an imperial-enemy than participants in the low-contact group which suggests that perception of the U.S. as an imperial enemy country is lowered with higher contact.

For *intergroup empathy*, *t*-test for the level of contact showed a significant difference in means of empathy for Americans. High-contact group more empathy towards Americans than the participants in the low-contact group which suggests that intergroup empathy increases with higher contact. Another *t*-test for the level of contact showed a significant difference in means of anxiety with Americans. High-contact group expressed lower anxiety towards Americans than the participants in the low-contact group which suggests that intercultural anxiety lowers with higher contact.

Table 2

*Scale Reliability Coefficients and Correlations Among Variables (N=148)*

Variables	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Positive perception	.95	-					
2. Negative perception	.88	-.66**	-				
3. U.S. ally	.83	.64**	-.52**	-			
4. U.S. imperial-enemy	.79	-.58**	.66**	-.32**	-		
5. Intergroup empathy	.90	.78**	-.64**	.56**	-.58**	-	
6. Intercultural anxiety	.89	-.58**	.59**	-.45**	.56**	-.59**	-

\*\*  $p < .00$ .

Table 2 shows a negative correlation between both subscales of *perception of prototypical Americans*. Positive perception is positively related with Ally image and intergroup empathy while it is negatively related with Imperial-enemy image and intercultural anxiety. Results also show that with increase in intergroup empathy, intercultural anxiety lowers down and Ally image is positively related with

increased intergroup empathy and negatively related with intercultural anxiety.

As hypothesized, this study tested two testable multiple mediation models. In both models, the level of contact (low vs. high) was the predictor variable, and intergroup empathy and anxiety were the mediating variables; only outcome variables differed in four models. These models were tested using multiple mediation bootstrapping analyses, with 5000 re-samplings (Hayes, 2013).

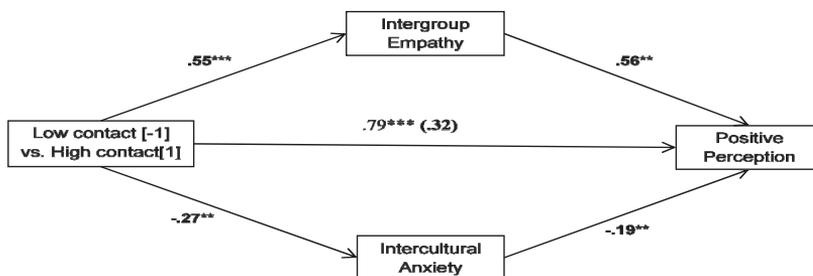


Figure 1. Model showing contact contrast effects on the positive perception of Americans

In model 1 (see Figure 1), a multiple mediation bootstrap analysis demonstrated that overall mediation of the relationship between the contrast and positive perception was changed significantly from .79 to .32 (non-significant). It was found that both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.27, p < .01$ ) were significantly predicted by the contrast (low-vs. high-contact), also both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .56, p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.19, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of positive perception of Americans. Overall, direct effect ( $\beta = .79, p < .001$ ) was significant, and the mediation effect compared to the direct effect was weak. The total indirect effect was significant ( $c = .33, CI [.22, .42]$ ). The specific indirect effect path from the contrast through empathy ( $a^*b = .27, CI [.18, .38]$ ) was significant, whereas that of intercultural anxiety was non-significant ( $a^*b = .05, CI [.01, .11]$ ). Thus, only the mediator of intergroup empathy, to a greater level accounted for the relationship between these variables. In simple words, the relationship between high-contact and low-contact is what determines if there will be empathy development and anxiety reduction, only once there is a

possibility of empathy development and anxiety reduction then it is possible to have positive perceptions about Americans.

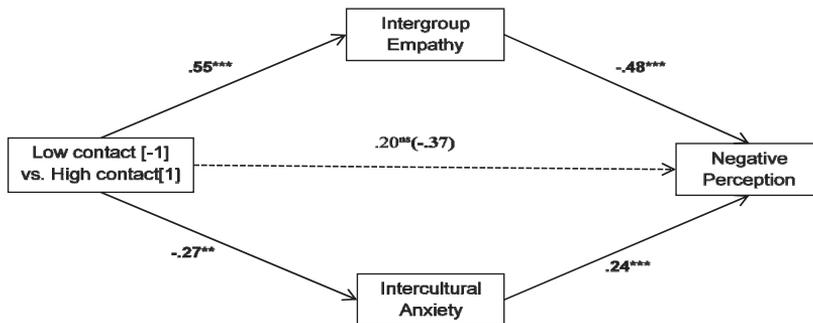


Figure 2. Model showing contact contrast effects on the negative perception of Americans.

In model 2, (see Figure 2), another multiple mediation bootstrap analysis demonstrated that overall mediation of the relationship between the contrast and negative perception of Americans was significant. It was found that both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly predicted by the contrast; also both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = -.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of the negative perception of Americans. Overall, direct effect ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p = .23$ ) was nonsignificant, but the total indirect effect was significant ( $c = -.37$ , CI  $[-.50, -.23]$ ). The specific indirect effect path from the contrast through empathy ( $a*b = -.28$ , CI  $[-.42, -.17]$ ) was significant, and that of intercultural anxiety was non-significant ( $a*b = -.09$ , CI  $[-.17, -.03]$ ). In other words, the relationship between the high-contact compared to low-contact is what derives empathy development and anxiety reduction, only once there is a possibility of empathy development and anxiety reduction then it is possible to have reduced negative perceptions about Americans. Thus, as it could be seen in Figure 2, the mediator of intergroup empathy to a greater level was accounted for the relationship between these variables.

In model 3, also shown in Figure 3, another multiple mediation bootstrap analysis demonstrated that overall mediation of the relationship between the contrast of high and low-contact and perception of the U.S. as an ally was significant. It was found that both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly predicted by the contrast. Also,

both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.17, p < .05$ ) were significant predictors of the perception of the U.S. as an ally nation.

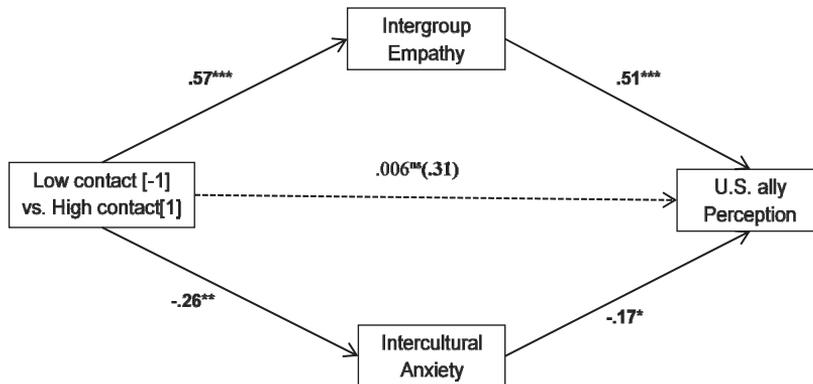


Figure 3. Model showing contact contrast effects on the U.S. ally perception.

Overall, direct effect ( $\beta = .006, p = .97$ ) was non-significant, but the total indirect effect was significant ( $c = .31, CI [.20, .46]$ ). The specific indirect effect path from the contrast through empathy ( $a^*b = .26, CI [.13, .44]$ ) was significant, and intercultural anxiety was non-significant ( $a^*b = .05, CI [-.002, .12]$ ). Like previous models, the relationship between the high-contact is what derives empathy development and anxiety reduction, only once there is a possibility of empathy development and anxiety reduction then it is possible to perceive Americans as an ally nation.

In model 4 (see Figure 4 below), the multiple mediation bootstrap analysis demonstrated that overall mediation of the relationship between the contrast and perception of the U.S. as an imperial-enemy was significant. It was found that both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = .54, p < .001$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = -.27, p < .01$ ) were significantly predicted by the contrast. Also both intergroup empathy ( $\beta = -.26, p < .01$ ) and intercultural anxiety ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ) were significant predictors of the imperial-enemy image of the U.S.

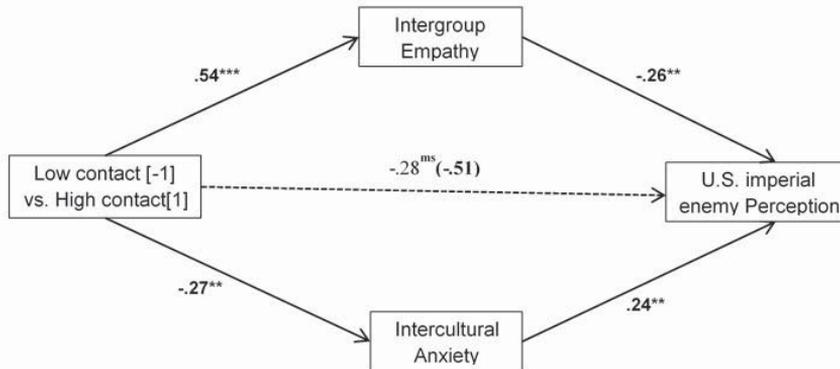


Figure 4. Model showing contact contrast effects on the U.S. imperial enemy perception.

Overall, direct effect ( $\beta = -.28$ ,  $p = .08$ ) was only marginally significant, but the total indirect effect was significant ( $c = -.51$ , CI [-.82, -.31]). The specific indirect effect paths from the contrast through empathy ( $a*b = -.33$ , CI [-.60, -.13]) and intercultural anxiety were significant ( $a*b = -.18$ , CI [-.37, -.03]). Like previous models, the relationship between the high-contact is what derives empathy development and anxiety reduction, only once there is a possibility of empathy development and anxiety reduction then it is possible to perceive Americans as lesser imperial-enemy nation. As shown in Model 4, the mediators of intergroup empathy and intercultural anxiety accounted for the partial mediation relationship between these variables.

## Discussion

Our assumption that contact provided via Fulbright program's policy effects positively the perception of Pakistani Fulbright grantees. We were able to directly investigate that having high-contact with Americans was a key antecedent of positive outcomes. We found that high-contact group reported more positive perception of and lower negative perception of Americans. As postulated, with higher contact the participants showed a lower endorsement of negative traits of Americans and they perceived a typical American more positively than participants in low-contact group. These findings are in line with previous research on contact theory where studies have shown that

intergroup contact can promote the expansion of one's sense of self to include the outgroup (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001).

Findings about image of the outgroup were in the expected direction. With higher contact participants perceived the U.S. more as an ally and lower as an imperial-enemy. We think that due to higher contact participants not only change their stereotypes and prejudices about individuals, but also they perceive the country as a more positive and less negative entity. It is intriguing to note that while Pakistan and the U.S. are strategic allies, at the diplomatic level, Pakistanis who have never travelled to the U.S. are significantly low on perceiving U.S. as an ally; rather they perceive the U.S. more as an imperialist-enemy. Our findings support that increased contact helped Pakistani Fulbright scholars in developing more positive image of the U.S.

Results regarding the effects of contact on outgroup empathy and intercultural anxieties are consistent with previous research (see Binder et al., 2009; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Higher intergroup empathy in high-contact group could be explained with expansion of one's sense of self to include the outgroup (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001), which would help in developing more empathic concern and perspective taking toward Americans. Even though there is always much negativity and ambiguity on media about the relationship between the two countries, it is particularly noteworthy that there is more empathy with higher contact of Pakistani scholars in the U.S.

Research on intercultural anxiety suggests that prejudice towards the outgroup is predicted by a lack of knowledge about the outgroup and by past negative contact (e.g., Stephan et al., 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 1989). This study shows that contact reduces intercultural anxiety. It seems that by exposing even politically volatile groups to one another via a well-regulated program such Fulbright, intergroup intercultural anxiety will be reduced. This reduction in anxiety may facilitate prejudice reduction and fostering positive relations.

Our findings related to the path models showed that the mediation through intergroup empathy is always significant in all models. The relationship was such that in the case of positive perception of Americans and ally image of the U.S., empathy was positively mediated the paths from contact to positive outcomes. In the case of negative perception of Americans and image of the U.S. as an imperial, enemy was negatively mediated by intergroup empathy. Furthermore, the relationship of intercultural anxiety and was such that in the case of positive and negative perception of Americans and

perception of the U.S. as an ally, intercultural anxiety was not a significant mediator, but in the case of image of the U.S. as an imperial enemy it was a significant mediator. These findings add to the existing literature that in addition to mediating the positive perception of the member of the outgroup, empathy also effects the image of the outgroup as an entity, for instance as an ally or an imperial-enemy.

Although recent research has shown that Pakistani youth has negative perceptions about the U.S. (Anjum, Castano, & Aziz, 2016), current study has demonstrated that inter-group contact built via policy oriented programs such as Fulbright exchange program, even between groups with complex history since 9/11, can be beneficial in promoting positive inter-group attitudes. As seen in the mediation models conducted in this study, when people make direct contact the youth with negative perception can experience intercultural anxiety and increased empathy. This study is novel in its investigation of inter-group contact between the United States and Pakistan and thus may help in propagating how to increase positive attitudes and reduce prejudice. Future studies should extend such exploratory work to other groups that have an enduring history of ambivalent relationship. Perhaps promotion of contact via exchange programs will allow us to cultivate a better understanding. This may help in fostering positive perspectives towards members outside our countries and continents.

Our results indicate that Fulbright program successfully enhances the positive perception about the U.S. among its grantees, even from the countries with volatile diplomatic relations, such as Pakistan. Given that the U.S. invests biggest amounts of educational development funds towards Fulbright and on the contrary ever escalating charged political sphere between the U.S. and Pakistan, this research is timely and meaningful. It is especially significant that high contact could so markedly improve attitudes of Pakistanis towards Americans and the U.S. as a country despite the diplomatic turmoil of official diplomatic relationship between the two nations. Last year, the United States spent just over 250 million dollars funding Fulbright programs all over the world with the intention of improving and humanizing international relations (Fulbright Scholar Program, 2018).

Findings of this study are the first to attest to the efficacy of the Pakistani Fulbright program, and they do so in the context of relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. More importantly, this study suggests that contact between ordinary representatives of culturally different groups can foster empathy and favorable views, whereas billions of dollars of aid and official military cooperation may not. A notable strength of this study is that the participants in this

study represent a minority group, whereas most of the contact research studies incorporate participants from the majority groups (Binder et al., 2009). Also all intergroup comparisons and samples used for majority and minority relationships in intergroup contact research, to best of our knowledge, are Western. Another contribution of this study is that the sample by default gives a good comparison level. For example, the group of Pakistani scholars who aspire to go to the U.S., the other group that is in the U.S. and majority of which is actually comparable to those in the first group, as they came from the same institute in Pakistan. This provides reasonably comparable groups with different level of direct contact with Americans.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

A few potential weaknesses of this study include the selection bias, partially unique (prestigious) experience of Fulbright fellows, and the stable context in which this study was conducted. Regarding selection bias, we did not randomly select the participants not it was possible to balance the demographic characteristics of the participants in the two groups. Secondly, the effect of the contact may have been driven by the mere fact that Fulbright fellowship is prestigious and it covers many costs in addition to just reducing tuition fee. Probably future research can compare Fulbright and non-Fulbright fellows with high-contact with Americans to fill this gap in current study. Additionally, being on this fellowship gives bright prospects upon returning back to Pakistan, the possibility of being hopeful might have been the driving force in addition to intergroup empathy or anxiety.

Finally, as psychologists we cannot ignore the role of context, which is possibly one of the biggest limitation of this study. This study was done using a cross-sectional design at a time which was a peaceful and immigration friendly era for Pakistani Fulbright scholar (President Barrack Obama's). It would be interesting to replicate this study in the current (President Donald Trump) administration's era. Recently, there have been some worrisome remarks by Fulbright authorities regarding the continuation and VISA policies for Fulbright fellows from various countries including Pakistan (Voice of America, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

We conclude our paper with words of Senator J. William Fulbright who once said: *“Education is a slow-moving but powerful force. It may not be fast enough or strong enough to save us from catastrophe, but it is the strongest force available.”* Based on findings

of our study we suggest that it is highly meaningful to run cultural exchange programs based on education such as Fulbright program. Investment in such programs have the potential to bring more sustainable positive changes and benefits for both groups involved in exchange program. We suggest that such educational-cultural exchange programs have wider implications. They would help in developing positive perceptions, emotional ties and better diplomatic relations among nations and open doors for peaceful world for times to come.

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