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**Interact & aspire high: Contextual conditions of acculturation and  
educational aspirations**

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## Abstract

Although education is central for minorities' integration, there are large achievement gaps between minority and majority students as a result of pervasive educational inequalities. Efforts to advance the educational outcomes of minority children have identified that parental beliefs about the education of their children are significantly influential on the children's attainment. Given that these beliefs are dependent on the acculturation of the parents; improvements in intergroup contact, described as an antecedent of acculturation, could potentially produce beneficial educational outcomes for the children. This study aims to understand the educational aspirations Roma parents have for their children, drawing on intergroup contact and acculturation theories. The Roma is the largest minority in Europe and subject to many educational inequalities, so this approach could potentially help to improve their situation. Specifically, we examined how Roma parents' frequency and quality of interaction with non-Roma individuals are related to their educational aspirations, and to what extent can this relationship be explained by their psychological process of acculturation. 242 Roma parents in Portugal participated in a survey study. Overall results revealed that an increase in intergroup contact frequency of the parents is related to higher educational aspirations for their children, and this positive effect is mediated by a decrease in their preference for culture maintenance. Moreover, the gender of the child and the socioeconomic status of parents were important predictors of parental educational aspirations. Implications for research and policy are discussed.

*Keywords:* Acculturation Antecedents, Intergroup Contact Theory, Roma Education, Educational Aspirations.

## Index

|                                                        |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgment.....                                    | II  |
| Abstract .....                                         | III |
| Index.....                                             | IV  |
| Index of figures and tables .....                      | V   |
| Introduction .....                                     | 1   |
| Chapter I – Theoretical Framework.....                 | 4   |
| Acculturation orientations in context.....             | 4   |
| Contact frequency and quality .....                    | 7   |
| Parental educational aspirations .....                 | 10  |
| Roma parents’ educational aspirations .....            | 12  |
| Present study.....                                     | 13  |
| Chapter II – Methods.....                              | 15  |
| Participants .....                                     | 15  |
| Procedure.....                                         | 15  |
| Measures.....                                          | 16  |
| Educational aspirations.....                           | 16  |
| Acculturation orientations .....                       | 16  |
| Frequency and quality of contact.....                  | 17  |
| Socio-demographics .....                               | 17  |
| Chapter III – Results.....                             | 18  |
| Descriptives and correlations.....                     | 18  |
| Prediction of educational outcomes.....                | 19  |
| Mediation analysis of acculturation orientations ..... | 21  |
| Chapter IV – Discussion.....                           | 24  |
| Limitations and future research .....                  | 27  |
| Practical implications .....                           | 29  |
| Conclusion.....                                        | 30  |
| References .....                                       | 31  |

## Index of figures and tables

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| Figure 1.1 ..... | 14 |
| Figure 3.2 ..... | 22 |
| Table 3.1 .....  | 18 |
| Table 3.2 .....  | 19 |
| Table 3.3 .....  | 21 |
| Table 3.4 .....  | 23 |

## Introduction

The Roma is the largest minority group in Europe, frequently facing social exclusion, marginalization and poor socio-economic conditions (Europäische Union, 2018). Moreover, despite institutional efforts during the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” to fight discrimination and inequalities, the situation has seen little improvement over time (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017).

Education has been central to policies aiming to tackle disadvantages among minority groups, not only because it allows people to escape the cycle of poverty and improves health, employment and political participation (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017), but because it is also a driver of social integration for immigrants and their offspring (OECD & Union, 2015). However, in many instances, education is plagued with inequalities, resulting in large achievement gaps between majority and minority students (Riederer & Verwiebe, 2015). In the case of the Roma, these inequalities are particularly complex and multidimensional, ranging from anti-Roma prejudice from the society at large, to schooling and teacher deficits, cultural differences and structural disadvantages (Lauritzen & Nodland, 2018). As a result, the Roma fare worse and drop out more at school, have lower access to higher education and are a target of educational segregation (Europäische Union, 2018).

The educational outcomes of children depend on the multiple influences of the proximal and distal contexts in which they are immersed (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Among them, the involvement degree of parents and their beliefs about education have been shown to exert an important influence during childhood (Gutman & Feinstein, 2010) and to have a lasting impact on the children’s attainment (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen, & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). However, minority parents experience multiple structural and psychological barriers to getting engaged in their children’s education (Mendez, 2010). This is why many interventions aiming to tackle educational inequalities have focused on family-systems and supporting parents with their children’s education, resulting in substantial improvements on children’s health, social-emotional development and cognitive abilities (Engle et al., 2011).

This study aims to understand the educational aspirations Roma parents have for their children, drawing on intergroup contact and acculturation theories. Specifically, we will explore how Roma parents’ frequency and quality of interaction with non-Roma individuals are related to

their educational aspirations, and to what extent can this relationship be explained by their psychological process of acculturation.

According to the Intergroup Contact Hypothesis, developed by Allport (1954), certain conditions of contact with out-group members lead to a reduction of prejudice against them. This effect has been shown consistently in the literature (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006 for a meta-analysis) and it is a promising tool for improving intergroup relations (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Since the initial development of the theory, researchers have found a number of factors explaining the direct and indirect effects of intergroup contact on intergroup relations. These factors range from cognitive, such as stereotype reduction; to affective, such as reduced anxiety and increased empathy towards the outgroup (Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010). Most of the research on intergroup contact has however been conducted with majority group members, overlooking minorities' potentially different experiences of contact (Bagci, Stathi, & Piyale, 2018). For instance, minorities engage in intergroup contact for different reasons than the majority members and have enhanced levels of anxiety during the interactions (see Tropp, Mazziotta, & Wright, 2016 for an overview). Hence, previous literature stresses the need for further research into the mechanisms and outcomes underlying intergroup contact for minorities (Bagci et al., 2018; Tropp et al., 2016).

Cross-cultural psychology has contributed to our understanding of intergroup contact by analyzing it from the perspective of acculturation theory (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). According to acculturation theory, when an individual comes in contact with another culture, psychological aspects of the person interact with the multiple contexts they live in, producing outcomes that range from physical and mental health to socio-cultural adaptation to the new environment (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Individuals having a positive appraisal of both their ethnic and host cultures are thought to be oriented towards integration, which usually leads to the best outcomes (González, & Brown, 2016; Sam & Berry, 2010). Acculturation outcomes are currently seen as the result of the interaction between the perspectives on cultural maintenance and desire for contact with the outgroup of minority and majority members (Brown & Zagefka, 2011).

This study focused on Roma parents in Portugal, explaining the educational aspirations they have for their children as the result of the interaction between their experiences of contact and psychological process of acculturation. We addressed a research gap on intergroup contact on minority groups and examined its potential relationship to educational outcomes. We contributed to research on cross-cultural psychology by studying how this relationship can be explained by

the socio-psychological variables of acculturation. As previously mentioned, intergroup contact has been shown to be a promising tool for improving intergroup interactions, integration to be the best outcome of acculturation and education to be a vehicle for upward mobility. Hence, understanding the relationship between the three will help us design better policies and interventions to improve the lives of minorities. Furthermore, by examining these relationships with the Roma, we aimed to contribute to untangling the multidimensional problem of Roma education with empirically-grounded policy recommendations.

The following section presents the theoretical framework and relevant concepts. Then we proceed to the description of the methods and results. Finally, we discuss our main findings, identify limitations and discuss potential implications for policy-making.



## **Chapter I – Theoretical Framework**

### **Acculturation orientations in context**

Acculturation refers to the “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). It identifies the psycho-social changes in behaviors, identities and values that people go through when in prolonged contact with other cultural environments, which subsequently affect their psychological well-being and social functioning (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Early works in psychology carried out by Berry and colleagues described acculturation as a bi-dimensional process resulting from the person’s orientation toward cultural maintenance (wish to preserve aspects of one’s cultural heritage) and their orientation toward seeking contact (the wish to interact with members of the host society), which interact to form four strategies of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Berry, 2005). Integration refers to individuals having an active interest in maintaining the ethnic culture while participating in the larger social network, whereas in assimilation individuals relinquish their ethnic culture to favor contact with the dominant society. Separation refers to individuals seeking to maintain the ethnic culture while avoiding interaction with the majority-group members, while in marginalization, usually out of discrimination and exclusion, individuals reject both the ethnic heritage and the contact with the mainstream culture (Berry, 2005). These orientations of acculturation provide cumulative psychological resources, so having a positive valence towards both the ethnic and the host cultures is associated with better sociocultural and psychological adjustment (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013) and favorable intergroup relations (González & Brown, 2016).

The acculturation orientations are relevant predictors of psychological adaptation, that involves internal psychological changes associated with mental health, well-being and life satisfaction (Ward & Kennedy, 1994); and socio-cultural adaptation, which denotes a behavioral dimension about the individuals’ ability to interact effectively in the new environment, accompanying changes in educational performance or social competence (Ward, 2005). The distinction between these two forms of adaptation is important since they have been found to be empirically distinct and independent in terms of predictors and outcomes; whereas psychological adaptation concerns, for instance, matters of intrapersonal characteristics and social support, socio-cultural adaptation is more strongly influenced by contact variables, such as the quantity and quality of intergroup interactions (Ward, 2005).

Although the acculturation orientations constitute an essential component of acculturation, other authors widened the notion of acculturation to include other important elements. Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver (2006) for instance, proposed that the acculturation process could be divided into acculturation conditions (characteristics of the individual, the immigrant group, the society of origin and the receiving society that act as antecedents), orientations (the strategies proposed by Berry that would act as mediators between conditions and outcomes) and outcomes (the psychological well-being and sociocultural competence of the individuals) (Arends-Tóth & Vijver, 2006). They later on well-fitted their model with a sample of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, finding perceived discrimination and acceptance as conditions of acculturation, the orientations as intervening mechanisms and measures of psychological and socio-cultural adaptation as outcomes (Te Lindert, Korzilius, Van de Vijver, Kroon, & Arends-Tóth, 2008). However, although current research acknowledges these components, the majority of the studies have focused on the outcomes of acculturation rather than on its conditions (Sam & Berry, 2010). Moreover, of the studies examining the conditions of acculturation, the majority have centered on intrapersonal characteristics, such as personality traits of extroversion and agreeableness, open-mindedness or emotional stability (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). This intrapersonal focus has received criticism for being narrow and disregarding of the social environment surrounding the person acculturating (Jurcik, Ahmed, Yakobov, Solopieieva-Jurcikova, & Ryder, 2013).

Consequently, a growing number of researchers are proposing to change the focus of study to the multifaceted ecological context in which acculturation takes place (Sam & Berry, 2010; Schachner, van de Vijver, & Noack, 2017; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Following the logic of Bronfenbrenner theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), the general consensus depicts the acculturating individual at the center of concentric circles representing the more proximal or distal contexts they live in, which influence each other to produce the final outcome of acculturation (Doucerain, 2018). A relevant example of the multiple contexts influencing acculturation was put forward by Schachner et al. (2017), who created a framework of the contextual conditions of acculturation and adjustment for migrant adolescents. The authors theorized how the settings of the mainstream society at the exo and macro systems (general climate towards the ethnic groups and integration, the ethnic composition and migration history) interact with micro-systems, such as the characteristics of the immigrant group (the perceived cultural distance and status in society), the school (whether it fosters equality and inclusion,

supports multiculturalism, etc.) and the family (their school involvement, acculturation expectations and other cultural traits), influence the acculturation orientations and ultimately the outcomes of the process (Schachner et al., 2017). They later on tested the model in a study with immigrant students in Germany, providing evidence of different contextual antecedents (school, family and ethnic group) affecting the acculturation orientations differently, and these in turn being associated with different outcomes (Schachner, Van de Vijver, & Noack, 2018). In this study, the authors found that whereas the family was more relevant for cultural maintenance, the school was more related to cultural adoption; and whereas proximal contexts (like school and family) were more relevant for the psychological outcomes of acculturation, the ethnic group was found more relevant to sociocultural adjustment. Importantly, their results confirmed the mediating role of the orientations in the acculturation process, since most of the associations between contextual conditions and outcomes were indirect through the orientations. They also provided evidence in support of the differential role of the acculturation orientations on the outcomes, since culture maintenance was more strongly related to psychological outcomes whereas culture adoption was related to sociocultural outcomes (Schachner et al., 2018). In sum, the ecological approaches to acculturation put forward a broader notion of acculturation, stressing the need of research on the contextual conditions of acculturation and their interaction with the orientations to produce the final outcome.

The current study focused on the family context, specifically the parents. The rationale behind studying families is that they are the most influential micro-system for children, affecting many of their developmental, psychological and educational outcomes (Cohen et al., 2018). Moreover, parental involvement in early learning might have a bigger influence on the educational attainment of children than any other factor, including family income, parental education or school environment (Gutman & Feinstein, 2010). However, as a result of poverty, marginalization and discrimination, many minority parents experience chronic stress that undermines their motivation to stimulate their children (Cohen et al., 2018). It is thus essential to study the intersectional barriers they experience and potential ways to ameliorate their situation. Our study is also based on the concept of “Developmental niche”, a theoretical approach focusing on the parental views about their practices and organization of daily life in order to develop more efficient and grounded policies (Super & Harkness, 1986). We also followed an ecological approach to acculturation, considering contextual conditions that affect minority parents’

acculturation outcomes. Specifically, this study expands the knowledge on the antecedents of acculturation by exploring new contextual intergroup variables: the frequency and quality of interactions with outgroup members.

### **Contact frequency and quality**

As suggested by the prominent works of Zagefka and Brown (2002), acculturation is closely related to intergroup dynamics. In their early study, the authors found that the relative fit between the acculturation preferences of majority and minority groups was related to the quality of their intergroup relations (Zagefka & Brown, 2002). Similar cross-sectional correlations emerged in their longitudinal study with Chilean majority members and their attitudes towards the Mapuche minority, as well as a potentially causal relationship between the acculturation orientation “desire for contact” and the perceived quality of intergroup relations (Zagefka, Brown, & González, 2009). However, the causal relationship between the acculturation orientations and intergroup contact has not been consistently considered in literature: while some studies suggest there is a degree of interdependence and even a causal effect of acculturation orientations on intergroup contact (Brown & Zagefka, 2011), recent longitudinal studies have placed intergroup contact as an antecedent (González & Brown, 2016; Hässler et al., 2019). In our study we have taken the latter perspective, following the findings of Schachner et. al. (2018) on the intermediating role of the acculturation orientations between contextual conditions and outcomes and aiming to address the research gap on the conditions of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Our findings would advance the understanding of the dynamics between intergroup contact and acculturation and help create better policies for minorities’ integration, since intergroup contact could be employed to generate the most beneficial acculturation outcomes.

Allport’s original proposal of the “contact hypothesis” posits that interaction with members of the outgroup decreases prejudice, especially under optimal conditions of equal status, collaborative work towards a common goal and support from relevant authorities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Following an interaction with outgroup members, people go through a number of cognitive changes (such as stereotype reduction towards the outgroup) and emotional changes (such as increased empathy or decreased anxiety), which ultimately translate into the overall improvement of intergroup relations (Tropp et al., 2016; Vezzali et al., 2010). The

intergroup contact effect has been shown consistently in literature, regardless of gender or stigmatized group, applied in issues ranging from conflict resolution to improving intergroup relations in work settings and shown multiple beneficial effects beside prejudice reduction, such as endorsement of policies to reduce intergroup inequality (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011).

The intergroup contact theory suggests there are two independent components in the interaction, one related to the extent or frequency of contact and one related to its valence or quality (Pettigrew et al., 2011). These two components have summative effects, so the most effective kind of intergroup contact would be the one that involves not only a high frequency, but also high quality of interaction, for instance in the form of cross-group friendships (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). There is however some controversy as to whether frequency and quality are both reliable predictors or whether there is a dominance of one over the other (Binder et al., 2009). In some studies, the quality of the contact has been shown to be a statistically better predictor of positive intergroup outcomes (Hässler et al., 2019; Lolliot et al., 2015). Other studies nuanced this claim, specifying that it might be more important only to majority groups, since they might rely more on the quality of the interaction as the basis of their intergroup judgements (Vezzali et al., 2010).

Previous research has identified a number of ways in which intergroup contact is different for minority and majority members. Most notably, the contact effects are generally weaker in studies conducted with minority members (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Intergroup contact might also be experienced differently by majority and minority groups: whereas majority members experience anxiety about being perceived as prejudiced, minorities experience anxiety about becoming the target of the prejudice; whereas majority members' motivation for intergroup contact is related to seeking acceptance and reassuring their moral integrity, minorities seek respect and empowerment; and whereas majority members prefer representations which minimize intergroup differences, minority members prefer their ethnic identity to be acknowledged (Tropp, Mazziotta, & Wright, 2016). There might also be differences in the way majority and minority groups rely on the two components of contact in order to judge the interactions (Vezzali et al., 2010). According to these authors, majority members would rely more on the quality of the interaction because they usually have less frequent contact with outgroups and might need additional information to judge the contact. Conversely, minorities might rely more on the frequency of interaction as the basis for their intergroup judgments, since

their previous experiences with discrimination might impact negatively on their appraisal of the interaction' quality (Vezzali et al., 2010).

Most of the research on intergroup contact has however been conducted with majority group participants, so we still have a limited understanding of the extent to which contact's mechanisms and outcomes are different for minorities (Bagci et al., 2018). Still, the literature acknowledges that minorities benefit from intergroup contact in several ways. For instance, research on the impact of discrimination on minorities' adaptation has shown that higher intergroup contact reduces minorities' reports of perceived discrimination (Bagci et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2010). Likewise, cross-group friendships have been shown to buffer the negative psychological effects of perceived discrimination on children (Bagci, Rutland, Kumashiro, Smith, & Blumberg, 2014). Minority groups can also profit from intergroup contact indirectly, through its effect on the majority of the population, such as the increase in support for integration and for policies to reduce inequality (Tropp et al., 2016). Addressing the gaps in intergroup contact theory by conducting research with minorities can, therefore, have a relevant impact on the overall quality of intergroup relations.

In addition to the aforementioned cognitive and emotional changes, cross-cultural psychology has contributed to explaining the effects of intergroup contact in inter-ethnic relations by analyzing their relation to acculturation. For instance, early works by Piontkowski (2000) demonstrated that several variables typically influencing intergroup relations, contact among them, were highly predictive of the acculturation orientations of several dominant and non-dominant groups (Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdržálek, 2000). Van Acker and Vanbeselaere (2011) also demonstrated that majority members' positive intergroup experience with minority groups elicited positive affect towards them, whereas the reverse produced negative emotional responses, lower support for minorities' ethnic culture maintenance and higher demand for host culture adoption. In a recent longitudinal study, developing new cross-group friendships was shown to influence majority-group Chilean students' acculturation orientations, making them more supportive of integration (Hässler et al., 2019). Moreover, other studies have associated intergroup contact with a process called deprovincialization: that is, a decrease in desire for culture maintenance due to individuals distancing themselves from the in-group (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010).

Although more sparsely, contact has also been connected to the acculturation orientations of minority group members. For instance, Zagefka and Brown (2002) found that minorities'

preference for integration was correlated with more favorable perceived intergroup relations and less ingroup bias. Moreover, not only direct contact but also meta-perceptions are associated with the acculturation orientations of minorities: when minorities perceive the majority to prefer their integration, they also prefer integration (Zagefka, González, & Brown, 2011). Conversely, some studies have found that prejudice, which is an expression of negative intergroup interactions, was related to an increase in culture maintenance and decrease in culture adoption among minority groups (Zagefka et al., 2014). This effect is theoretically supported by the Rejection-Identification hypothesis, theorizing that prejudice against minorities leads them to identify more strongly with the ethnic group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Furthermore, recent studies suggest that minorities might sometimes favor assimilation as a way to gain acceptance in the mainstream society and increase collective and individual status, evidence of deprovincialization effects on minorities (Bagci et al., 2018).

The current study contributed to previous efforts to integrate intergroup contact and acculturation theories by providing evidence on how the frequency and quality of contact are related to the acculturation orientations. Moreover, it explored these effects on the Roma minority group, therefore contributing to the less frequent body of research of intergroup contact theory on minorities. Additionally, it explored the outcomes of intergroup contact in education, a domain traditionally less researched than prejudice reduction. Specifically, it examined if the quality and frequency of intergroup contact are positively related to the aspirations that parents have for their children' education.

### **Parental educational aspirations**

Research on the link between family systems and schools shows a number of factors, such as parenting styles, parental involvement or parental beliefs about the schooling system, that help predict the educational attainment of children (Spera et al., 2009). Among those, the educational aspirations of parents, referring to the level of education that parents would like their children to attain, seems to be a particularly important predictor of children's school achievement (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Boonk et al., 2018; Spera et al., 2009; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Although there is no conclusive evidence, multiple studies have offered explanations for the relationship between parental aspirations and school achievement: some suggest that it might

be due to the influence of the aspirations of parents on the children's own aspirations (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). Others relate it to practical matters, suggesting that parents with high educational aspirations tend to help their children with setting academic goals or persisting in school and college (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2005). Other studies have instead explained it in terms of the effect that parental aspirations might have on other microsystems, for instance, serving as a partial buffer against low teacher expectations (Benner & Mistry, 2007).

However, there is some degree of controversy regarding aspirations. Some authors have pointed out that an excessive focus on aspirations might obscure other important features explaining educational inequality, such as structural disadvantages, falling into a narrative of "deficit" among disadvantaged groups (Baker et al., 2014). Moreover, although differences in educational aspirations are seen across different minority groups (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), they remain in any case high (Baker et al., 2014), which might point to additional barriers impeding parents to transform those aspirations into tangible results (Baker et al., 2014; Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Spera et al., 2009).

Although the scope of the effect and the mechanisms by which these aspirations translate to educational outcomes is yet to be determined, the literature does highlight the importance of the "significant others" in shaping young people's aspirations (Baker et al., 2014). In addition, according to a recent review, when parental involvement is operationalised in terms of aspirations, parental educational aspirations was one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement, regardless of ethnicity or social class (see Boonk et al., 2018 for an overview). Based on these findings, we expect that parents' aspirations can be a facilitating and supportive factor in children's education and therefore, a relevant subject of study.

Cross-cultural psychology can contribute to our understanding of educational aspirations by examining their relationship with acculturation processes. Evidence suggests that the acculturation orientations are relatively independent of each other, both in terms of their relationship to the conditions that affect them and the outcomes they influence (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Cultural maintenance is typically associated to psychological adjustment and outcomes such as feeling well, and cultural adoption to gaining skills that facilitate sociocultural adjustment (Schachner et al., 2017; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Academic achievement, for instance, would be an example of the latter, and multiple studies on minorities' education evidence that it is closely related to culture adoption (see Makarova & Birman, 2015 for a review). In the current study, we



argued that educational aspirations can also be operationalised as an outcome of sociocultural adaptation, given their theoretical connections with achievement. To our knowledge, educational aspirations have not yet been studied as an outcome of acculturation, but if they would be operationalised as such, we argue that they would be associated with higher cultural adoption. This study contributed to research in cross-cultural psychology by examining the relationship of acculturation orientations with educational aspirations, testing our assumptions with a sample of Roma parents in Portugal.

### **Roma parents' educational aspirations**

The Roma is the largest minority in Europe, highly discriminated and characterised by low scholastic achievement (Europäische Union, 2018). Although research with Roma parents is rare, several studies in different European countries have helped describe some of their beliefs about education. For instance, Sigona & Trehan (2009) suggested that, due to their beliefs being deeply influenced by their experiences of historical marginalization, many Roma parents believe that education only brings weak economic benefits. Consistent with these findings, a qualitative study with newly-arrived Roma parents in Scotland suggested that, although Roma mothers supported their children to attend school and do well, they were uncertain of the educational possibilities of their children in the long-term and did not think that education could help them overcome the structural inequalities they face (Sime, Fassetta, & McClung, 2018). Moreover, on a study in Croatia, it was found that Roma parents rated their children's achievement and academic satisfaction lower and had lower educational aspirations than the majority parents (Pahic, Vidovic, & Miljevic-Ridicki, 2011).

In Portugal, the Roma community, otherwise called "Ciganos", is similarly characterized by educational inequalities, low attainment and low access to higher education (Magano & Mendes, 2016). These authors also found that Roma parents were involved in their children's studies and had moderate expectations about their children's educational prospects. However, their educational aspirations were higher for boys than for girls, since traditional values regarding the role of women in raising children conflicted with girls pursuing higher education. Moreover, although parents considered education to be essential for basic numeracy learning, they did not see much value above, so their expectations wane for higher education (Magano & Mendes, 2016).

Furthermore, the economic recession of 2008 might have curtailed recent advances regarding higher educational aspirations, more progressive gender roles and integrationist orientations on the Roma community, pushing them to “cope with the loss of social benefits and economic opportunities by strengthening intra-ethnic solidarity networks and ethnic closure” (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015, p. 10). Still, these authors warned about blaming families for the low scholastic achievement of their children, since other structural factors, such as low socioeconomic status or institutional discrimination are also important challenges to Ciganos’ education (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015; Magano & Mendes, 2016).

### **Present study**

The present study examined the relation between social psychological variables (e.g.; intergroup contact and acculturation) and ethnic minority parents’ educational aspirations. Specifically, it examines if frequency and quality of contact with ethnic majority non-Roma members are associated with the educational aspirations Roma parents have for their children, over and above other individual-level predictors of the child (i.e., gender and age-group) and parents (i.e., level of education and socio-economic status). Finally, we also examine if the relationship between intergroup contact and parental educational aspirations occurs via acculturation orientations (i.e., cultural maintenance, cultural adoption and desire for contact).

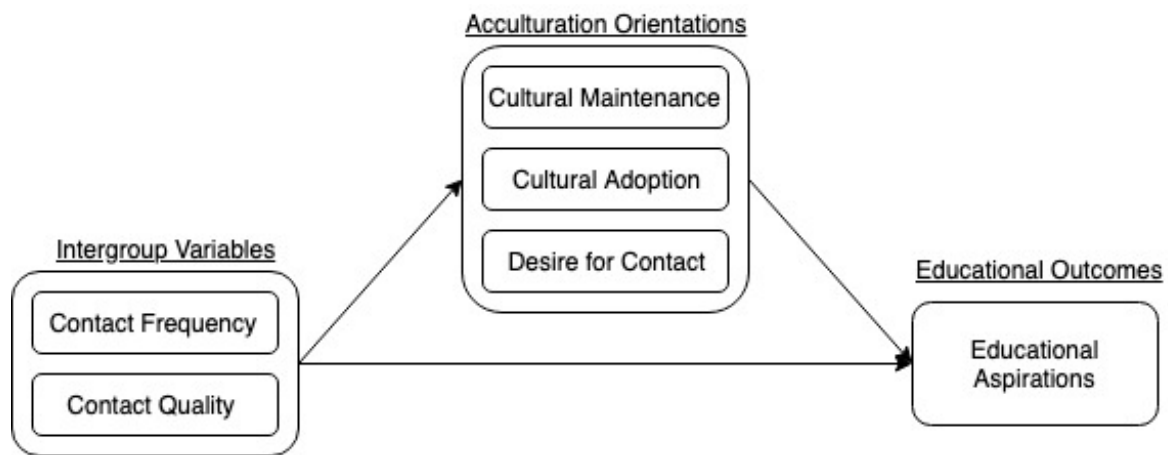
Considering previous research, we expect that: (see Figure 1.1)

H1: Higher levels of parental intergroup contact frequency (H1a) and quality (H1b) will be positively related to parental educational aspirations. Moreover, based on previous research claiming that quality of interaction is a less important predictor for minority groups (Vezzali et al., 2010), we expect a stronger effect of quantity vs quality of interaction on the outcome variable (H1c).

H2: Based on previous studies showing that cultural maintenance is more typically associated with psychological outcomes and that cultural adoption is more strongly related to socio-cultural outcomes (Ward & Geeraert, 2016), we predict that cultural adoption will be positively related to educational aspirations (H2a), more so than cultural maintenance or desire for contact (H2b).

H3: The relationship between intergroup contact and educational aspirations will be mediated by the acculturation orientations. Based on previous studies showing that higher contact is often related to lower cultural maintenance and higher cultural adoption (Bagci et al., 2018; Zagefka et al., 2014), we expect a positive indirect effect of frequency and quality of contact on educational aspirations through a decrease in cultural maintenance (H3a) and increase in cultural adoption (H3b).

Figure 1.1 *Theoretical model*



## Chapter II – Methods

### Participants

This research was conducted within a larger European project. ISOTIS is a collaborative research project funded by the European Union aiming to tackle inequalities and increase inclusiveness for families with diverse cultural backgrounds. An extensive survey was developed to assess resources, acculturation processes, experiences with education, beliefs about education and well-being of parents of different disadvantaged groups in Europe ( $N= 3938$ ). The current study focused only on the quantitative interviews conducted with Roma parents in Portugal.

A total of 242 Roma parents participated voluntarily, upon signing an informed consent form. Participants were aged between 18-59 years old ( $M= 32.6$ ,  $SD= 8.33$ ), were mainly women (98,8%) and most were born in Portugal (97,5%). Regarding marital status, 9,7% reported to be married, 4,5% to be separated/divorced, 4.1% always had been single, 3.3% were widowers. 85,5% reported to be living with a partner and in 96,6% of cases the partner was the father/mother of the child. Most of the participants reported not having a paid job (98,3%), and 57,4% reported their main occupation to be domestic work. Their level of education was low, their mean level of education corresponding to ISCED 1: primary education. Participants socio-economic status was very low, the material deprivation index revealing that on average participants lived below the threshold of poverty ( $M= 6,3$ ,  $SD=2.7$ ). 50,8% of parents indicated having children aged 3-5 and 49,2% aged 9-11. 52% were boys and all of them were born in Portugal.

### Procedure

The interviews were conducted in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Oporto. The two sites were selected because they are the largest metropolitan areas in Portugal, they include urban and semi-urban areas and most importantly, a large number of residents from the target group (9051 Roma residents in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon and 3654 Roma residents in the Metropolitan Area of Oporto).

The sampling of participants was carried out through top-down contact with schools and teachers who facilitated the contact between members of the research team and the target families, and bottom-up through contact with organizations, community centers, charities and governmentally funded projects and particularly Roma cultural mediators. Economic incentives

were used to increase participation: participants were given a voucher of five euros which could be used in well-known supermarkets, cafeterias, sports and health centers and clothing stores, as well as a book for the child with a cost of up to another five euros. To ensure the validity of the interviewing process, interviewers, which are professional researchers of ISOTIS Portugal team fluent in Portuguese, participated in a 2 full-days training on the required guidelines and procedures, including meeting with the local stakeholders involved, role plays of the interview and assistance to practice the interviews beforehand.

## **Measures**

Participants answered a questionnaire with measures assessing their educational aspirations for their children, acculturation orientations, the frequency and quality of contact with non-Roma people and socio-demographic questions.

**Educational aspirations:** Parents indicated the level of qualification they would like their children to complete, using a 5-point scale, where higher numbers mean a higher level of education (1= GCSE examinations, end of compulsory school, 2= Post-16 education, 3= Post-secondary education, 4=Bachelor or equivalent, 5=Master or equivalent). This question was adapted from (Buchmann & Dalton, 2002).

**Acculturation orientations:** Parents indicated their level of agreement with several statements regarding the maintenance of ethnic culture, adoption of majority culture and desire for contact with non-Roma people using a 5-point scale (1=Disagree, 5=Agree). Culture maintenance was assessed with two items, adapted from (Zagefka et al., 2014): “I think it would be good if members of my group speak our own original language often; think it would be good if members of my group kept as much as possible our culture of origin and way of living”, the items were aggregated ( $r = .386, p < .001$ ). Culture adoption was assessed with two items adapted from (Zagefka et al., 2014): “I think it would be good if members of my group speak English often; I think it would be good if members of my group take on as much as possible of the British culture and way of living”; the two items also were aggregated ( $r = .138, p = .034$ ). Desire for contact was assessed with two items adapted from (Zagefka, González, & Brown, 2011): “It is important to me that members of my group have British friends; It is important to me that members of my group spend some of their spare time with British people”; and were aggregated

( $r = .678, p < .001$ ). Higher values on the scales indicated higher levels on each of the acculturation orientations.

**Frequency and quality of contact:** Parents indicated how often they interact with non-Roma people (i.e., frequency of contact) and how do they feel about it (i.e., quality of contact), in two different contexts (At their neighborhoods and at their children's school/pre-school). Frequency of contact in the settings was assessed by: "How often, if at all, do you interact with non-Roma people at your child's pre-school/ in your neighborhood" (1 = Never, 2= Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4= Often). Quality of contact was assessed by "How do you feel about interacting with parents with non-Roma background at your children's pre-school / within your neighborhood (1 = I don't enjoy it, 2= I enjoy it a little, 3 = I enjoy it quite a bit, 4 = I enjoy it a great deal). The two items of frequency were aggregated ( $r = .595, p < .001$ ) as well as the two items used for quality ( $r = .720, p < .001$ ). Higher values indicated higher frequency and higher quality of contact. These measures were adapted from (Laurence, Schmid, & Hewstone, 2018).

**Socio-demographics:** The questionnaire included measures of socio-demographics about the children and the parents. Of interest to this study, parents indicated the gender (male, female) and age-group (3-5, 9-11 years) of the child. They also responded to a measure of their level of education ("International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)") and a measure of socioeconomic status, the Material Deprivation Index (MDI). The MDI was measured with a 13 items scale, adapted from (Guio et al., 2016). Parents responded whether they could not afford items covering key aspects of living conditions ranging from basic (food, clothes, shoes, etc.) and social (Internet, leisure activities) activities. In this study, MDI was treated as a continuous variable, and families would be considered as materially deprived if they lacked 5 or more items. Higher values on the scale indicate higher deprivation and lower socio-economic status.

## Chapter III – Results

### Descriptives and correlations

Preliminary correlations analysis using IBM SPSS 25 revealed significant relations between the variables of the hypothesized model. All coefficients, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.1.

There was a positive correlation between Frequency and Quality of contact ( $r = .285, p < .001$ ). That is, the more participants reported higher frequency of contact with out-group members the more they reported a more positive evaluation of the contact interaction. These intergroup variables were also related to the acculturation orientations: Frequency of contact was positively correlated with cultural adoption ( $r = .146, p = .024$ ) and desire for contact ( $r = .403, p < .001$ ) and negatively related to cultural maintenance ( $r = -.128, p = .048$ ). Quality of contact was only correlated with desire for contact ( $r = .221, p = .001$ ). Cultural adoption was also positively related to desire for contact ( $r = .216, p = .001$ ).

Table 3.1

*Pearson Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Intergroup Contact Variables and Acculturation Orientations.*

| Variable               | 1      | 2      | 3     | 4      | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|----------|-----------|
| 1 Frequency of contact | -      |        |       |        | 3.37     | .86       |
| 2 Quality of contact   | .285** | -      |       |        | 2.94     | .63       |
| 3 Cultural maintenance | -.128* | -.006  | -     |        | 3.82     | 1.36      |
| 4 Cultural adoption    | .146*  | .074   | -.030 | -      | 4.56     | .76       |
| 5 Desire for contact   | .403** | .221** | -.116 | .216** | 4.82     | .64       |

*Note.* \*\*.  $p < .001$  \*  $p < .05$

Furthermore, correlations between socio-demographic variables and educational aspirations revealed that gender of the child and MDI were significantly related to the educational aspirations that parents have for their children. All coefficients are presented in Table 3.2

Specifically, the gender of the child was positively related to aspirations ( $r = .211, p = .001$ ) and MDI was negatively related to aspirations ( $r = -.163, p = .012$ ). That is, parents showed higher educational aspirations for their sons and the lower their socioeconomic status the lower educational aspirations they revealed for their children. Since neither age-group of the child nor the level of parental education were related to educational aspirations, they were not included in further analyses.

Table 3.2

*Pearson Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Socio-demographic Variables and Educational Aspirations.*

| Variable                            | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|----------|-----------|
| 1 Parent Education                  | -     |        |       |        | 1.0      | .092      |
| 2 Material Deprivation Index        | -.028 | -      |       |        | 6.32     | 2.71      |
| 3 Age of child                      | .002  | .125   | -     |        | 1.49     | .5        |
| 4 Gender of child***                | -.006 | -.014  | -.049 | -      | 1.53     | .5        |
| 5 Educational aspirations for child | .073  | -.162* | -.049 | .211** | 3.23     | 1.59      |

*Note.* \*\*.  $p < .001$  \*  $p < .05$

\*\*\* Dummy-coded: 0 = female; 1 = male

### **Prediction of educational outcomes**

We conducted a hierarchical regression analysis with enter method using IBM SPSS 25 to investigate if socio-economic and social-psychological variables predict the educational aspirations Roma parents have for their children. The predicted model was tested in three steps: the first model included only socio-demographic variables about the child (gender) and the parents (MDI). Second and third steps added socio-psychological variables: on the second step frequency and quality of contact were added to the model. The third step included the three acculturation orientations (cultural maintenance, cultural adoption and desire for contact). The variables were added in this order to understand if socio-psychological variables can predict educational aspirations over and above socio-demographical variables. Acculturation orientations



were introduced at the last step since they theoretically have a more direct connection with the outcome variable. Coefficients are presented in Table 3.3

The results of the first step, including the socio-demographic variables only, indicated that the two predictors explained 8,8% of the variance ( $R^2 = .088$ ,  $F(2,220) = 10.576$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Specifically, material deprivation ( $\beta = -.111$ ,  $t = -2.962$ ,  $p = .003$ ) as well as gender of the child ( $\beta = .703$ ,  $t = 3.441$ ,  $p = .001$ ) significantly predicted educational aspirations. That is, higher levels of material deprivation predicted lower educational aspirations, and having a son instead of a daughter strongly predicted higher educational aspirations.

On the second step, the results of the regression indicated that including quality and frequency of contact did not significantly increase the explained variance (10%,  $R^2 = .104$ ,  $F(4,222) = 6.303$ ,  $p < .001$ ), since there was no significant change of  $F$  between step one and two ( $\Delta F(2,218) = 1.940$ ,  $p = .146$ ). The results of the regression indicated that over and above the socio-economic variables of gender and MDI, which remained significant, quality of contact was not related to educational aspirations ( $\beta = -.036$ ,  $t = -.216$ ,  $p = .829$ ) and only frequency of contact was ( $\beta = .302$ ,  $t = 1.936$ ,  $p = .054$ ). Consistent with our hypothesis H1a, frequency of contact was positively related to educational aspirations. That is, the more contact with outgroup members parents have, the higher their aspirations for their children's educational future. These findings are also supportive of H1c, showing that frequency of contact is more strongly related to educational aspirations than quality of contact.

The last step included the socio-psychological variables of acculturation orientations. The results of the regression indicated that the seven predictors explained 15% of the variance ( $R^2 = .157$ ,  $F(7,222) = 5.741$ ,  $p = .003$ ), significantly improving the model ( $\Delta F(3,215) = 4.577$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Aside from gender and material deprivation, which continued to be significant predictors, at step three it was found that parental acculturation orientations of culture maintenance ( $\beta = -.171$ ,  $t = -2.361$ ,  $p = .019$ ) and adoption ( $\beta = .337$ ,  $t = 2.537$ ,  $p = .012$ ) were significantly related to educational aspirations. In line with our predictions (H2a) cultural adoption was positively related to educational aspirations, even more so than the other acculturation orientations (H2b). Parents that were oriented towards adopting the mainstream culture had higher educational aspirations for their children. Furthermore, we found a negative association between parents' desire for culture maintenance and their educational aspirations, such that the more they desired to maintain their heritage culture the lower the education aspirations for their children were.

When all seven variables were included at stage three, neither of the intergroup variables of frequency and quality of contact were significantly related to educational aspirations. Gender of the child remained as the most important predictor of educational aspirations that parents have for their children ( $\beta = .687, t=3.453, p = .001$ ).

Table 3.3

*Hierarchical Regression Coefficients. Predictors of Educational Aspirations*

| Model | Variables                  | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> |
|-------|----------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|
| 1     | (Constant)                 | 2.932    | .409      |         | 7.166    |
|       | Material deprivation index | -.111    | .038      | -.191** | -2.962   |
|       | Gender of child            | .703     | .204      | .222**  | 3.441    |
| 2     | (Constant)                 | 1.964    | .761      |         | 2.581    |
|       | Material deprivation index | -.107    | .038      | -.183** | -2.841   |
|       | Gender of child            | .694     | .203      | .219**  | 3.414    |
|       | Frequency of contact       | .302     | .156      | .130*   | 1.936    |
|       | Quality of contact         | -.036    | .169      | -.015   | -.216    |
| 3     | (Constant)                 | .557     | 1.389     |         | .401     |
|       | Material deprivation index | -.113    | .037      | -.193** | -3.003   |
|       | Gender of child            | .687     | .199      | .217**  | 3.453    |
|       | Frequency of contact       | .217     | .156      | .094    | 1.397    |
|       | Quality of contact         | -.066    | .167      | -.026   | -.394    |
|       | Culture maintenance        | -.171    | .073      | -.149*  | -2.361   |
|       | Culture adoption           | .337     | .133      | .161    | 2.537    |
|       | Desire for contact         | .192     | .258      | .050    | .744     |

*Note.* \*\*.  $p < .001$  \*  $p < .05$

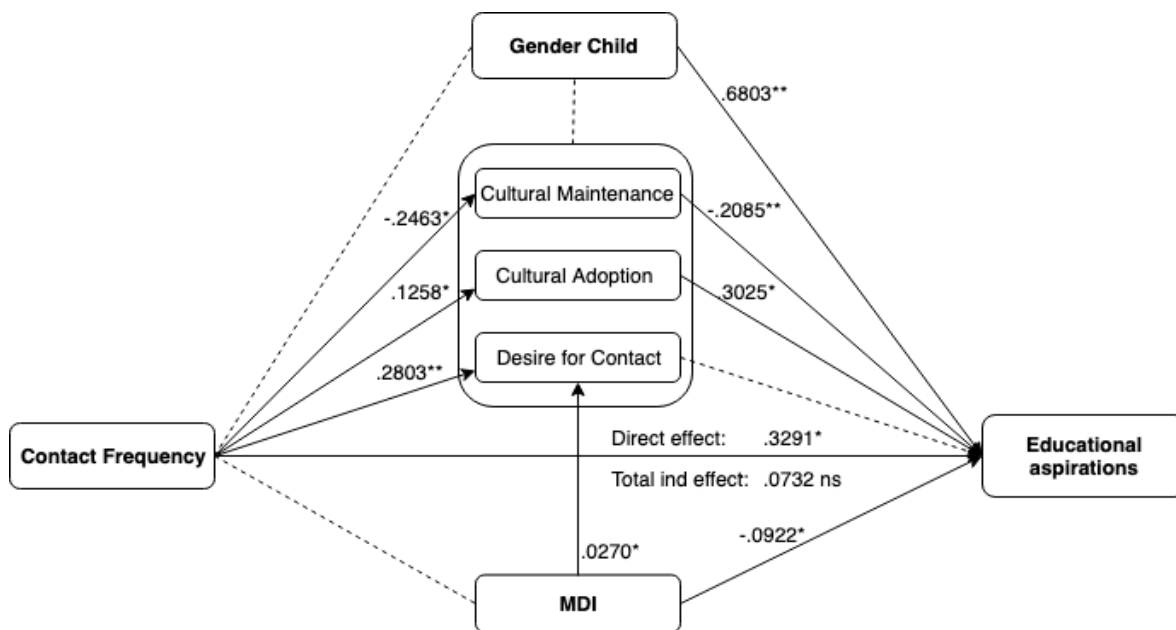
**Mediation analysis of acculturation orientations**

To examine the indirect effects of intergroup contact on the educational outcomes we ran a mediation analysis with 5000 bootstrap samples using SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 4) (Hayes, 2013). Since quality of contact was not significantly related to educational aspirations, it was excluded from these mediation analyses. Frequency of contact was entered as the predictor, the acculturation orientations (culture maintenance, cultural adoption and desire for contact) were

the mediators, and gender of child and MDI were used as covariates, since the hierarchical regression had previously shown they are important predictors of educational aspirations. Coefficients, direct, indirect and total effects and significance levels are displayed in Figure 2. Coefficients of direct and indirect effects are presented in Table 3.4.

The results showed that frequency of contact was significantly related to the three acculturation orientations. Specifically, greater frequency of contact with the out-group is related to lower desire for maintenance of ethnic culture, higher adoption of the mainstream culture and higher desire for contact with non-Roma members (see Figure 2). However, only culture maintenance and culture adoption were significantly related to educational aspirations. Specifically, a lower desire for maintenance of ethnic culture and a higher desire for adoption of mainstream culture were related to higher educational aspirations of parents for their children.

Figure 3.2. Mediation analysis.



Note. MDI= Material Deprivation Index. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . The dotted lines are non-significant paths.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The reversed path analysis was also conducted, considering the acculturation orientations as predictors and intergroup contact quality and frequency as mediators. No significant indirect effects were found neither for frequency nor for quality of contact through the acculturation conditions.

Table 3.4.

*Path Analysis of Frequency of Contact, Educational Aspirations, Cultural Maintenance, Cultural Adoption and Desire for Contact.*

| Culture Maintenance                   |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
|                                       | Constant     | 4.7079 | .51   | .000  | 3.6998 | 5.7160 |
|                                       | FQ           | -.2463 | .10   | .021  | -.4560 | -.0366 |
|                                       | MDI          | .0138  | .03   | .676  | -.0513 | .0789  |
|                                       | Gen          | -.0834 | .17   | .641  | -.4356 | .2688  |
| R2= .0241, F(3,229)= 1.889 , p= .1322 |              |        |       |       |        |        |
| Culture Adoption                      |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|                                       | Constant     | 4.2095 | .28   | .000  | 3.6476 | 4.7714 |
|                                       | FQ           | .1258  | .06   | .035  | .0089  | .2427  |
|                                       | MDI          | .0057  | .01   | .756  | -.0305 | .0420  |
|                                       | Gen          | -.0685 | .09   | .492  | -.2649 | .1278  |
| R2= .0222, F(3,229)= 1.731 , p= .1613 |              |        |       |       |        |        |
| Desire for Contact                    |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|                                       | Constant     | 3.8269 | .19   | .000  | 3.4335 | 4.2203 |
|                                       | FQ           | .2803  | .04   | .000  | .1984  | .3621  |
|                                       | MDI          | .0270  | .01   | .037  | .0017  | .0524  |
|                                       | Gen          | -.0670 | .07   | .337  | -.2045 | .0704  |
| R2= .0241, F(3,229)= 1.889 , p= .1322 |              |        |       |       |        |        |
| Edu Aspirations                       |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|                                       | Constant     | 1.1759 | 1.06  | .272  | -.9271 | 3.2788 |
|                                       | FQ           | .3291  | .12   | .011  | .0770  | .5813  |
|                                       | Cult. Main   | -.1861 | .07   | .012  | -.3285 | -.0437 |
|                                       | Cult. Adopt  | -.3025 | .13   | .022  | .0429  | .5620  |
|                                       | Des. Contact | -.0380 | .19   | .841  | -.4097 | .3338  |
|                                       | MDI          | -.0922 | .04   | .0119 | -.1639 | -.0205 |
|                                       | Gen          | .6803  | .19   | .000  | .2950  | 1.0656 |
| R2= .1586, F(6,226)= 7.0975 , p< .001 |              |        |       |       |        |        |
| Direct effect                         |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|                                       |              | .3291  | .13   | .0108 | .0770  | .5813  |
| Indirect effects                      |              | B      | se    | p     | LLCI   | ULCI   |
|                                       | Total        | .0732  | .0629 |       | -.0505 | .1984  |
|                                       | Cult. Main   | .0458  | .0160 |       | .0032  | .0644  |
|                                       | Cult. Adopt  | .0380  | .0268 |       | -.0054 | .0975  |
|                                       | Des. Contact | -.0106 | .0554 |       | -.1244 | .0949  |
|                                       | Des. Contact | -.0106 | .0554 |       | -.1244 | .0949  |

*Note.* FQ= Frequency of contact, Cult.Main= Cultural Maintenance, Cult.Adopt=Cultural Adoption, Des.Contact= Desire for contact.

## Chapter IV – Discussion

Despite numerous attempts to improve the situation of the Roma in Europe, they continue to be the most discriminated minority and live in poor socio-economic conditions (Europäische Union, 2018). Improving educational outcomes has been central to the institutional efforts to remedy the situation (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017), having the potential to tackle early inequalities, promote integration and improve their future life-conditions (OECD & Union, 2015). Since parental beliefs about education seem to be particularly predictive of children's educational attainment (Gutman & Feinstein, 2010), many interventions aiming to tackle educational inequalities focus on supporting minority parents with their children's education (Engle et al., 2011). Minority parents, however, experience additional challenges in this regard, resulting in part from their acculturation process (Mendez, 2010). These challenges could potentially be ameliorated, according to the intergroup contact theory, with positive and frequent contact between minority and majority members (Brown & Zagefka, 2011).

The current study contributed to this field by examining the role of intergroup contact on parental educational aspirations, explaining it through the lens of acculturation theory. Our results overall suggest that an increase in the frequency of contact between Roma parents and non-Roma is related to their preference for assimilation, since contact was positively associated with the desire for cultural adoption and negatively with the desire for cultural maintenance. This assimilative orientation among Roma parents was then related to having higher educational aspirations for their children.

Consistent with our hypotheses (H1), our results show that intergroup contact is positively related to educational aspirations. Specifically, as predicted by H1a, a higher frequency of contact was related to higher educational aspirations, both directly and indirectly through the acculturation orientations. Contrary to the expected, the quality of contact was not related to educational aspirations (H1b). These findings also indicate that frequency of contact was a stronger predictor of the educational outcomes than quality, confirming hypothesis H1c. These results offer further evidence that intergroup contact can have beneficial outcomes for minorities (Bagci et al., 2014) and provide evidence of effects on a new educational outcome, the parental aspirations of parents. Moreover, our results support previous finding claiming that majority and minority members might rely on different components of the contact in order to judge the interaction, frequency of contact being more important for minority groups (Vezzali et al., 2010). The lack of significant relations with quality could arguably be due to the Roma's interaction

with the majority being conditioned by the general levels of hostility they experience (Kende, Hadarics, & Láštiová, 2017), therefore relying more on the frequency of contact to judge their intergroup interactions. This study addressed a research gap in intergroup contact theory by studying intergroup contact effects on a minority group and adding to the literature acknowledging the differential pathways through which it operates on minorities. However, previous literature has suggested that quality of interaction is an overall better predictor of positive intergroup contact than frequency (Lolliot et al., 2015) and cross-group friendships have also been shown to be the best predictor of positive intergroup contact (Hässler et al., 2019). Hence, more research along these lines is needed to examine the relative importance of frequency and quality of interaction for minorities and its potential relationship with other outcomes not considered in this study.

Consistent with our predictions, the desire for cultural adoption was positively related to educational aspirations of Roma parents (H2a), more so than the desire for cultural maintenance (H2b). These findings are consistent with previous literature examining the differential impact of acculturation orientations on psychological or sociocultural adaptation, specifically studies associating cultural adoption with socio-cultural outcomes (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). However, contrary to their findings, our results indicate that when parents have a lower tendency towards cultural maintenance, they also have higher educational aspirations for their children. Educational aspirations were therefore related to a tendency towards assimilation. A plausible explanation for the above described results is found in Orçan et al. (2014), suggesting that Roma mothers might perceive their ethnic culture as a barrier to educational success in the mainstream society and favored assimilation as a way to increase their children's likelihood of success (Orçan, Çiçekler, & Ari, 2014). Future research could explore this explanation testing our model with additional measures about parental beliefs about their ethnic culture.

Moreover, consistent with hypothesis H3a, frequency of intergroup contact was indirectly related to educational aspirations through cultural maintenance. Specifically, the more Roma parents interacted with non-Roma members, the less they desired culture maintenance, which then related to increased educational aspirations. These results are partially in line with previous research showing that intergroup contact is typically related to an increase in cultural adoption and decrease in culture maintenance (Bagci et al., 2018; Verkuyten et al., 2010). However, contrary to the hypothesized, culture adoption (H3b) did not mediate contact positive effects on educational aspirations. Likewise, since the quality of interaction was not related to educational

aspirations, we could not test any indirect effects with the acculturation orientations. One possible explanation is that the indirect effects of contact through acculturation is dependent on the outcome. Thus, future research could test our proposed model with a different outcome, such as parental school involvement, to explore if these patterns of findings would be replicated.

Besides the impact of social psychological variables like intergroup contact and acculturation, our study also evidenced the importance of socio-demographic variables for educational aspirations. Specifically, material deprivation and gender of the child were important predictors of parents' educational aspirations. Consistent with previous findings on the impact of socio-economic status on the educational outcomes of minority children (OECD & Union, 2015), Roma parents from poorer socio-economic background had lower educational aspirations for their children. These findings highlight the need to be aware of structural barriers (i.e., economic and material deprivation) preventing the Roma to aspire to higher levels of education. Additionally, in line with previous studies suggesting that Roma parents in Portugal have different aspirations for their male and female children (Magano & Mendes, 2016), Roma parents in our study showed higher educational aspirations for boys than for girls. These findings stress the need to address gender issues in interventions aimed to raise educational aspirations in Roma communities. Contrary to previous findings claiming that parents with higher levels of education usually hold higher educational aspirations for their children (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), the level of education of the parents on our sample was not related to their aspirations. This result could be due to our sample's low level of education, since the non-existing educational capital might not allow them to engage with their children's education and develop higher educational aspirations. Furthermore, contrary to previous findings claiming that parental educational aspirations wane for older children (Spera et al., 2009), the age of the child was not related to parental aspirations either. This could be due to the fact that Roma children tend to drop out in higher rates during secondary rather than elementary school, when teenagers are in the age of transitioning to adulthood and future gender roles are been formed, signaling declining parental support for education during secondary school (Magano & Mendes, 2016). Hence, future research could address if educational aspirations are effectively related to the age of the child with a sample of older children/adolescents in secondary school.

Overall, our results complement previous literature on the social-psychological elements involved in minorities integration and education in several ways. They yield additional evidence

to the claim that acculturation orientations are relatively independent, influenced by different antecedents and influencing different outcomes, as previous research on the ecology of acculturation suggested (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). We also offered evidence of the mediating role of the acculturation orientations between contextual conditions and outcomes, as previous research had claimed (Schachner et al., 2017). Our results also suggest that frequency of intergroup contact is distinct and independent from its quality and that it might be a stronger predictor of educational outcomes for minorities (Vezzali & Stathi, 2017) and we offered insights on the underlying mechanisms of intergroup contact for minorities, addressing a research gap by examining its link to acculturation orientations (Bagci et al., 2018). Our results indicate that an increase in intergroup contact is likely to have a positive outcome in terms of increasing educational aspirations. However, this outcome is achieved through an increase in assimilatory orientations, which literature consistently claims is not the ideal acculturation strategy and might lead to lower levels of life satisfaction (Sam & Berry, 2010). Additionally, our results offered further evidence of socio-demographic variables of SES of parents and gender of the child, which are connected to educational outcomes and which should be addressed, along with social-psychological elements of intergroup contact and acculturation, in future interventions with Roma parents.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study is cross-sectional and does not allow to infer causality and literature does not yet allow to draw a definitive line between antecedents and outcomes of acculturation. For instance, previous meta-analytic literature on the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice evidenced that contact reduced prejudice but also that prejudice reduced contact (Binder et al., 2009). The same pattern of bidirectional influence had later on emerged between intergroup contact and acculturation orientations and some authors claimed there is a degree of dynamic interdependence between them (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). However, recent longitudinal studies have found causal links between conditions of contact and acculturation orientations and place intergroup contact as an antecedent of acculturation (González & Brown, 2016; Hässler et al., 2019; Schachner et al., 2018). Our results are consistent with the latter, since the reversed path-analysis did not yield any significant indirect effects. Moreover, our results indicate a strong relationship between intergroup contact and desire for contact and no relationship between the



acculturation orientation and the outcome, which might point to the feedback loop of acculturation dimensions feeding into intergroup contact that some authors had previously claimed (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Although our results are consistent with the recent trends in acculturation theory, future research could test the model experimentally or longitudinally, to draw more solid conclusions on the causal direction of the effects.

Regarding the measures, the extension of the original survey did not allow for in-depth measurement of each of the variables, since it would have become too lengthy and impractical. As a result, contact quality and frequency and the acculturation conditions were measured with a few items each. Although theoretically grounded and adapted from previous studies, these scales might have failed to capture such complex constructs in their entirety. Future studies could try to replicate these findings using psychometrically tested scales, such as those proposed by Lolliot et al. (2015) for intergroup contact or by Celenk & Van de Vijver (2011), in the case of acculturation orientations, which would yield more solid results.

There are several issues regarding the generalizability of our results. Our study was conducted in Portugal and the different socio-political environment, historical background and educational systems on other countries might impact intergroup contact and outcomes differently. The study surveyed mainly mothers' answers and there might be asymmetrical patterns of aspirations between mother and fathers. This study did also not target newly-arrived Roma migrants, as all participants were Portuguese citizens, thus future research could further explore this group as they might have different acculturation patterns. Furthermore, the Roma community is an umbrella term to characterize a heterogeneous group with important cultural differences between them, so the experiences of one group might not directly apply to another. Future research could address all these questions by focusing on other Roma communities, in other countries, surveying the educational aspirations of both parents and focusing on multiple-group comparisons.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study has considered intergroup contact as potentially positive. However, intergroup contact can also be experienced as negative, prior research suggesting that it might actually increase prejudice toward outgroup members (Graf & Paolini, 2016). This could arguably be the case of the Roma in Europe, since they are the target of blatant prejudice and discrimination, and intergroup experiences with them are usually experienced as negative (Kende et al., 2017). Moreover, the effect of negative intergroup contact has been found to be stronger than positive contact, although the latter is more frequently reported, which might

balance the effect of negative experiences (Graf & Paolini 2016). Furthermore, according to some authors, there has been a general bias in research towards studying the positive side of intergroup contact and neglecting the detrimental effects of negative intergroup contact in research. Future research could address this research gap expanding our model to account for negative intergroup experiences. It might also offer additional explanations as to why the quality of contact did not show significant results in our study.

Lastly, in this study, we have focused only on families. However, as previously mentioned in the literature, the outcomes of acculturation are dependent on the interaction of the different contexts the person lives in, so the portrait is inaccurate if we do not take into account the other systems (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). For example, at the institutional level, in schools, teachers usually have low expectations for Roma students and schools are marked by segregation or they are typically perceived as having strong assimilationists views about minorities, which might lead to separation (Magano & Mendes, 2016). At the societal level, strong assimilationists views about culture and prejudice against minorities can lead to a stronger identification with the ethnic culture (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). In sum, although research on cultural factors influencing education is needed and impactful, they are more often than not put forward as a scapegoat not to address structural racism and low investment in minorities' education (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). Future research could address these issues and offer a more accurate portrait by focusing on multiple contexts simultaneously. Furthermore, besides cultural factors involved in Roma integration, future research needs to address issues of inclusive education, structural barriers to minorities education and institutional racism (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018).

### **Practical implications**

It is possible to derive several practical implications for future interventions in education for the Roma community from our results. Our results call out to authorities to implement interventions to foster good intergroup relations between the majority of the population and the Roma. Although Roma integration is a complex, multidimensional problem, improving intergroup relations between the Roma and non-Roma has the potential to ameliorate their experiences with education, which is beneficial for Roma children's prospects. However, although intergroup contact might be an effective tool to promote better intergroup dynamics, our research showed that it actually promotes higher educational aspirations through increasing assimilatory practices from parents, which might have detrimental effects on their psychological

well-being (Sam & Berry, 2010). Therefore, interventions aimed to increase intergroup contact should be complemented with interventions aimed to lower racism and discriminatory practices from the larger society and with interventions that promote and valorize Roma culture, in order to promote integration at hence the best psychological and socio-cultural outcomes possible (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

Moreover, the striking effect of the gender of the child on parental educational aspirations suggests that although the cultural trend pertaining gender roles in the Roma community might have already started to change, it still needs to be addressed in interventions with parents, since the lower educational aspirations parents have for daughters constitute an important barrier to accessing higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout Europe, the Roma are the most marginalized and discriminated minority, suffering from blatant inequalities in education. Our study suggests that this situation can be partially ameliorated by fostering intergroup contact between the Roma and the non-Roma. Frequent intergroup contact is related to parent's acculturation orientations, which are in turn related to having higher educational aspirations for their children. This effect is however produced through an increase in assimilatory views and should, therefore, be regarded with caution. Our study offers new insights into how intergroup contact operates in minorities, its relationships to their acculturation processes and its potential benefits for minorities' education and integration.

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