

## Empirical Article

**Interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals, blind patriotism and preference for Immigrants' acculturation**EERIKA FINELL<sup>1,2</sup>  and CLIFFORD STEVENSON<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland<sup>2</sup>Tampere University, Tampere, Finland<sup>3</sup>Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

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Strong interpersonal bonds between group members have been found to either increase intergroup antipathy or improve intergroup attitudes, depending on the intergroup situation. However, the question of whether close ties with fellow group members can contribute positively and negatively to intergroup attitudes *at the same time* remains unexplored. We explore this question in the context of a national group taking the example of Finns' acculturation attitudes toward immigrants. One adolescent sample ( $N = 401$ ) and one adult student sample ( $N = 285$ ) completed surveys assessing these factors. Across both studies, strong interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals showed a negative effect on acculturation attitudes toward immigrants via an increase in blind patriotism. At the same time, interpersonal bonds also had a direct and positive effect on attitudes toward contact with Finns and (among younger respondents only) attitudes toward cultural maintenance. Our results indicate that the strength of interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals has simultaneous and opposing associations with acculturation attitudes via a combination of direct and indirect pathways. Based on these results we argue that groups can be simultaneously both caring and moral communities.

**Key words:** National attachment, interpersonal bonds, intergroup attitudes, acculturation preference, structural equation model.

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## INTRODUCTION

As Dovidio (2013) points out, the separation of intragroup processes from intergroup dynamics is a flaw at the heart of much current social-psychological theory and research. Across the arenas of social cognition, social identity and intergroup relations, he points to the fundamental role played by intragroup dynamics in shaping intergroup perceptions and actions. In effect, he argues that viewing perceptions and behaviors that occur between groups in isolation from those that occur within groups produces an impoverished and partial understanding of intergroup processes.

In order to increase understanding of the complex relationship between these processes, this article reports two studies that test models with: (1) direct effects between close interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals (e.g. native Finns) and out-group attitudes; and (2) indirect effects via blind patriotism. By testing these models we aim to develop three arguments in this paper. First, the close interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals may have the potential to lead to positive intergroup attitudes. Second, this positive effect emerges only if *group morality* is taken into account. Third, it follows that the *same* close interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals may have the potential to lead to both positive and negative intergroup attitudes because groups are: (1) *caring communities* that provide security, support and a feeling of belonging to their members and therefore reduce intergroup anxiety, and (2) *moral communities* that impose duties and demand loyalty from their members, including the duties to obey rules and protect the in-group. Here we depart from the literature that distinguishes between different forms of nationalistic or patriotic sentiment in regard to whether they are related to

positive/neutral or negative intergroup attitudes because we argue that care and morality are closely related to each other: the stronger individuals' interpersonal ties with fellow nationals, the stronger their loyalty toward the in-group and the willingness to follow the moral order.

We first discuss the importance of close ties with group members for group formation, and then we review some literature on how these are related to intergroup attitudes. Thereafter we progress to the issue of group morality, using blind patriotism as an example of moral belief and virtue. Third, we take the example of majorities' expectations of immigrants regarding acculturation (i.e., majorities' acculturation attitudes), which provides the outcome variable of our study. Finally, in order to test our arguments, we present two preliminary studies from Finland that analyze both the direct and indirect effects of majorities' interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals on their acculturation attitudes (i.e., attitudes toward the maintenance of immigrants' culture and support for intergroup contact), using blind patriotism as a suppressor. Our model is presented in Fig. 1.

*Interpersonal bonds between group members and intergroup attitudes*

Close interpersonal bonds between members of the group are perceived to be essential for the psychological formation of small networks such as task-oriented teams (Deaux & Martin, 2003). These bonds are important sources of social support and feelings of security, belonging and being respected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle & Haslam, 2018;

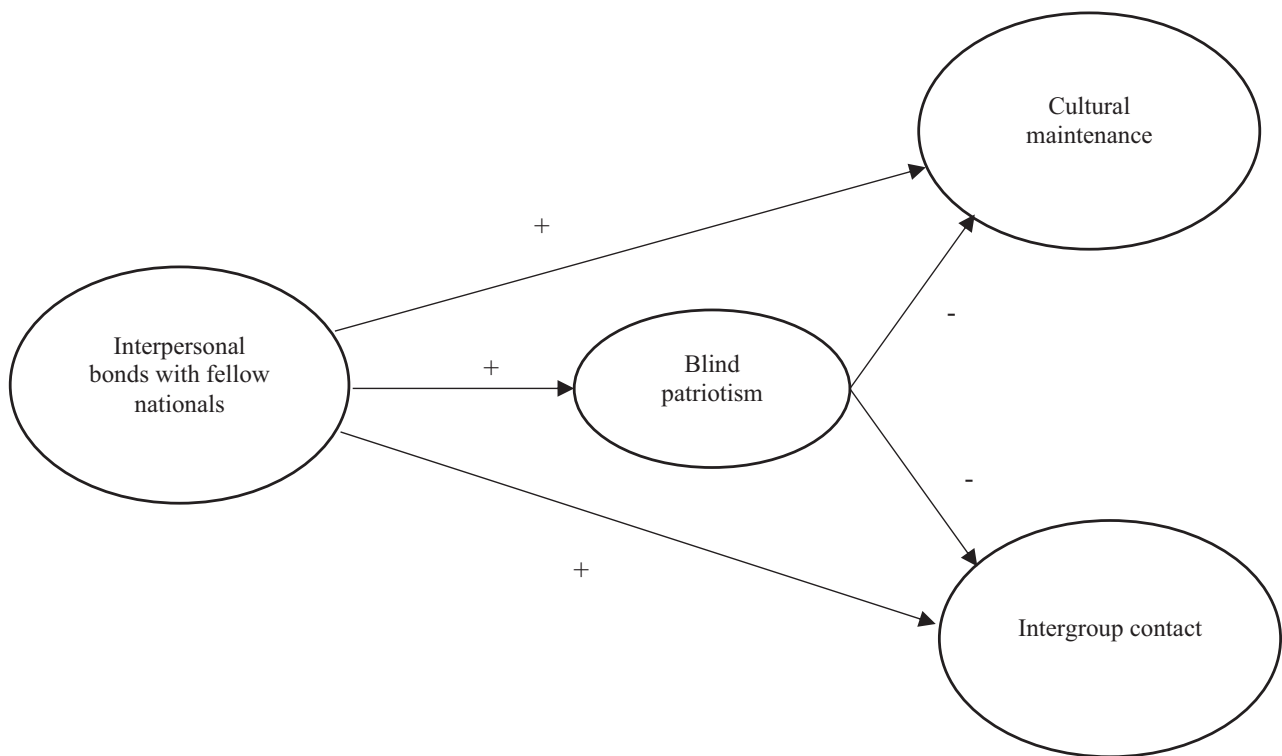


Fig. 1. Model to be tested.

Tyler & Blader, 2003). Although less acknowledged, close interpersonal bonds may also play an important role in the context of large scale social categories (Deaux & Martin, 2003; Loseke, 2007; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). For example, nations which are abstract social categories, are also materialized in social networks through the habits of everyday nationalism in families, schools, workplaces and leisure activities (Skey, 2011) such as in sports (Watson, 2017) or in dance (Kalogeropoulou, 2013). Through these practices, interpersonal bonds between fellow nationals make the category of the nation emotionally meaningful (Skey & Antonsich, 2017), and enable people to feel connected with other group members and to be recognized as a valued member (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Neville & Reicher, 2011). In line with this reasoning, research on autobiographical memories associated with national flag-raising rituals shows that accounts of intimate interpersonal bonds are at the core of many of these nation-related memories. In these memories, the national flag is not only a symbol of the nation, but also reminds people of moments with their loving grandmothers or dear friends (Finell, 2019). Also Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) show that the quality of interpersonal bonds between group members predicts the sense of belonging to large scale social categories.

Strong interpersonal bonds between members of a group are not only important for the psychological formation of social categories. A range of research has illustrated interdependence of these bonds and intergroup perceptions and behaviors. For example, the classic Robbers Cave study by Muzafer Sherif shows that under competitive conditions, when boys were spending time in groups, identification and loyalty rapidly developed. However, simultaneously, the negative perception other group members flourished (Sherif, 1956 see also Effron &

Knowles, 2015). Moreover, strong interpersonal bonds between group members afford communication and social influence among them, which facilitates a collective response to potential threats (Drury & Alfarhli, 2019). Within a laboratory prison simulation, interpersonal bonds and interaction were the basis on which prisoners came together to resist, challenge and overcome the guards' authority (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). Thus, strong intragroup bonds can both deteriorate intergroup attitudes and facilitate coping with and resistance to the threat occasioned by out-groups, which in turn can escalate intergroup conflicts.

However, it is also possible that strong interpersonal bonds with group members can enhance more positive intergroup relations and attitudes. Herreros and Criado (2009) show that social capital among host nationals across Europe was predictive of positive attitudes toward immigrants. In addition, studies from South Africa evidence that a sense of belonging and connectedness to one's local and national communities predict positive attitudes toward immigrants (Gordon, 2017; Gordon & Maharaj, 2015). In a similar way, literature focusing on group identification stresses that if the content of identity is based more on bonds between group members and mutual help (e.g. Yuki, 2003) or affective ties (e.g. Jackson & Smith, 1999) rather than depersonalization, group members are less keen on boundary building between groups. Stevenson, Costa, Easterbrook, McNamara and Kellezi (2020) show that residents in ethnically diverse areas of England who identified with their local residential community had more positive attitudes toward members of the opposing cultural tradition. This was due to the effect of community identification in increasing perceived social support from other neighbors, which in turn reduced "intergroup anxiety" (i.e., the threat felt in interpersonal interactions with ethnic out-

group members). In other words, the perceived intragroup support provided by identification with the neighborhood served to afford anxiety-reducing reassurance when dealing with out-group members, thereby improving intergroup attitudes.

While these opposing effects of intragroup processes on intergroup attitudes are usually studied separately, sometimes researchers in the fields of sociopsychological, sociological and political nation studies have been interested in analyzing them simultaneously. A large body of literature has tried to categorize different forms of national attachment and attitude in regard to how they are related to intergroup attitudes. Typically, these different sentiments are compared with each other in statistical models, such that one form (e.g., nationalism) predicts negative and the other (e.g., patriotism) neutral or even positive intergroup attitudes (e.g., Davidov, 2011; de Zavala, Cichocka & Bilewicz, 2013; Green, Sarasin, Fasel & Staerklé, 2011; Heinrich, 2020). However, our research differs from these studies in two important ways. First, our focus is on ties among fellow nationals per se, not on the more abstract forms of national attachment and attitude (e.g., patriotic sentiments, collective narcissism) that are typically analyzed in this field. Second, we argue that the close ties with fellow nationals can both lead to positive intergroup attitudes and *at the same time* increase the adoption of norms dictating that members should faithfully serve and protect the interests of in-group. These moral norms may lead to negative intergroup attitudes and mask potentially positive effects of these ties.

#### Group morality

Increasingly sociopsychologists have become aware that morality is related not only to interindividual relations but also how to be a member of group (Ellemers, Pagliaro & Barreto, 2013; Haidt, 2007; Wildschut & Insko, 2006). For example, Haidt (2008) argues that morality not only protects individual rights from the selfishness of others, but also regulates selfishness by strengthening groups and emphasizing loyalty. He and his colleagues (see e.g., Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009) call these two kinds of moral system as individualizing and binding. The virtues of care and fairness belong to individualization dimension whereas the virtues of in-group loyalty, respect of authorities, and purity belong to binding dimension. Similarly, Wildschut and Insko (2006) have emphasized that groups are protected by moral norms that dictate that in-group members should faithfully serve the interests of the in-group. As the interests of the in-group may necessitate harming out-group members – and in some cases, even in-group members – group morality can sometimes be antithetical to individual morality. It follows that in the sphere of group morality the welfare of the in-group is at the core of moral principles, whereas in the sphere of individual morality the welfare of the individual is at the core of moral principles.

The concept of group morality is especially important in the context of nations. Nations are moral communities that require their members to perform duties that might be antithetical to their own personal well-being (Anderson, 1991). Patriotism is a moral belief system that includes an obligation to serve and protect one's own country and fellow nationals (Finell, 2017; Poole, 1999). This is especially the case in times of national crises. Therefore, in this

paper, we take “blind patriotism” as an example of group morality. Unlike literature that defines it using dispositional terms (Staub, 1997), we define blind patriotism as a belief system that dictates that one should be loyal to one's own country without questioning the decisions made by one's fellow nationals: it is expected that individuals should support any action their nation takes, and should avoid criticizing it (Schatz, 2018; Staub, 1997). Thus, blind patriotism reflects the virtues of in-group loyalty and respect (see Graham *et al.*, 2009). The literature has shown that blind patriotism is associated with emphasized group boundaries, negative intergroup attitudes, opposition to multiculturalism, and perceived intergroup threat (Finell & Zogmaister, 2015; Schatz, 2018; Williams, Foster & Krohn, 2008).

As explained above, we suggest that although strong ties among fellow nationals may have the potential to lead to positive intergroup attitudes, they also increase the adoption of group morality; the stronger the ties with fellow nationals, the stronger their group morality. This suggests two paths: one direct path from interpersonal bonds between group members to intergroup attitudes, and one indirect path via blindly patriotic beliefs. Given that blind patriotism is supposed to be related to negative intergroup attitudes, it should then follow that the association between interpersonal bonds and positive intergroup attitudes will become stronger when the indirect path via blind patriotism is included in the model. In other words, we suggest that blind patriotism works as a suppressor.<sup>1</sup> Next, we turn to our outcome variable and pose our formal hypotheses.

#### Interpersonal bonds between group members and acculturation attitudes

Majorities' acculturation attitudes play an important role in smooth cultural diversification. If majority group members support the maintenance of minority groups' cultures and identities (i.e., cultural maintenance) and prefer minority groups to engage in daily interaction with them (i.e., intergroup contact), these attitudes increase the likelihood of successful mutual acculturation (Berry, 2017) and positive intergroup relations (Horenczyk, Jasinskaja-Lahti, Sam & Vedder, 2013).

Research has already demonstrated that among minority groups, strong interpersonal bonds between group members enhance positive attitudes toward the majority group's culture and increase the willingness to engage in intergroup contact. For example, exchange students who felt connected to their ethnic groups and received support from this group had a more positive attitude toward both their own and the host group's cultures, and had more contact with host group members, than did exchange students who did not have such resources (Berger, Safdar, Spieß, Bekk & Font, 2019). Likewise, in a mixed method study of first-year undergraduates, Phinney and colleagues found that a strong (versus diffuse) sense of ethnic identity could serve as a ‘secure base’ for engaging with other ethnic groups (Phinney, Jacoby & Silva, 2007).

However, among majority groups, research has mainly focused on general national identification, showing a negative association between such identification and the acceptance of multicultural ideology (Badea, Iyer & Aebischer, 2018; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker & Obdrzalek, 2000; Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten &

Martinovic, 2006). The effect of majorities' intragroup bonds on their acculturation attitudes toward immigrants has remained largely unexplored. In addition, while it is known that prevailing national ideological and normative factors influence people's acculturation attitudes (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997; see also Miglietta, Tartaglia & Loera, 2018), the role of blind patriotism in this process is rarely analyzed.

From the literature reviewed above, we expect the following patterns:

1. An increased strength of bonds with fellow nationals will be negatively associated with acculturation attitudes via increased blind patriotism (H1).
2. Once this indirect negative path is taken into consideration, there will remain a more positive direct effect between interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals and acculturation attitudes (H2).

We test these hypotheses through two survey studies conducted in Finland among national majority members. The first study was a self-completed survey administered to upper-secondary school students in the context of their educational establishment. The second study was an online survey completed by university students. The aim of the second study was to test whether we were able to replicate the results of the first study with a different population.

The data for both studies was collected in large cities in Finland. The annual survey on migration conducted by Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA) shows that the attitudes toward migration has slowly moved to a more positive direction in the country. This is the case especially regarding to labor migration; in 2020 35% opposed it whereas in 2010 49% did so. In addition, 55% perceived that the increase of labor migration in Finland brings positive international influence in 2018,<sup>2</sup> whereas in 2007 the percentage was only 44. However, 52% still perceived in 2019 that the current magnitude of immigration is too high in Finland (*Finnish Business and Policy Forum*, 2021).

The proportion of people with a foreign background constitutes 8% of Finland's 5.5 m population (Official Statistics of Finland, 2022). A quarter of all those who have migrant background live in Helsinki, and this change has been rapid. It is estimated that 26% of Helsinki residents will speak a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Same by 2035, whereas this percentage was 16 in 2019 (Helsingin kaupunginkanslia, 2019). Because of this rapid transition, Finland provides an excellent context in which to analyze how intragroup processes can affect acculturation attitudes among majority group members. Given that in the public discourse people with migrant background are often referred with the label "immigrant" (*maahanmuuttaja*) in Finland, and no distinction between their different ethnic backgrounds are made, we study the acculturation attitudes toward immigrants in general instead of a specific ethnic group.

## STUDY 1

### *Participants and procedure*

In total, 401<sup>3</sup> Finnish-majority adolescents filled in a questionnaire measuring their interpersonal bonds with fellow

Finns and intergroup attitudes (229 females, 172 males; age:  $M = 17.25$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ , age range 16–20 years). Membership of the majority group was defined as follows: both parents of the participant were born in Finland, and the participant had Finnish citizenship. Given that immigration is such a recent phenomenon in Finland, it is very unlikely that the sample included third-generation immigrants. The data was collected in five upper-secondary schools in a metropolitan area of Finland during school lessons by asking pupils to complete a paper copy of the survey. Before they filled in the questionnaire, the participants completed a writing task asking them about their autobiographical memories related to Finnish national symbols, in order to make their ties with national fellows psychologically salient.

### *Materials*

Our predictor was *interpersonal bonds* with fellow Finns (i.e., interpersonal bonds). This was measured by three revised items used by Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) to measure respondents' bonds with group/category members: "How well do you know other Finns?" "How sociable are you with other Finns?" "How close do you feel to other Finns?" The response scale varied between "not at all" (1) and "extremely" (7). The reliability was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73).

We used two summed variables as our outcome variables. The first measured participants' attitudes toward immigrants' *cultural maintenance* through three items (i.e., "It is important that immigrants maintain their heritage culture in Finland"; "Immigrants should maintain their religion, language and traditions in Finland"; "It is important that immigrants maintain their way of living in Finland"). The second measured attitudes toward *intergroup contact* between Finns and immigrants through two items (i.e., "It is important that immigrants also spend time with Finns in their free time"; "It is important that immigrants have Finnish friends").<sup>4</sup> Both measures were adapted from Zagefka and Brown (2002). The response scale varied between "totally disagree" (1) and "totally agree" (5). The reliability of both scales was good (*cultural maintenance*: Cronbach's alpha 0.85; *intergroup contact*: Cronbach's alpha 0.90). These items have previously been used in the Finnish context (e.g., Mähönen, Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2011).

Our suppressor, *blind patriotism*, was measured on three revised items taken from Schatz and colleagues' scale (Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999). All the items were related to uncritical support for one's nation: "I support Finland's policies for the simple reason that they are the policies of my country"; "It is unpatriotic to criticize one's own country"; "You should support your country right or wrong." The response options ranged from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5) (Cronbach's alpha 0.61). These items have previously been used in the Finnish context (e.g. Finell & Zogmaister, 2015). Finally, we included gender as a background variable because research has shown that there can be gender differences in intergroup attitudes (Jonason, Underhill & Navarrate, 2020) as well as age.

### *Analytical strategy*

A structural equation model was built and then analyzed using Mplus statistical software version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998). A full informational maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation with a bootstrapping approach (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) was adopted to test direct and indirect effects.<sup>5</sup> Bootstrapping is a preferred method to test indirect associations, but it can also be used to address the non-normality of the data (Pek, Wong & Wong, 2018). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used as fit indicators in the

model. SRMR < 0.08, CFI > 0.95 and RMSEA < 0.06 indicate a good fit between the hypothetical model and the observed data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We did not use the  $\chi^2$ -test statistic due to its sensitivity to sample size (Schermelel-Engel, Moosbrugger & Müller, 2003; Vandenberg, 2006). The highest missing values in the observed variables were in the cultural maintenance factor ( $N = 16$ – $20$ ), and the lowest missing values were in the interpersonal bonds factor ( $N = 3$ – $5$ ). For missing data, Mplus computes the standard errors of parameter estimates by using the observed information matrix (Kenward & Molenberghs, 1998; Muthén & Muthén, 1998). We report both the unstandardized and standardized estimates and the  $p$ -values of unstandardized estimates.

### Results

First, we tested the model fit of a two-factor solution of acculturation attitudes (cultural maintenance and intergroup contact). The analysis showed an almost adequate fit (CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.02). The model was further improved by allowing residual correlations between one pair of variables in the cultural maintenance factor (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.01). Also, an alternative model was tested in order to preclude the possibility that the items would load significantly better on a single factor. This model showed a significantly poorer fit (CFI = 0.60, RMSEA = 0.45, SRMR = 0.15). The standardized loadings of all factor indicators were significant ranging from 0.65 to 0.99. The measurement models for blind patriotism and interpersonal bonds were also tested. Both showed an excellent fit (blind patriotism: CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.00; interpersonal bonds: CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.00). The standardized loadings of these factor indicators were significant ranging from 0.45 to 0.79. The correlations between all the latent variables are reported in Table 1. From this, we first note the positive and significant association between interpersonal bonds and intergroup contact, but not between our predictor and cultural maintenance.

Next, the proposed structural model was tested. Age and gender were used as covariates. Gender was associated significantly with all the latent factors other than blind patriotism. Age did not have significant associations. Only significant relations were included in the model. The structural model showed a good fit (CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.03). The model was further improved by allowing residual correlations between one pair of variables in the cultural maintenance factor,

as above. This model fitted significantly better than the less constrained model (CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03, SRMR = 0.03). The *total effects* of interpersonal bonds on acculturation attitudes were significant (cultural maintenance: unstandardized beta ( $B$ ) = 0.16, standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) = 0.15,  $p = 0.023$ ; intergroup contact:  $B = 0.19$ ,  $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), as well as the direct effects (see Fig. 2). Furthermore, the *indirect paths* were significant (interpersonal bonds on cultural maintenance:  $B = -0.10$ ,  $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ; interpersonal bonds on intergroup contact:  $B = -0.10$ ,  $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). The model explained 14–15% of the variance of acculturation attitudes (cultural maintenance:  $R^2 = 0.137$ ; intergroup contact:  $R^2 = 0.146$ ).

The results support our first hypothesis: the indirect effects between interpersonal bonds and acculturation attitudes via blind patriotism are significant. Also, our second hypothesis receives support: interpersonal bonds are more positively related to acculturation attitudes after the indirect path is taken into consideration. The significant direct effects between interpersonal bonds and acculturation attitudes are in the opposite direction to the significant indirect effects. These findings support our notion that blind patriotism works as a suppressor in the model, and increases the predictive validity of interpersonal bonds when it is included in the same regression equation (MacKinnon, Krull & Lockwood, 2000; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991).

Overall, then, Study 1 provides some preliminary evidence for our hypotheses, showing that interpersonal bonds do indeed appear to have parallel countervailing effects upon acculturation attitudes. However, there are several aspects of the study, including the age of the participants and the initial priming activity (whereby Finnish identity was made salient to participants), that indicate a necessity to replicate these findings before making firm inferences from the results. Accordingly, we conducted another study with older participants, in which the data was collected without an identity prime.

## STUDY 2

### Participants and procedure

The data was collected by asking teachers at Tampere University and the University of Helsinki (including their “open universities”) to distribute the link to the questionnaire and the invitation to their students. In total, 285 members of the Finnish majority (235 females, 42 males and eight others) filled in the online questionnaire (an e-form). Participants were included on the basis of being an ethnic Finn by virtue of having both parents born in Finland and speaking Finnish as their native language. The mean age of participants was 28.12 years ( $SD = 8.97$ ).

### Materials

*Interpersonal bonds, cultural maintenance, intergroup contact and blind patriotism* were measured similarly as in Study 1. Gender (female = 0, male = 1, other = 2) and age were included as background variables. There were no missing values. We followed the same analytical strategy as in Study 1. The Cronbach alphas were: interpersonal bonds = 0.67, cultural maintenance = 0.86, intergroup contact = 0.76, blind patriotism = 0.71.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between latent variables – correlations estimated using FIML with robust standard errors ( $N = 401$ )

	1	2	3
Interpersonal bonds	1		
Blind patriotism	0.41***	1	
Cultural maintenance	0.12	−0.15*	1
Intergroup contact	0.17**	−0.15*	0.39***

\* $p < 0.05$ ,

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ,

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

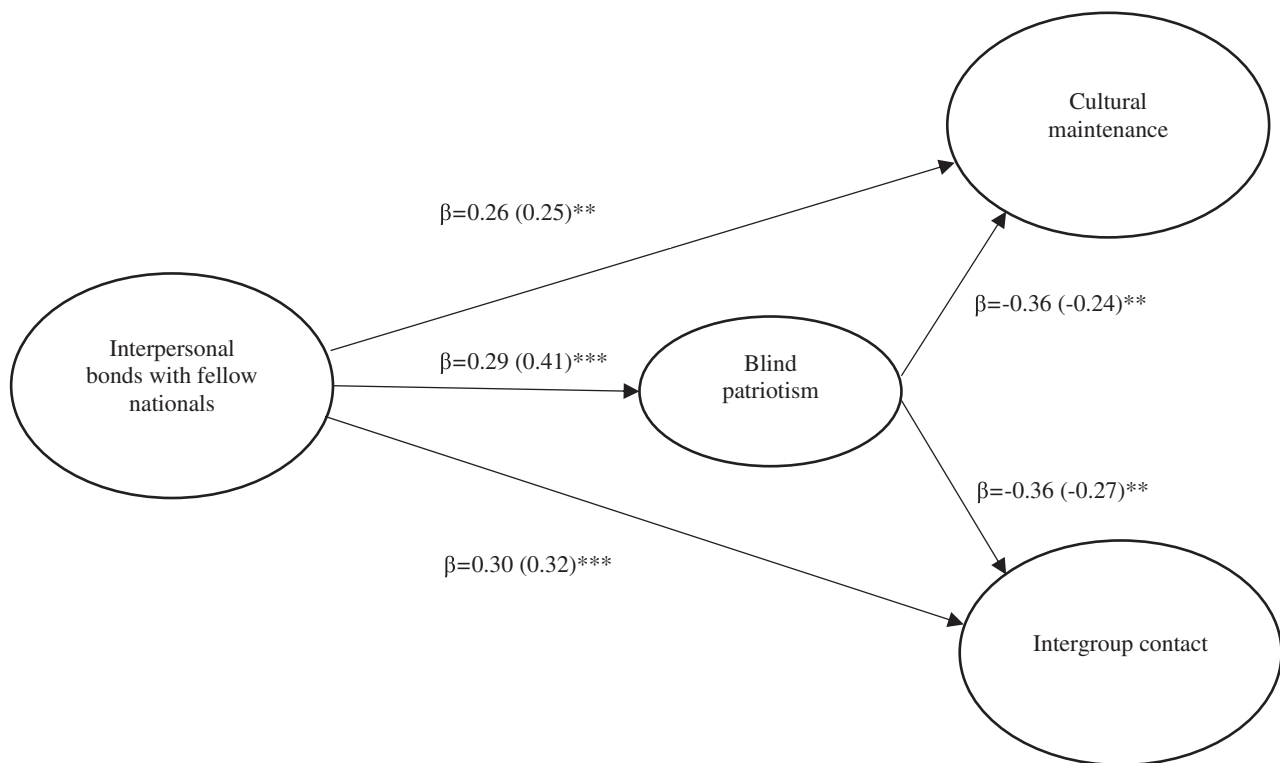


Fig. 2. Unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients of the direct and indirect effects of the final model. Standardized regression coefficients in parentheses. Notes:  $N = 401$ . \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

### Results

The two-factor solution of acculturation preference (cultural maintenance and contact) showed a good fit (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.01), and the standardized loadings of all factor indicators were significant ranging from 0.69 to 0.89. The measurement models for blind patriotism and interpersonal bonds also had a good fit (blind patriotism: CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.00; interpersonal bonds: CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.00). The standardized loadings of indicators ranged from 0.47 to 0.96 and were significant. The correlations between all the latent variables are reported in Table 2. We can note no observable relationship between interpersonal bonds and our outcome measures.

Gender (in the form of two dummy variables) and age were included as background variables in the initial model. Of these variables, only gender was significantly associated with both acculturation attitudes and interpersonal bonds. Only significant

associations with background variables were included in the final model.

The final structural model showed an excellent fit (CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03, SRMR = 0.05). The model was not improved by allowing residual correlations. The *total effects* of interpersonal bonds on acculturation attitudes were not significant (cultural maintenance: unstandardized beta ( $B$ ) =  $-0.13$ , standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) =  $-0.11$ ,  $p = 0.166$ ; intergroup contact:  $B = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.490$ ), whereas the *indirect paths* were significant (interpersonal bonds on cultural maintenance:  $B = -0.10$ ,  $\beta = -0.08$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ; interpersonal bonds on intergroup contact:  $B = -0.11$ ,  $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The estimates of direct paths are reported in Fig. 3. The direct path between interpersonal bonds and cultural maintenance was not significant, whereas the direct path between interpersonal bonds and intergroup contact was significant. The model explained 15–18% of the variance of acculturation attitudes (intergroup contact:  $R^2 = 0.151$ ; cultural maintenance:  $R^2 = 0.182$ ).

As in Study 1, the results support the first hypothesis: interpersonal bonds are positively associated with an increase in blind patriotism, which is in turn negatively associated with acculturation attitudes. Also, our second hypothesis is partly supported: the relationship between interpersonal bonds and intergroup contact is positive and becomes significant after the indirect path is taken into consideration. As in Study 1 the significant direct effects between interpersonal bonds and intergroup contact is in the opposite direction to the significant indirect effects. This supports our notion that blind patriotism works as a suppressor in this model (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2000; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991). In relation to the outcome of cultural

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between latent variables – correlations estimated using FIML with robust standard errors ( $N = 285$ )

	1	2	3
Interpersonal bonds	1		
Blind patriotism	0.37***	1	
Cultural maintenance	-0.04	-0.21**	1
Intergroup contact	0.11	-0.23*	0.26**

\* $p < 0.05$ ,

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ,

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

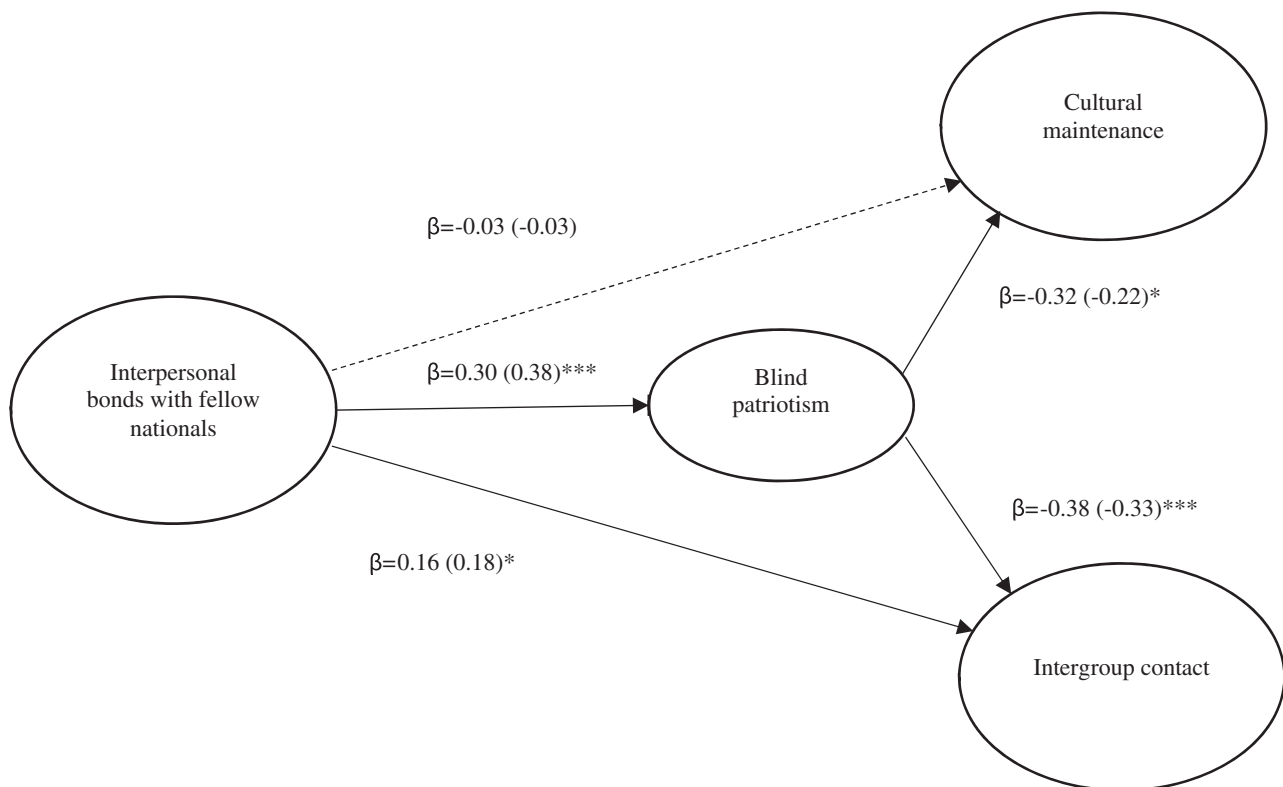


Fig. 3. Unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients of the direct and indirect effects of the final model. Standardized regression coefficients in parentheses. Notes:  $N = 285$ . \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

maintenance, blind patriotism fully mediates this association and thus does not support our second hypothesis. Unlike in Study 1, the total effects between interpersonal bonds and acculturation attitudes are not significant.

## DISCUSSION

In this article we aimed to develop three arguments. First, we argued that the close interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals may have the potential to lead to positive intergroup attitudes. Second, we argued that the crucial factor in this process is group morality, which we operationalized as blind patriotism (i.e., a belief system that dictates that one should be loyal to one's own country without questioning the decisions made by one's fellow nationals; Schatz, 2018; Staub, 1997). Third, we argued that these two factors – interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals and group morality – reflect two essential and interrelated features of group life that are closely tied to each other so that the stronger the interpersonal bonds, the stronger the morality. In other words, interpersonal bonds between group members have potential to lead to positive intergroup attitudes and *at the same time* increase the adoption of norms dictating that members should faithfully serve and protect the interests of in-group, which may lead to negative intergroup attitudes.

Our findings here suggest that this is indeed the case. Across two studies of attitudes toward immigrants' acculturation among Finnish adolescents and university students, we showed that there were two counterposed effects: (1) a positive direct effect between strong interpersonal bonds and positive attitudes toward

immigrants' acculturation; and (2) a negative indirect effect via blind patriotism.

Although the literature seldom reports a significant positive relationship between "in-group love" and "out-group love," we suggest that interpersonal bonds between group members provide support and resources to individuals that can facilitate more positive intergroup attitudes. This is in line with the work by Stevenson *et al.* (2020) on residential mixing in Northern Ireland, whereby intragroup support predicted improved intergroup attitudes through reduced intergroup anxiety (see also the work of Gordon and colleagues on immigration in South Africa; Gordon, 2017; Gordon & Maharaj, 2015). In our study we can speculate that close interpersonal bonds between Finns also serve to reduce the experience of intergroup threat and anxiety, which in turn improves intergroup perceptions and attitudes. Further research is of course required.

We also illustrate the parallel negative effect of intragroup bonds upon attitudes toward immigrants via blind patriotism. This is in line with the bulk of previous research which shows a positive relationship between the endorsement of blind patriotism and negative intergroup attitudes (Finell & Zogmaister, 2015; Schatz, 2018; Spry & Hornsey, 2007; Williams *et al.*, 2008). Here we show that this effect is more than an individual predisposition, and is in fact part of an intragroup process: perceived ties with fellow nationals are associated with blind patriotism, which in turn predicts negative acculturation attitudes. In effect, blind patriotism is part of a process of intragroup influence, whereby strong national ties predict greater adherence to these moral norms (see also Doosje, Ellemers & Spears, 1999;



Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Jetten, Postmes & McAuliffe, 2002).

Finally, previous studies have examined the different impacts of positive and negative forms of nationalism, or different types of national identity content, on attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., Finell, Olakivi, Liebkind & Lipsanen, 2013; Pehrson, Vignoles & V., & Brown, R., 2009). Others have found that collective narcissism serves to mask more positive effects of general national identification on intergroup attitudes (de Zavala *et al.*, 2013). However, our work is the first to suggest that interpersonal bonds between nationals can both lead to positive attitudes toward immigrants and *at the same time* increase the adoption of the group moral norms of blind patriotism, which predicts negative attitudes toward outgroup members.

Our work also suggests some novel applications in the area of acculturation. The finding that the positive effects of interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals occurs alongside the negative effects of blind patriotism suggests that a securely supported national should be more positively disposed to immigrants (i.e., they support multiculturalism, see Berry, 2017) than one who possesses fewer attachments to co-nationals. Thus, it is important to preserve the positive effects of national ties without the negative normative influences of blind patriotism. In practical terms, the tools of community-building and social inclusion, if used to address isolation and marginalization among host nationals, could potentially help to reduce fear and threat associated with immigration.

Of course, there are some limitations to our studies that bear consideration. First, this work was conducted within a single nation that has relatively low levels of immigration. While our findings bear resemblance to studies investigating the relationships between intra- and intergroup processes elsewhere, they will need to be replicated across other national contexts. Second, work remains to be done to uncover the specific mechanisms whereby interpersonal bonds between group members have positive effects on acculturation attitudes. From prior work in the social cure tradition (e.g., Haslam *et al.*, 2018), we can infer that intragroup support may play a role in reducing intergroup threat and increasing perceptions of interdependence and a shared fate, although the specifics of this remain to be determined (see Stevenson *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, there are some inconsistencies between the findings of our two studies which bear further scrutiny. Within the first model, the total effect of interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals on both forms of acculturation attitude (cultural maintenance and intergroup contact) is significant, and the indirect effects are partial; in the second model, the indirect pathway fully explains the relationship between interpersonal bonds and attitudes toward cultural maintenance, leaving no positive effect remaining. We can speculate that one reason for this might be that the priming activity undertaken by the adolescents in Study 1 may have enhanced the salience of a more vivid and secure view of interpersonal bonds than would otherwise be the case, thereby strengthening the relationship between interpersonal bonds and acculturation attitudes. Similarly, the act of bringing to mind one's own autobiographical memories associated with Finland is likely to have increased the insight of these younger participants into the challenges facing immigrants

in terms of cultural maintenance. However, it is important to bear in mind that also in the second model, the direct effect of interpersonal bonds on cultural maintenance is less negative than the total effect. Once more, further research is required to unpack these complex dynamics in finer detail.

Despite these limitations, our study provides important novel insights for the quest to understand the complex relationship between in-group love and out-group hate (e.g., Brewer, 1999). It proposes that strong interpersonal bonds between group members have the potential to help people to better adapt to cultural change, but at the same time they also increase the adoption of group morality and protective norms. The important question is how strong interpersonal bonds with fellow nationals can be used in a constructive manner to promote harmonious and respectful intergroup relations.

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These data collections did not need ethical approval in Finland. Please see <https://tenk.fi/en/advice-and-materials/guidelines-ethical-review-human-sciences>. Participation was voluntary. Written informed consents were taken when needed. Both data are anonymous.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A suppressor is a variable that increases the predictive validity of another variable when it is included in the same regression equation (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> There is no information from 2019 and 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Two respondents did not report their gender, and they were dropped from the analysis.

<sup>4</sup> A factor with two variables is considered reliable when the variables are highly correlated with each other ( $r > 0.70$ ) but fairly uncorrelated with other variables (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The correlation between these two items was  $r = 0.82$ . The pairwise correlations between these items and the cultural maintenance items varied between  $r = 0.23$  and  $r = 0.34$ .

<sup>5</sup> The analyses were also made with a FIML estimation with robust standard errors (the MLR estimator in Mplus). MLR is robust to moderate violations of assumptions such as non-normality (Savalei, 2010). When bootstrapping is used, MLR cannot be used in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998). Bootstrapping can also be used to address the non-normality of the data (Pek, Wong, & Wong, 2018), although MLR is preferred (Kline, 2011). We conducted the analyses using both methods. The standard errors were almost identical. The pairwise correlations were estimated by MLR, because when bootstrapping is used Mplus does not provide p-values for standardised estimates.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

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