

Accepted author manuscript.

Mähönen, T. A., Brylka, A., & Jasinskaja-Lahti, I. (2014). Perceived ethnic superiority and immigrants' attitudes towards multiculturalism and the national majority. *International Journal of Psychology*, 49(4), 318-322.

**Perceived ethnic superiority and immigrants' attitudes  
towards multiculturalism and the national majority**

**Tuuli Anna Mähönen\*, Asteria Brylka, & Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti**

Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki

Unioninkatu 37 (PO Box 54), 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

\*Correspondence concerning this paper should be sent to Tuuli Anna Mähönen, Department of Social Research (Social Psychology), P.O. BOX 54, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland. Phone: +358919124889. Fax: +358919124877. Email: [tuuli-anna.mahonen@helsinki.fi](mailto:tuuli-anna.mahonen@helsinki.fi).

**Acknowledgements**

This research was funded by the KONE Foundation (Grant No 31-219; MIRIPS-FI project of Prof. Jasinskaja-Lahti) and by the Academy of Finland (Grant No 257079; LADA project of Dr. Mähönen). We would like to thank Emma Nortio and Elena Waschinski (Department of Social Psychology, University of Helsinki, Finland) for their help in data collection and coding.

## **Abstract**

Despite the recent multidimensional conceptualizations of social identities, previous research on the relationship between ingroup identification and outgroup attitudes has approached the former mainly through the strength of cognitive-emotional identification. In our study among Russian-speaking immigrants living in Finland ( $N = 312$ ), we focused on the direct and interactive effects of the strength of ethnic identification and perceived ethnic superiority on immigrants' support for multiculturalism and outgroup attitudes towards national majority. First, we found perceived ethnic superiority to be directly and negatively associated with outgroup attitudes. Second, we found a positive relationship between ethnic identification and support for multiculturalism only when ethnic superiority was not perceived. The results highlight the different ramifications of high ethnic identification and perceived superiority and speak for the destructive attitudinal effects of the latter.

Keywords: ethnic identification, perceived superiority, support for multiculturalism, outgroup attitudes

## **Perceived ethnic superiority and immigrants' attitudes towards multiculturalism and the national majority**

### **Introduction**

Despite the great volume of studies conducted among majority members on the ramifications of ingroup identification on intergroup relations, it is less clear, what factors affect ethnic minority group members' attitudes towards national majorities and multiculturalism – an ideology stressing equality and appreciation of cultural differences (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Verkuyten, 2007; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). The relationships between ingroup identification and these two types of attitudes differ according to group status. While ingroup identification is often negatively associated with outgroup attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and support for multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006) among majority group members, among minority group members, strong ingroup identification is associated with less negative outgroup attitudes (e.g., Staerkle, Sidanius, Green, & Molina, 2005) and stronger support for multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Importantly, it is not only the strength of identification, but also its *content* that matters when predicting negativity towards outgroups (e.g., Brown, 2010, pp. 160-163).

Social psychological research has predominantly approached ingroup identification through self-categorization, the value of ingroup membership and the strength of cognitive-emotional attachment (e.g., Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996) – the three main components of identification (Tajfel, 1982). However, researchers have increasingly started to acknowledge the greater multidimensionality of the concept. One of the most extensive examples is the model by Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy and Eidelson (2008), which integrates a large array of different conceptualizations into four distinctive modes of identification: importance (i.e., viewing the ingroup as a part of one's self-image), commitment (i.e., willingness to benefit the ingroup),

deference (i.e., willingness to submit to ingroup norms) and superiority (i.e., viewing the ingroup as superior to others). Roccas and colleagues (2008) point out that besides analyzing the three main socio-cognitive components of ingroup identification (Tajfel, 1982), attention should be given also to the effects of other relevant modes. Moreover, they stress that people often identify highly on some modes but weakly on others: importantly, different combinations of modes lead to different outcomes.

Of the four modes, namely superiority is assumed to be related to outgroup negativity, as it is based on a belief that the ingroup is more worthy than other groups (Roccas et al., 2008, p. 284). Notably, studies on perceived superiority and related constructs (e.g., studies on nationalism, e.g., Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001; studies on collective narcissism, e.g., Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013) have mostly been conducted among national majorities. This does not mean, however, that ingroup superiority concerns majorities only. For example, Minescu and Poppe (2011) found perceived superiority to be one of the key predictors of perceived intergroup conflict among ethno-national minority groups in autonomous republics of the Russian Federation. In this study, we expect immigrants' ethnic identification to be positively associated (Staerkle et al., 2005) and perceived ethnic superiority to be negatively associated (Roccas et al., 2008) with outgroup attitudes toward national majority (H1). However, as it is possible that the positive association between ethnic identification and outgroup attitudes is weaker when ethnic superiority is perceived, we also test for a moderator effect of perceived superiority.

Perceived ethnic superiority may also have an effect on support for multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can be seen to promote the maintenance of minority cultures (Verkuyten, 2007), and people can be expected to support it more when they see gains for themselves or the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Verkuyten, 2007). When the ingroup is perceived as superior, identification with this ingroup is unlikely to be associated with support of an ideology that is equally beneficial for all, even allegedly inferior groups. Thus, we expect a weaker positive association between the

strength of ethnic identification and support for multiculturalism when perceived ethnic superiority is high (H2).

These hypotheses are tested in the biggest immigrant group in Finland, i.e., Russian-speaking immigrants, who represent approximately 24% of all foreign language speakers (Statistics Finland, 2012). In Finland, there is a long history of antagonism towards Russians, mainly because of the wars between Finland and the Soviet Union during the WW2. Consequently, Russian immigrants have been victims of persistent prejudice and discrimination (see, e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009). However, due to the smaller cultural distance, they are typically treated better than groups such as Somalis and Arabs (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2006). Thus, due to the conflictual intergroup relations and Russian-speakers' complex status position, the group offers an interesting case to study the ramifications of perceived ethnic superiority.

## **Method**

### ***Participants and procedure***

The sample for this study was collected within the MIRIPS-FI project, which is a part of the international Mutual Intercultural Relations In Plural Societies (MIRIPS) network. A random representative sample of 800 immigrants who speak Russian as their mother tongue, have been born in Russian Federation or in Soviet Union, and had resided in Finland for at least five years in autumn 2012 was contacted via the Finnish Population Register Centre. The response rate was 39%, which is considered typical in survey studies in Finland. The sample of the present study is comprised of 312 individuals (77.9 % females; mean age 44.8 years,  $SD = 12.2$ ). Due to the possible selection bias resulting from sample attrition,  $\chi^2$  and  $t$ -tests were performed on relevant demographic factors, showing that the respondents were older than the non-respondents and the ratio of men to women was smaller in the respondents' sample. Although all contacted individuals

were born within the borders of the former Soviet Union and spoke Russian as their mother tongue, the sample was ethnically heterogeneous: while slightly over half (57.1%) of the respondents self-categorized themselves as ethnic Russians, the remaining participants reported belongingness to other ethnic groups of the nowadays Russian Federation. As the participants had resided in Finland for a considerable time, we controlled for their level of national identification, as it might be associated with the outgroup attitudes studied. Also sex, age, self-reported ethnic background and level of education were controlled for.

### ***Materials***

*Ethnic identification* and *national identification* were measured with four-item scales adapted from Mlicki and Ellemers (1997) and Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997). Sample items tapping the cognitive and affective aspects of identification included "*I am proud that I am Russian*" for Russian identification and "*I feel myself a part of Finnish society*" for Finnish national identification. *Perceived ethnic superiority*, in turn, was measured with a four-item scale adapted from Roccas et al. (2008; sample item: "*Russians are better than other groups in all respects*"). As regards dependent variables, *support for multiculturalism* was measured with a ten-item scale adapted from the Multicultural Ideology Scale by Berry and Kalin (1995; sample item: "*Ethnic minorities should be helped in preserving their cultural heritage in Finland*"). Finally, *attitudes towards the Finnish national majority* were measured with an eight-item scale previously used in the present intergroup context by Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, and Solheim (2009; sample item: "*I would accept with pleasure a native Finn as a friend*"). The participants marked their answers to all scales on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*), with higher scores denoted stronger identification, stronger support for multiculturalism and more positive outgroup attitudes. The reliability scores of the scales are presented in Table 1.

### ***Data analysis***

Missing data was dealt with hot deck imputation method, which replaces a missing item value of the recipient with a value of the matching donor within the same dataset (Myers, 2011). In order to ensure that the constructs of ethnic identification and perceived ethnic superiority were empirically distinct, a principal components analysis with direct oblimin rotation was performed prior to the testing of the hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested with two hierarchical regression analyses with support for multiculturalism and outgroup attitudes as the dependent variables. Following the recommendations of Hayes (2013), all continuous predictors were centered around their respective means.

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. There was a positive but not especially strong positive correlation between ethnic identification and perceived superiority. As regards the correlates of the dependent variables, support for multiculturalism correlated positively with ethnic identification and perceived superiority – albeit quite weakly with the latter. Outgroup attitudes correlated negatively with the strength of ethnic identification and perceived superiority. There was no significant correlation between the two dependent variables.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study*

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6..	7..	8..	9.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
1. Sex (0 = Men)	1	.03	.16*	-.09	.10	.05	.05	.17**	.06	-	-	-
2. Age		1	-.09	-.05	-.05	-.07	.13*	-.01	.02	44.82	12.17	-
3. Years of education			1	.04	.11	-.06	-.16**	.02	.11*	15.37	3.20	-
4. Self-reported ethnic background (0 = Russian)				1	.08	-.38**	-.03	-.04	.11*	-	-	-
5. National identification					1	-.02	-.05	.01	.22**	3.75	.88	.89
6. Ethnic identification						1	.34**	.30**	-.15**	3.83	1.05	.90
7. Perceived superiority							1	.12*	-.22**	2.64	.85	.81
8. Support for multiculturalism								1	-.02	3.34	.56	.70
9. Outgroup attitudes									1	4.37	.52	.71

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .



In line with H1, perceived superiority was associated with less positive attitudes towards the national majority. However, high ethnic identification and outgroup attitudes were not associated with each other. We also tested for an interaction between ethnic identification and perceived superiority, but found none.

Table 2

*Hierarchical regression analysis on the predictors of outgroup attitudes (N = 312)*

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	4.30***	.07	4.29***	.07	4.29***	.07
Sex (0 = male)	.04	.07	.06	.07	.06	.07
Age	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Years of education	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Self-reported ethnic background (0 = Russian)	.11	.06	.09	.06	.09	.06
National identification	.12***	.03	.12***	.03	.12***	.03
Ethnic identification (EI)			-.02	.03	-.02	.03
Perceived superiority (PS)			-.12*	.04	-.12***	.04
EI x PS					.01	.03
$R^2$	.07		.11		.11	
$F$ change for $R^2$	4.46***		7.77***		.04	

Note. \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

Supporting H2, there was an interaction effect of ethnic identification and perceived superiority on multiculturalism (Table 3). The simple slope analysis (Figure 1) showed that there was a positive association between ethnic identification and support for multiculturalism only when perceived superiority was low ( $\beta = .46, p < .001$ ) or average ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ), but not when it was high ( $\beta = .11, p = .240$ ). Further probing of the moderation effect (Figure 2) revealed that the observed

positive association was significant for all values of the moderator below 3.24, bias-corrected CI based on 10 000 bootstrap samples {0.000, 0.167}.

The analyses were conducted both with and without control variables, and the pattern of results remained the same.

Table 3

*Hierarchical regression analysis on the predictors of support for multiculturalism (N = 312)*

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	3.23***	.21	2.39***	.25	1.41***	.38
Sex (0 = male)	.23**	.08	.21**	.07	.21**	.07
Age	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Years of education	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
Self-reported ethnic background (0 = Russian)	-.04	.06	.10	.07	.08	.07
Ethnic identification (EI)			.18***	.03	.44***	.08
Perceived superiority (PS)			.00	.04	.43***	.13
EI x PS					-.11***	.03
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.03		.12		.16	
<i>F</i> change for <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	2.34 <sup>†</sup>		15.81***		12.14***	

Note. <sup>†</sup>*p* = .06. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* ≤ .001. *f*<sup>2</sup> = .04.

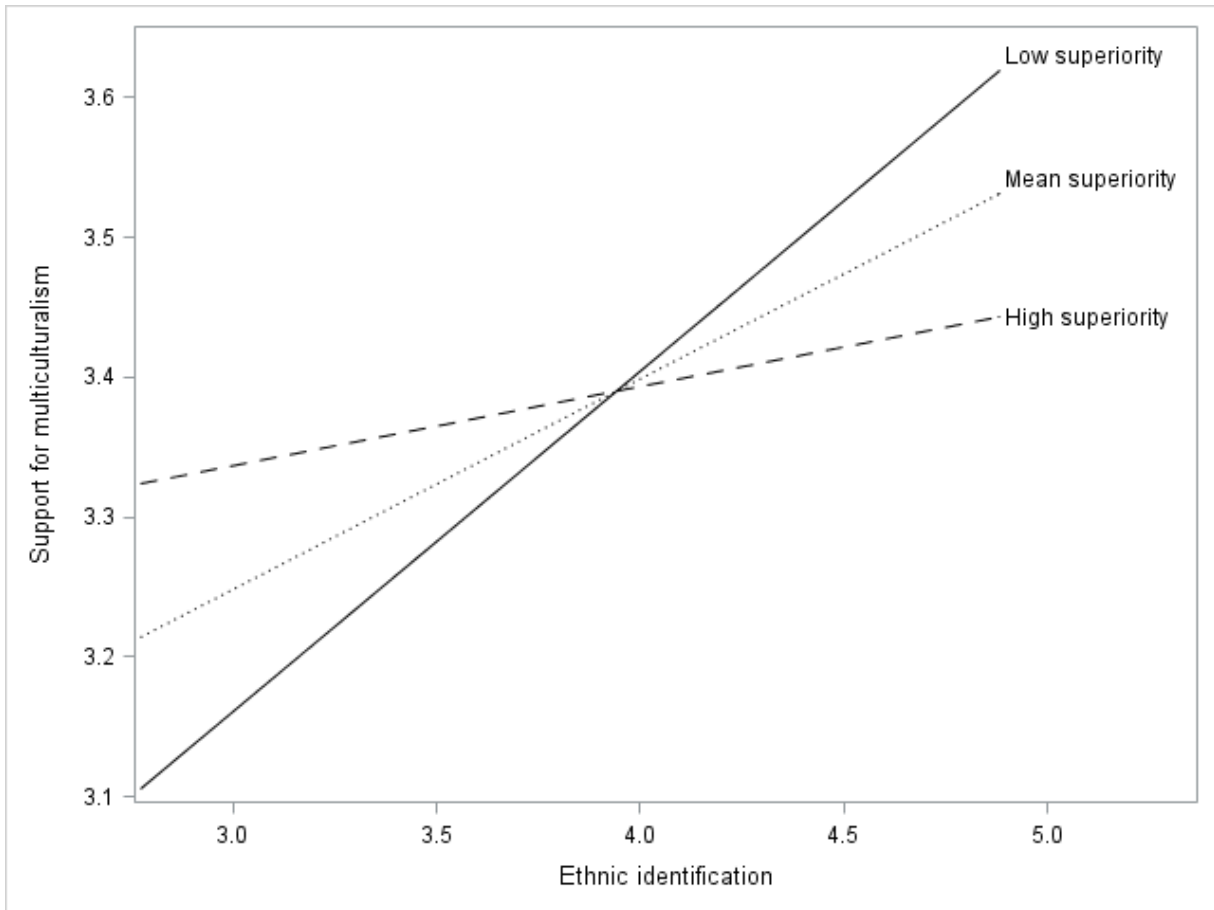


Figure 1. The moderating effect of perceived superiority (-1 SD, M, +1 SD) on the relationship between ethnic identification and support for multiculturalism.

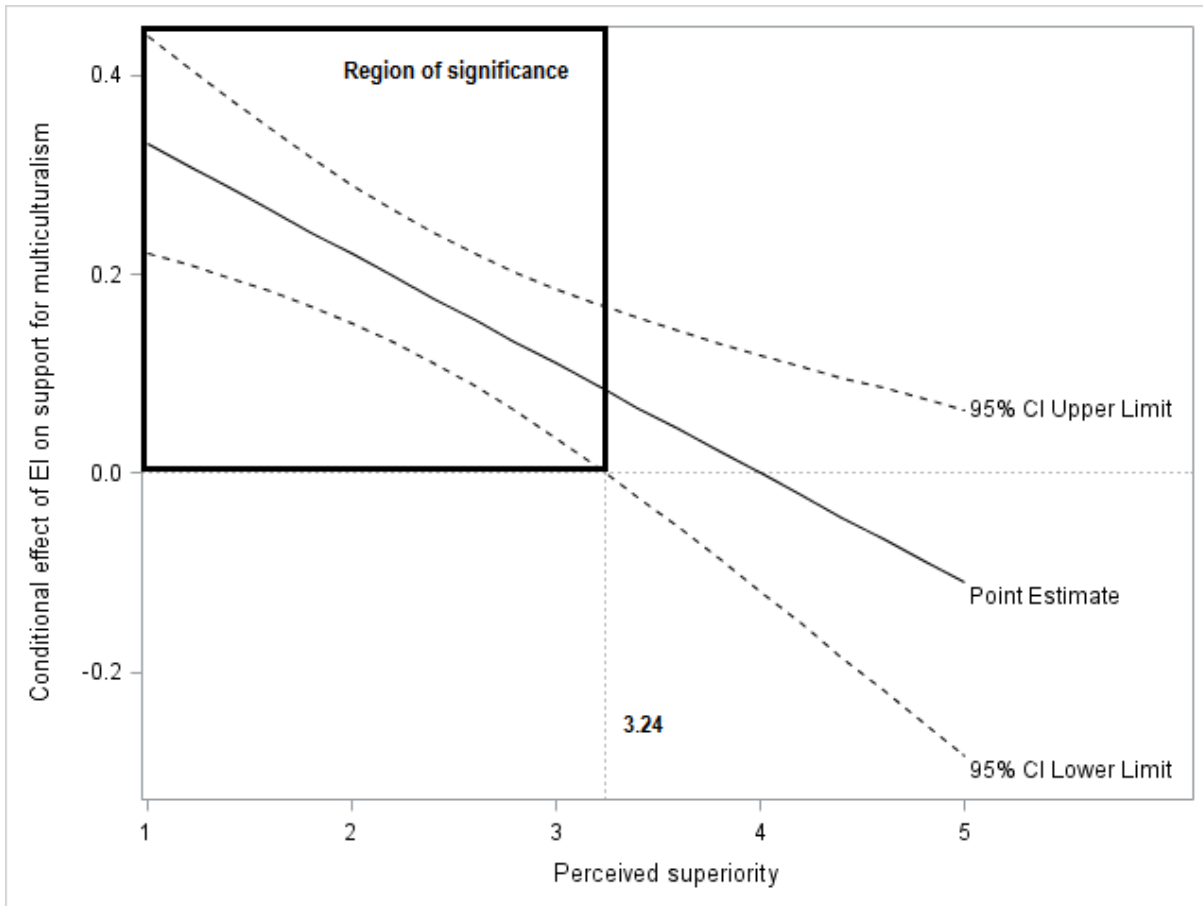


Figure 2. The conditional effect of ethnic identification (EI) on support for multiculturalism as a function of perceived superiority.

## Discussion

This study was, to our knowledge, the first to show the different roles of the strength of ethnic identification and perceived ethnic superiority when predicting immigrants' attitudes towards multiculturalism and the national majority. In line with previous theorization on perceived superiority (Roccas et al., 2008) and complementing research conducted among majority group members on collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013) and nationalism (e.g., Mummendey et al., 2001), high ethnic superiority not only weakened but abolished the positive association between ethnic identification and support for multiculturalism. Perceived superiority

was also associated with more negative attitudes towards the national majority, supporting the argument that it is the identity mode of superiority that matters when predicting outgroup negativity (Roccas et al., 2008).

While the negative ramifications of perceived superiority were attested, due to correlational data the proposed causal effects cannot be verified. Most plausibly, a bidirectional relationship between ethnic identification and multiculturalism exists (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). In future studies, it would be worth studying the ramifications of perceived ethnic superiority also on attitudes towards other ethnic minority groups. More research is also needed to confirm whether the results obtained are generalizable over other groups and contexts. Finally, even though the effect of subjectively reported ethnic background of the participants was controlled for in the present study, future studies should optimally test the proposed models with samples that are ethnically more homogeneous.

Finally, it could be claimed that heightened ingroup positivity is needed to cope with prejudice and discrimination faced by the minority (cf., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). However, just as there is a difference between constructive patriotism and blind nationalism (e.g., Mummendey et al., 2001), positive ethnic identification defined as attachment to and pride for the ingroup is different from exaggerated belief in ingroup superiority. Thus, instead of blaming the victims of discrimination, our results suggest that overly positive evaluations are a potential precursor of maladaptation. Previous research suggests that especially new and disadvantaged group members place importance to the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup (see, e.g., Ryan & Bogart, 1997). Consequently, we stress the importance of building mutual trust and respect between ethnic majority and minority group members, in order to alleviate the need for excessive bolstering of ingroup's value. As a positive cycle, this would probably lead to the reduction of intergroup threat and eventually also to more positive treatment of minorities on behalf of majority groups.

## References

- Arends-Tóth, J., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2003). Multiculturalism and acculturation: Views of Dutch and Turkish-Dutch. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 249–266.
- Berry, J., & Kalin, R. (1995). Multicultural and ethnic attitudes in Canada: An overview of the 1991 national survey. *Canadian Journal of Behaviour and Science, 27*, 301-320.
- Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and wellbeing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*, 135–149.
- Brown, R. (2010). *Prejudice: Its social psychology*. 2nd edition. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Golec de Zavala, A., Cichocka, A. K., & Bilewicz, M. (2013). The paradox of in-group love: Differentiating collective narcissism advances understanding of the relationship between in-group and out-group attitudes. *Journal of Personality, 81*, 16-28.
- Hayes, A., F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis. A regression-based approach*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Jasinskaja-Lahti, I., Liebkind, K., & Perhoniemi, R. (2006). Perceived discrimination and psychological well-being: A victim study of different immigrant groups. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 16*, 267–284.
- Jasinskaja-Lahti, I., Liebkind, K., & Solheim, E. (2009). To identify or not to identify? National disidentification as an alternative reaction to perceived ethnic discrimination. *Applied Psychology, 58*(1), 105–128.
- Minescu, A., & Poppe, E. (2011). Intergroup conflict in Russia: Testing the Group Position Model. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 74*, 166–191.
- Mlicki, P., & Ellemers, N. (1996). Being different or being better? National stereotypes and identifications of Polish and Dutch students. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 26*, 97–114.

- Mummendey, A., Klink, A., & Brown, R. (2001). Nationalism and patriotism: National identification and out-group rejection. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 159-172.
- Myers, T. A. (2011). Goodbye, listwise deletion: Presenting hot deck imputation as an easy and effective tool for handling missing data. *Communication Methods and Measures, 5*, 297-310.
- Phinney, J., & Devich-Navarro, M. (1997). Variations in bicultural identification among African American and Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 7*, 3-32.
- Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., Schwartz, S., Halevy, N., & Eidelson, R. (2008). Toward a unifying model of identification with groups: Integrating theoretical perspectives. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*, 280-306.
- Ryan, C. S., & Bogart, L. M. (1997). Development of new group members' in-group and out-group stereotypes: changes in perceived group variability and ethnocentrism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 719-732.
- Staerklé, C., Sidanius, J., Green, E. G. T., & Molina, L. (2005). Ethnic minority-majority asymmetry and attitudes towards immigrants across 11 nations. *Psicologia Politica, 30*, 7-26.
- Statistics Finland (2012). *Population structure of Finland 2011*. Retrieved 15 August, 2012, from [http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/vaerak/2011/vaerak\\_2011\\_2012-03-16\\_tie\\_001\\_fi.html](http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/vaerak/2011/vaerak_2011_2012-03-16_tie_001_fi.html)
- Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33*, 1-39.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-48). Monterey: Brooks/Cole.

Verkuyten, M. (2007). Social psychology and multiculturalism. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1(1), 280-297.

Verkuyten, M., & Martinovic, B. (2006). Understanding multicultural attitudes: The role of group status, identification, friendships, and justifying ideologies. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30, 1–18.