Widespread images of Muslim immigrants as “the threatening other” epitomize the current hostile climate towards Muslim minorities in Western Europe (Hussain, 2000; Poole, 2002; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007). Thus, close to 1 in 2 (46%) Flemish-Belgian voters perceive that Islamic values pose a threat to Western Europe (Billiet & Swyngedouw, 2009); and 41%
of the Dutch deem Muslim traditions to be incompatible with Western-European ways of life (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). The central tenet of the present study is that majority members’ perceptions of intergroup relations, such as the image that Muslims pose a threat to “our” values and way of life, will inform the ways in which they experience actual interactions with minorities (Howarth, 2006). Perceptions of intergroup relations are conceived of as group-based understandings of intergroup relations, rather than as mere reflections of reality (cf. Moscovici, 1988; Plaut, 2002, 2010). From the start, the social identity perspective has theorized that group-based understandings, of majority members in particular, shape the course of intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1978).

There is a vast body of research showing that when majority members see immigrant minorities as threatening, they adopt a more negative attitude towards immigrants (cf. Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006, for a review). Yet, little is known about the way generalized threat perceptions inform majority members’ experiences of specific situations of intergroup contact. We propose that group-based perceptions of immigrant minorities as threatening help majority members make sense of their daily contacts with members of immigrant minorities. When these daily interactions are interpreted in the context of threat, they may elicit feelings of anxiety and anger. Accordingly, our first research aim is to examine whether and how majority perceptions of threat may underlie more negative daily contact experiences with immigrant minorities.

To make sense of their encounters with immigrant minorities, majority members can draw on multiple coexisting and often competing images of intergroup relations (Plaut, 2010; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009). In addition to prevailing threat images of immigrant minorities in media and public debates, several content analyses have identified a competing portrayal of immigrant minorities as discriminated and stigmatized by the majority (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007; ter Wal, 2004; van Acker, 2012). Majority perceptions of discrimination imply an acknowledgement of prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment of minorities. Hence, while majority perceptions of immigrant minorities as threatening to the majority cast immigrant minorities in the role of “perpetrator,” majority perceptions of immigrant minorities as discriminated by the majority, cast minorities in the role of “victim.” Majority perceptions of threat and discrimination thus involve opposing attributions of responsibility.

Majority perceptions of discrimination are less well researched than (more prevalent) threat perceptions. However, there is some evidence associating the awareness of discrimination with more positive attitudes towards immigrants in the form of more support for affirmative action as well as multiculturalism (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Verkuyten, 2005). Extending these findings to ongoing contact with immigrant minorities, our second research aim is to examine whether and how perceived discrimination may enable more positive daily contact experiences with immigrant minorities.

**Perceived Threat and Daily Contact Experiences**

Our first research aim was to test how generalized perceptions of intergroup threat may underlie negative feelings in daily contacts with immigrant minorities. Research on intergroup contact has documented that perceived threat is related to both the quantity and quality of majority contact with immigrant minorities. In particular, high levels of perceived threat predict less positive contact. Likewise, majority members who have more frequent and more positive contacts with immigrant minorities, see them as less threatening (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Stephan et al., 2002; van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011).

While the relationship between intergroup threat and contact experiences is well-established in contact research, the existing studies rely on global retrospective assessments of overall contact quality (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Therefore, the contact paradigm offers limited insight into
the social ecology of naturally occurring intergroup interactions. The present study adds to existing research on intergroup contact by studying how generalized threat perceptions are associated with repeated experiences of specific contact situations.

Specifically, we reason that majority members who perceive immigrant minorities as threatening will be more likely to appraise concrete interactions with minorities as threatening. That is, to the extent that majority members see immigrant minorities as threatening to their majority identity and values, they are likely to appraise any differences with respect to the ways in which a minority member thinks and acts during the interaction as bothersome, rather than enriching. For members of high-status groups such as majority group members, appraisals of threat may be accompanied by fear as well as anger. Both emotions follow from appraisals of the situation as threatening or harmful to the self, and tend to involve blaming others as the source of threat or harm (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Research on intergroup emotions suggests that group members respond with such negative emotions when out-group members are perceived as interfering with in-group norms or social coordination (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). For instance, Mackie et al. (2000) show that in intergroup conflicts, low-status (or low-power) groups are more likely to experience fear while high-status (or high-power) groups experience anger in addition to fear, as they are more likely to display “offensive actions.” Applied to the present study, majority members may experience either anger or fear when they are bothered by the culturally different ways of thinking and acting of their minority interaction partners.

Perceived Discrimination and Daily Contact Experiences

A second research aim was to explore whether and how majority perceptions of discrimination may relate to more positive daily contact experiences. In a nutshell, we propose that majority members who perceive discrimination experience their daily contact experiences as more enriching, to a large extent because they more readily take the perspective of minority members and try to learn from them. Recent research has shown that perceived discrimination is related to different forms of empathy, including perspective taking (Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Iyer et al., 2003). Perspective taking in turn has been associated with more positive intergroup attitudes and behavior (e.g., Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio, Schrist, & Paolucci, 2003).

Perspective taking and learning can be seen as cognitive forms of empathy, which involve understanding and learning from the perspective of others (Davis, 1994). Cognitive empathy is distinct from emotional empathy, which involves experiencing emotional responses to the experiences of others. Emotional empathy may take the form of parallel empathy, which refers to experiencing the same emotions as another person as well as reactive empathy, which refers to an emotional response to the experience of another person (Finlay & Stephan, 2000). However distinct, the different types of empathy are closely related. Moreover, research suggests that perspective taking or “cognitive empathy” enables emotional empathy (Batson et al., 2002; Dovidio et al., 2004; Vescio et al., 2003). Therefore, and also because emotional empathy proper takes different forms across a range of naturally occurring contact situations, our study focuses on perspective taking.

In line with our reasoning, previous research has found that majority members who are aware of discrimination feel more emotional empathy towards minority members, and also engage more in perspective taking (Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Iyer et al., 2003). For instance, North American majority members who read a story about a member of a stigmatized group experiencing discrimination, reported feelings similar to those reported by the minority members themselves (such as anger towards the discriminating group; Finlay & Stephan, 2000). In another study, White Americans who acknowledged that African Americans are
subject to pervasive discrimination, felt more sympathy and compassion with African Americans than White Americans who did not (Iyer et al., 2003). Similarly, a recent study found that Whites who were aware of racial inequalities reported more perspective taking during an experimental task in which they imagined the course of events in a Black man’s life (Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011). Extending these findings to repeated and naturally occurring contact situations, we expect that majority members who perceive pervasive discrimination will more readily engage in perspective taking and learning during their daily contacts with minority members.

Furthermore, we argue that perspective taking and learning will in turn be associated with more positive contact experiences. A growing body of research documents the benefits of perspective taking for intergroup relations (e.g., Batson et al., 2002; Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio et al., 2003). For instance, Batson et al. (1997) found that asking participants to imagine how a particular member of a target group felt, increased their positive feelings both towards that person, as well as towards the target group as a whole. In addition, several studies have yielded an association between majorities’ perspective taking and prejudice towards African Americans (Dovidio et al., 2004; Vescio et al., 2003).

While most studies relate perspective taking to global intergroup attitudes, there is also more direct evidence for its benefits for the quality of actual intergroup contact. For instance, in a recent interracial interaction study in the US which experimentally induced a perspective-taking mindset, White participants who adopted a perspective-taking mindset showed more approach-oriented nonverbal behaviors (i.e., smiling, eye contact, leaning toward) during a subsequent interaction with a Black experimenter (Todd et al., 2011). In another study of interethnic interactions in our own lab, Belgian majority students who were “trying to learn” from their minority interaction partner, reported more positive feelings of admiration for their minority partner (van Acker, Mesquita, & Vanbeselaere, 2011). Admiration exemplifies so-called “appreciation emotions,” (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988), an emotion category that also includes feelings of respect, appreciation, awe, and esteem. Majority members who experience appreciation emotions, are likely to have appraised minority interaction partners’ behavior and ideas as enriching (rather than bothersome). In sum, we expect that perceived discrimination will be positively associated with appreciation and enrichment-related appraisals and emotions during ongoing interactions with minority members, and that this association is mediated by enhanced perspective taking and learning.

Summing up, we propose to test two hypotheses, which correspond to our research aims:

Hypothesis 1: Majority members’ perception of threat will be positively associated with threatening daily contact experiences.

Hypothesis 2: Majority members’ perception of discrimination will be positively associated with enriching daily contact experiences, through perspective taking and learning.

In order to test these hypotheses we administered a survey, followed by a daily diary study, among a group of Flemish-Belgian majority students. In the survey, students indicated the extent to which they perceived immigrant minorities as threatening the majority as well as the extent to which they perceived that immigrant minorities are discriminated by the majority. Two weeks later, the same majority students were invited to participate in a daily diary study, in which they kept track of their contacts with immigrant minorities for 7 consecutive days. Multilevel structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships between majority members’ perceptions of intergroup relations and their daily experiences of intergroup contact with immigrant minorities.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were students recruited from culturally diverse high schools in Flanders Belgium. After obtaining approval from the directors of
the schools, a researcher presented the study during school time in seven different classes (five from one school, and two from another). One hundred percent of the students who attended class that day ($N = 156$) showed interest in participating, and provided their email addresses. All students were consequently contacted by e-mail, and invited to complete a survey. One hundred twenty-three students (79%) completed the survey. These participants were invited 2 weeks later to participate in the daily diary study, and were prompted each day and for a period of 7 consecutive days to fill in a short questionnaire about their contacts with immigrant minorities during the day. Participants who completed the daily diary study received two film tickets as compensation (total value of 14.00 Euros). All 123 participants who completed the prestudy also filled in one or more of the daily diary questionnaires. Out of the 123 students, 23 (19%) did not have a Belgian cultural background. Their data were excluded from further data analyses. The Belgian majority students (45 men, 55 women) ranged in age between 15 and 20 ($M = 16.61$, $SD = 1.15$).

**Instruments and Measures**

Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to all questions using a scale ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree).*

**Survey.** The survey measured two types of majority perceptions of intergroup relations: (a) perceived threat and (b) perceived discrimination. **Perceived threat** was measured with four items. The items were chosen to conceptualize symbolic threat, conveying the notion that immigrant minority cultures threaten the majority culture because they are in conflict with majority values and ways of life (Riek et al., 2006). The items were: “Immigrant minority groups do not respect the Belgian culture and traditions”; “The way of life of some immigrant minorities does not fit with the Belgian way of life”; “The values and norms of some minority groups are conflicting with Belgian values and norms” and “Immigrant minorities have values and traditions that are incompatible (or cannot be reconciled) with Belgian values and traditions” ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.09$, $\alpha = .70$).

**Perceived discrimination** was measured by a three-item scale that we developed for the purpose of this study. The items were: “Immigrant minorities are often discriminated against in Belgium”; “Immigrant minority members are regularly treated unfairly in the labor market”; and “Many Belgians mistakenly lump all minority members together” ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.24$, $\alpha = .68$). The correlation between perceived threat and perceived discrimination was negative ($r[100] = −.37$, $p < .001$).

**Intergroup contacts daily diary.** Our intergroup contacts daily diary was inspired by the Rochester Interaction Record (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). An instance of intergroup contact was defined as “an encounter with one or more members of immigrant minority groups.”

At the end of each day of the diary study, participants reported how many contacts with members of immigrant minorities they had experienced that day. Participants were asked to report about the three most important contacts. For each contact, participants first described the situation. Next, several prompts appeared that asked participants to provide information about both the event (e.g., duration, location) and the minority interaction partner(s) during that event (e.g., role, relationship, ethnicity). Finally, participants indicated their agreement with a series of items on (a) perspective taking, and (b) appraisals and emotions during the contact situation. Since it was rare for participants to report more than three situations (i.e., in fewer than 2% of the cases), we are confident that our sample of situations is representative of the range of intergroup contacts that majority students in our study had experienced.

**Perspective taking.** A two-item scale of “perspective taking” was created ($r[538] = .49$, $p < .001$), consisting of one item on perspective taking proper (“I have tried to imagine the perspective of my interaction partner”) and one item on learning: “I have tried to learn something from my interaction partner.”
Experience of the contact situation. In order to assess participants’ experiences of specific contact situations as threatening or enriching, we measured their appraisals of the interaction partners as well as their emotions during the contact. Principal component analysis of all our measures of situated appraisals and emotions yielded a two-component solution which explained 61.15% of the variance. Threat-related appraisals and threat-related emotions loaded on the first component, while enrichment-related appraisals and emotions loaded on the second component. Therefore, we created an eight-item scale of threat-related appraisals and emotions (α = .89; “My interaction partner had a peculiar way of saying and doing things”; “My interaction partner did not share values that are important to me”; “The behavior of my interaction partner was inappropriate”; “My interaction partner did not respect my way of thinking”; anxious, insecure, irritated, and angry)\(^2\) and a five-item scale of enrichment-related appraisals and emotions (α = .84; “The ideas of my interaction partner were inspiring to me”; “My interaction partner’s strengths revealed themselves in this situation”; “Our different cultural backgrounds made this interaction valuable”; respect and admiration).

Results

The daily diary data have a multilevel or hierarchical structure, as contact situations (Level 1) are nested within individuals (Level 2). One hundred majority students reported on 538 intergroup contact situations. Of these contacts, 58% took place at school (e.g., in class or on the playground), 24.72% occurred in public places (e.g., on the bus or in a shop) and 7.24% during leisure time activities (e.g., in a soccer game or when going out). Furthermore, 44.80% of the contacts were with classmates, 16.73% with friends, 12.8% with acquaintances, and 25.1% with strangers. Finally, participants had contact with minority interaction partners from a variety of ethnic origins. Most interaction partners were of Moroccan (24.7%) and Turkish origin (16.5%), the largest Muslim minority groups in Belgium. In 31.2% of the contact situations, the ethnicity of the interaction partner was not reported.\(^3\)

In order to explore the associations between the study variables, we first conducted a series of simple multilevel regression analyses using SPSS. Each regression analysis included only one independent variable. Per analysis, one of the study variables was regressed on a variable of the same or a higher level. Thus, Level 2 variables were regressed on Level 2 variables only while Level 1 variables were regressed on Level 1 as well as Level 2 variables. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, perceived threat was positively associated with threat-related appraisals and emotions, and negatively with enrichment-related appraisals and emotions. Threat was unrelated to perspective taking. Perceived discrimination was negatively associated with perceived threat, and positively with both perspective taking and enrichment appraisals and emotions. It was unrelated to threat appraisals and emotions. Perspective taking was positively associated with enrichment appraisals and emotions, and negatively with threat-related appraisals and emotions. Finally, enrichment-related appraisals and emotions were negatively associated with threat-related appraisals and emotions.

We subsequently tested our hypotheses estimating a multilevel structural equation model (MSEM) with measured variables. This allowed us to simultaneously test the direct relationships between, on the one hand, majority perceptions of threat and discrimination, and on the other hand, situated threat and enrichment appraisals and emotions respectively. It also made it possible to test the hypothesized indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and enrichment appraisals and emotions via perspective taking. To estimate the MSEM model we used robust maximum likelihood estimators and full information maximum likelihood (FIML) for missing data. MSEM allows for separate (and theoretically unbiased) estimations of Level 2 and 1 (i.e., between- and within-subjects) components of the variance-covariance matrix (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zang, 2010).
Figure 1 shows the standardized parameter estimates in the final model for the theoretically relevant associations between majority perceptions of intergroup relations on the one hand, and their daily contact experiences with minority members on the other. When controlling for participants’ prior relationship with the interaction partner or for the interaction partner’s ethnicity, the effects remained the same. Hence, these background variables were omitted from the final model. The final model fitted the data very well ($\chi^2 [4, N = 538] = 4.25, p = .37; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .011, SRMR_{between-level} = .058$), as evidenced by a nonsignificant $\chi^2$ value, a comparative fit index (CFI) $> .95$, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $< .06$, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $< .08$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004).

In support of Hypothesis 1, we obtained a significant relationship between perceived intergroup threat and situated threat appraisals and emotions during intergroup interactions ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), such that majority students who perceived more threat by immigrant minorities, were also more anxious and angry during daily contacts with minority interaction partners.

In support of Hypothesis 2, we found a positive relationship between perceived discrimination and perspective taking ($\beta = .31, p = .003$), and between perspective taking and enrichment-related appraisals and emotions during daily intergroup contacts ($\beta = .68, p < .001$). Moreover, a hypothesized indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and enrichment appraisals and emotions, through perspective taking, was also significant ($b = .14, p = .026$). Thus, participants who perceived more discrimination experienced their
daily contacts with minority interaction partners as more enriching, in part because they more readily engaged in perspective taking with their minority partners.

In addition to this indirect relationship, a direct relationship between perceived discrimination and enrichment appraisals and emotions also emerged ($\beta = .22, p = .036$). This suggests that additional processes may also play a role in connecting perceived discrimination with ongoing contact experiences. Majority perceptions of intergroup relations explained 9.7% of the variance in perspective taking, 21% of the variance in threat appraisals and emotions, and 60.7% of the variance in enrichment appraisals and emotions.

Discussion

The present study sought to connect majority members’ group-based perceptions of intergroup relations to their experiences of naturally occurring day-to-day contacts with immigrant minorities. It shows that common perceptions of immigrant minorities as threatening throw a long shadow over intergroup contact situations as they become self-enforcing through repeated threat appraisals and emotions during everyday contact situations. The present study thus goes beyond the finding from previous research on intergroup contact that perceived intergroup threat is associated with majority members’ global estimates of the quality of intergroup contact (e.g., Stephan et al., 2002; van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011) by showing that threat perceptions are reflected in the ways majority members experience specific everyday interethnic contacts.

Our findings also show that an alternative perception of intergroup relations—that minorities are discriminated by the majority—is associated with both positive appraisals and positive affect during everyday intergroup interactions. Majority members who acknowledged discrimination and stigmatization at the beginning of the study, engaged in more perspective taking during their everyday interactions with immigrant minorities 2 weeks later. Perspective taking, in turn, was associated with higher levels of enrichment appraisals and emotions. Hence, our findings show that majority members’ perceptions of the nature of the intergroup relations make the difference between emotions of threat and emotions of enrichment during everyday contacts with immigrant minorities.

The Consequences of Acknowledging Discrimination

Our research extends previous research on the relationship between the majority’s awareness of discrimination and perspective taking (Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Iyer et al., 2003; Todd et al., 2011) by showing that the perception that immigrant minorities are discriminated is associated with more spontaneous perspective taking during ongoing interactions. It is important to point out that majority perceptions of discrimination as conceptualized and measured here involve the acknowledgement that differential treatment of immigrant minorities is (to some extent) unfair. Majority members who acknowledge that there is differential treatment, and that this is unfair, are likely the ones who never believed that everyone gets what they deserve. Most majority members, but particularly the ones who strongly believe in a just world (see Jost & Hunyady, 2005), will readily blame minority members themselves for their failure to succeed. Blaming minorities themselves relieves majority members of their responsibility, and may thus serve to maintain, or even restore majority members’ belief in a just world.

Perspective Taking and Intergroup Attitudes

Our research also extends research on the relationship between perspective taking and intergroup attitudes. Previous research has shown that majority members’ perspective taking may positively influence their intergroup attitudes (Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Vescio et al., 2003), as well as their behavior during standardized interactions with minority
members (Todd et al., 2011; but see Vorauer, Martens, & Sasaki, 2009). Our research adds to the existing findings by demonstrating the link between perspective taking and positive feelings during everyday interethnic contacts: Majority members who reported spontaneous perspective taking during daily interactions with immigrant minorities, also reported more feelings of appreciation towards immigrant minorities during these interactions.

However, there may be important boundary conditions to the beneficial effects of perspective taking. First, earlier recent research on the role of perspective taking has yielded differential effects on moral emotions for high and low identifiers: In one study, taking the perspective of the victims increased the guilt feelings of low-identifying majority members, whereas it led to decreased guilt feelings in high identifiers (Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2009, Study 1). It is possible that high identifiers were more protective of their positive identity than low identifiers.

Other recent research has also suggested potential limits to the positive effects of perspective taking (Vorauer, Martens, et al., 2009). This research also manipulated perspective taking but this time preceding an intergroup interaction in the lab. Perspective taking had a positive effect on the behavior of highly prejudiced majority members, but a negative effect on the behavior of majority members who were low in prejudice. In particular, it appeared that perspective taking had a negative impact on lower prejudiced majority members’ behavior because it led them to be complacent during the interaction, not feeling that they had to exert much effort to convey positive regard to the outgroup member.

Further research should investigate the conditions under which perspective taking is beneficial to intergroup relations. However, it is important to note that our study differs from the two studies just described (Vorauer, Martens, et al., 2009; Zebel et al., 2009), because it measured rather than manipulated perspective taking. Perspective-taking instructions may take on a different meaning than if perspective taking occurred spontaneously.

**Perspective Taking and Motivational Mindsets**

The present findings are consistent with recent work on motivational mindsets during intergroup interactions (Murphy, Richeson, & Molden, 2011). This work found that the behavior of majority members who were motivated to approach desired outcomes (e.g., getting to know the minority interaction partner) was more positive during intergroup interactions than that of majority members focusing on avoiding undesired outcomes (e.g., not appearing prejudiced; Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010). Other recent work has also shown that the behavior of majority members who focus on learning during intergroup interactions is more positive than that of majority members focusing on performing (Migacheva & Tropp, 2014). Our own findings are consistent with both studies, and also suggest that perspective taking is closely related to a focus on learning something from the partner.

**Direction of Causality**

The present analysis specified majority perceptions of intergroup relations as predictors of intergroup contact experiences. While such a conceptualization is suggestive of a causal direction, our research design does not allow for a conclusion on the direction of the association. The relationship between the quality of intergroup contact and perceptions of intergroup relations may best be thought of as bidirectional. On the one hand, the idea that majority members’ perceptions of intergroup relations shape contact experiences fits well with the logic of multilevel analyses—often, higher order measures are assumed to be causes of lower order measures (Schaafsma, Nezlek, Krejtz, & Safron, 2010). It is also consistent with the theoretical notion that ideas about intergroup relations impact majority members’ intergroup behavior (cf. Vorauer, Gagnon, et al., 2009). On the other hand, it is equally plausible that intergroup contact experiences inform majority members’ perceptions of intergroup relations; this is in fact the gist of
intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Therefore, majority members’ conception of intergroup relations may influence their contact experiences, but contact experiences may also further reinforce, or to the contrary change, majority perceptions of intergroup relations.

A further limitation of the correlational nature of the present research is that we cannot be sure whether perceived discrimination and perceived threat are the important “drivers” of majority members’ emotional experience during intergroup contact or whether there is another (third) variable that accounts for the relationship. Most importantly, we were not able to control for the nature of the reported contact situations. Yet, it is possible that majority members who perceive immigrant minorities as threatening may have reported qualitatively different—and more negative—encounters with immigrant minorities, and such differences might have accounted for the obtained pattern of findings. For instance, it is possible that majority members who strongly perceive immigrant minorities as threatening have fewer minority friends and, therefore, reported fewer contacts with friends than majority members who do not perceive immigrant minorities as threatening. Although we cannot entirely rule out this alternative explanation for the different patterns of emotions, several findings make it less likely. First, we found no relationship between the endorsement of perceived threat and the proportion of reported interactions that were with friends (as opposed to others than friends).\(^4\) In addition, the relationship between intergroup perceptions (threat, discrimination) and emotional experiences during the interaction was not affected by the nature of the situation, as defined by the relationship with the interaction partner or the ethnicity of the partner. Taken together, these results increase our confidence that differences in the nature of the situation cannot entirely account for the relationship between intergroup perception and emotional experience during intergroup contact. However, future research in a more controlled setting should complement the present findings. In this research majority participants’ perceptions of intergroup relations can be measured before they engage in a standardized interaction situation.

**Conclusion**

A daily diary study among Flemish majority high school students sheds light on how majority perceptions of intergroup relations afford different experiences of daily contacts with immigrant minorities. It shows that pervasive images of minorities as a threat to “our” culture have a self-perpetuating character as they pave the way for more threatening contact experiences. Yet, an alternative perception of immigrant minorities as discriminated by “us” affords more positive appraisals and affect, and hence provides possibilities for more harmonious intergroup relations.

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**Notes**

1. When the analyses were run for each of the two items separately, this resulted in the same pattern of results as the results reported here.
2. When the analyses were run with a threat-related appraisals and emotions scale that only included fear-related emotions (instead of both fear- and anger-related emotions) this resulted in an equally good model fit ($\chi^2 = 4.51, N = 538, p = .34$; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .015, SRMR\(_{\text{between-level}} = .059$), and yielded a similar pattern of results.
3. We were curious to see whether the cultural background of the interaction partner would be related to the quality of interethnic interactions. Since the current discourse of threat focuses primarily on Muslim minorities we grouped all cultural backgrounds into a dichotomous category “Muslim cultural background” or “no Muslim cultural background.” Whether interaction partners were of Muslim cultural background or not...
was not related to enrichment appraisals and emotions nor to threat appraisals and emotions.

4. Analyses are available from the author upon request.

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