

# The more diverse the better: Identifying with a diverse neighbourhood mother community predicts greater intergroup contact

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## Abstract

Although it has been shown that identification with a neighbourhood community can support intergroup relations within the community by providing resources to cope with intergroup contact, previous research has not investigated how the perceived diversity of the neighbourhood identity influences this process. This study extends research on neighbourhood identification by focusing on a specific group (mothers of small children), examining how and when identification with other mothers living in the same neighbourhood is related to intergroup contact with local outgroup mothers. We examined this in a survey study, for which we collected data from both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers at public maternal and child healthcare centres ( $N = 733$ ). Our study showed that identification with the neighbourhood mother community was positively associated with intergroup contact, partly via perceived social support from other neighbourhood mothers for both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers. Our study additionally revealed that the perceived proportion of outgroup mothers in the local mother community moderated the relationship between identification and intergroup contact for both groups. Our findings highlight the significance of

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considering perceived diversity for determining when identification will support intergroup contact. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's [Community and Social Impact Statement](#).

**KEYWORDS**

intergroup contact, mothers, neighbourhood, social cure, social identification

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, residential diversification's effects on intergroup contact and relations within neighbourhoods have been hotly debated. On the one hand, diversification may result in conflict or withdrawal from contact (Putnam, 2007); on the other hand, residential mixing may increase intergroup contact and thus improve intergroup relations (Schmid, Al Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014). More recently, research on community identities has attempted to reformulate the question from 'what are the effects of neighbourhood diversification?' to 'how can communities better cope with the challenges of diversification?' (Stevenson, Easterbrook, et al., 2019). This research demonstrates that residents' identification with their neighbourhood community predicts increased intergroup mixing because it provides residents with the necessary psychosocial resources to make contact (Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021). However, this line of research has yet to consider how the perceived diversity of the local community identity affects the consequences of identification and whether these processes affect minority and majority groups similarly. It also has yet to determine whether these social identity processes operate within specific neighbourhood subgroups.

This article explores these issues by analysing how and when identification with the superordinate category 'neighbourhood's mothers' is related to positive and frequent intergroup contact between majority and immigrant mothers living in the same area. We focus on mothers with small children because they spend a lot of time in their neighbourhoods visiting local family venues (Wilson, 2013; Witten, Kearns, McCreanor, Penney, & Faalau, 2009), and therefore they have great potential for intergroup encounters in their everyday life in diverse neighbourhoods. Despite this potential, however, prior research has found these encounters to be rare (Paajanen, Seppälä, Stevenson, Riikonen, & Finell, 2023).

### 1.1 | Neighbourhood diversification as threat or opportunity

The effects of diversification on local communities have been much debated in recent decades, with the main debate focusing on the differing predictions of constrict theory (Putnam, 2007) and the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). According to the constrict theory (Putnam, 2007), increased diversity in neighbourhoods decreases social capital and solidarity among residents, at least initially, leading to increased perceptions of threat and withdrawal from social contacts. The contact hypothesis, on the other hand, sees diversity as providing more opportunities for intergroup contact and thus as potentially enhancing intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The evidence is inconclusive: while early studies showed a generally negative impact on neighbourhoods' social capital (Putnam, 2007), this later gave way to the understanding that diversification's effects depend on the neighbourhood's resilience and the level of pre-existing intergroup relations (Laurence, 2014). Indeed, increased intergroup contact can decrease experienced threat and increase trust, counteracting the negative effects of

diversification (Schmid et al., 2014). These latter studies highlight that contact among neighbours is a key process through which diversification can have positive effects in neighbourhoods. However, research on neighbourhood diversification has mainly analysed large-scale surveys, leaving specific neighbourhood contexts and the intergroup dynamics and subgroups within them under-investigated. Consequently, researchers have called for studies that focus on actual contacts among residents in specific neighbourhoods (Stolle & Harell, 2013) and take into account how neighbourhood identity dynamics impact on social relations while capturing the perspectives of different resident groups who may perceive or experience contact differently (Stevenson, Easterbrook, et al., 2019; Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019).

## 1.2 | The ‘social cure’ approach to understanding neighbourhood diversification

Extensive research in the Social Identity and Health (SIAH or ‘social cure’) tradition demonstrates that identification with social groups (i.e., the degree to which people internalise social groups as an important part of the self) provides individuals with psychosocial resources to cope with stress, threat and change, and thus has a positive impact on well-being (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle, & Haslam, 2018). Perception of a shared identity with other group members plays a key role in this process; people are more likely to give social support to ingroup members than to outgroup members and to experience stress reduction when receiving help from an ingroup member (Haslam et al., 2018; Haslam, O’Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005). While the relationship between social identification and social support has been found to be reciprocal (Häusser, Hadi, Reichelt, & Mojzisch, 2023), the social cure approach views social identification as primarily the cognitive precursor of the transformation of social relationships between group members resulting in the perception and experience of increased social support (Haslam, Reicher, & Levine, 2012). In other words, social support mediates the relationship between social identification and its positive outcomes (Haslam et al., 2018).

This article focuses on social cure processes in mixed neighbourhoods. In such neighbourhoods, communities can provide residents from different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds with an inclusive superordinate category (i.e., neighbourhood identity) which they can identify with (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Stevenson, Costa, Easterbrook, McNamara, & Kellezi, 2020; Stevenson, Easterbrook, et al., 2019). There is evidence that such superordinate categories can promote positive intergroup relationships (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Lemay & Ryan, 2021), thus having the potential to help residents to cope with the challenge of diversification (Stevenson et al., 2020; Stevenson, Easterbrook, et al., 2019).

Neighbourhood identification is related to intergroup contact between residents from different ethnic groups living in the same neighbourhood, both directly and indirectly (Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021). The *direct effect* is due to the process of ‘primary appraisal’ of threats (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): social identification affects how people appraise the potential threat of intergroup contact to them (Haslam et al., 2005; McNamara et al., 2021; Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021). Intergroup contact can be perceived as potentially threatening because of, for example, the possibility of being negatively evaluated by both in- and outgroup members (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1996). Neighbourhood communities can decrease this threat by recategorising former outgroup members as members of the same superordinate category (Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald, & Lamoreaux, 2010) thereby facilitating contact (Lemay & Ryan, 2021). In other words, residents’ identification with their neighbourhood reconceptualises potential intergroup threats as opportunities for engagement with ethnic outgroup members considered to belong to the same community (Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019; Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021).

Neighbourhood identification also facilitates contact *indirectly* through perceived social support from neighbourhood community members (Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021). This impacts on the ‘secondary appraisal’ of threats (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): when faced with a threat, individuals assess whether they have the necessary resources to cope with it (Haslam et al., 2005). If individuals feel that they can rely on their group members for social support, it allows them to feel capable of coping with the threat, thereby reducing related anxiety

(Haslam et al., 2005; McNamara et al., 2021). Neighbourhood identification increases perception of support from other residents living in the same neighbourhood, which can reduce intergroup anxiety and increase 'collective confidence in contact' thus facilitating actual intergroup contact between residents from different ethnic and religious groups (Stevenson et al., 2020; Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021).

In a similar vein, King, Baxter Magolda, and Massé (2011) have shown that within a college setting where students encounter intergroup difference, social support provides individuals with confidence to engage openly in intergroup encounters despite initial feelings of intergroup anxiety. The end goal of this process is 'intercultural maturity' whereby the students reframe difference more inclusively, thus enabling them to engage constructively with other groups. While there is no direct longitudinal evidence of the effect of social support on intergroup behaviour, previous longitudinal research has demonstrated that neighbourhood identification increases perception of social support from neighbourhood community members which then increases prosocial behaviour towards others (Stevenson, Wakefield, Felsner, Drury, & Costa, 2021).

In addition, it is also possible that there are factors that modify the association between neighbourhood identification and contact between different resident groups. Previous qualitative research suggests that the outcomes of community identification are likely related to the degree to which residents consider their neighbourhood community to be characterised by diversity (Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019; Stevenson & Sagherian-Dickey, 2016). This is particularly important given the wide range of evidence indicating that simple copresence rarely translates into actual intergroup contact (Bettencourt, Dixon, & Castro, 2019; Paajanen et al., 2023). Moreover, according to the Social Identity Model of Residential Diversification (SIMRD) (Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019), perceived diversification has an important role in intergroup dynamics: if the identity of the neighbourhood is perceived to be based on diversity this should lead to more harmonious relations (Laurence, 2014; Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019).

However, this line of research has not yet quantitatively tested how perceptions of the diversity of the neighbourhood community impact on social cure processes in neighbourhoods. A different line of research concerning identity content has strongly established that it is important to consider both the strength of identification and how the group is defined and conceptualised when examining the effects of social identification (Finell, Olakivi, Liebkind, & Lipsanen, 2013; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008). For example, the relationship between national identification and attitudes towards immigrants depends on how the nation is portrayed (Finell & Zogmaister, 2015). In general, identities that are perceived as more inclusive are found to be more beneficial for intergroup relations than more exclusive identities (Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009; Visintin, Green, & Sarrasin, 2018). Following this rationale, the present study examines the impact of diversity as an inclusive neighbourhood identity content on intergroup contact focusing on a specific group, neighbourhood mothers.

### 1.3 | Neighbourhood mothers as a subgroup in neighbourhoods

Becoming a mother is a remarkable change for a woman. It is often experienced both as a positive transition with many rewarding experiences and as a demanding life phase that requires effort and involves stress (Musick, Meier, & Flood, 2016). In particular, motherhood often reduces one's pre-existing social relations (Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2013) which can lead to a loss of social support and thus negatively impact one's mental health (Seymour-Smith, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021).

In multiethnic neighbourhoods, motherhood offers an important way for residents to network within their neighbourhood community, as mothers often meet other mothers and share similar interests (Seppälä, Riikonen, Paajanen, Stevenson, & Finell, 2022). While local family venues offer important opportunities for and are used by mothers to interact with fellow ingroup mothers (Seppälä et al., 2022), prior research shows that these opportunities are not utilised when it comes to intergroup contact. For example, immigrant mothers' contacts with the majority are often fleeting and superficial and involve intergroup anxiety (Paajanen, Seppälä, Stevenson, & Finell, 2022), and

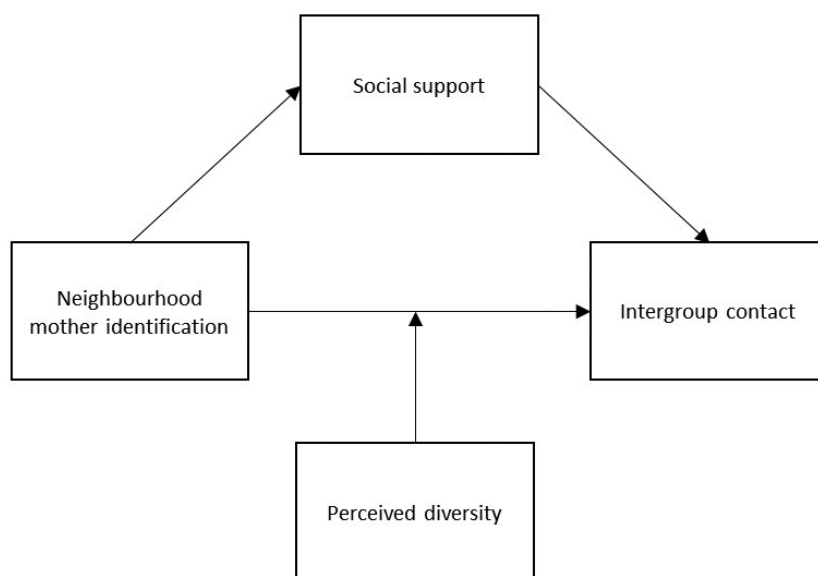
ethnic majority mothers and minority mothers rarely have contact with each other even if they spend time at the same place in the neighbourhood instead opting to seek the company of ethnic ingroup mothers (Paajanen et al., 2023; Wilson, 2013).

Nevertheless, previous qualitative research suggests that a shared identity as mothers can facilitate contact between mothers. For example, the experience of sharing a mother identity enabled mothers to form intimate friendships with other local mothers (Seppälä et al., 2022), and being in the same place was depicted as naturally resulting in intergroup contact when motherhood was constructed as a bond between majority and immigrant mothers (Riikonen, Finell, Suoninen, Paajanen, & Stevenson, 2023). This means that neighbourhood mother identity can constitute a superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) for mothers with different ethnic backgrounds. If mothers see themselves as part of this same superordinate group (i.e., neighbourhood mothers) instead of as two entirely distinct groups (i.e., majority and minority) this should increase their motivation to engage in intergroup contact with members of the other subgroup (Dovidio et al., 2007; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Lemay & Ryan, 2021). This is also important because previous research shows that direct and imagined contact with an outgroup member, who belongs to the same superordinate category, enhances intergroup relations more than contact with an outgroup member who does not belong to the same category (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989; Vezzali et al., 2015). However, no research has yet investigated whether social cure processes underpin the relationship between neighbourhood mother identification and intergroup contact between majority and minority mothers and how perceived diversity modifies these associations.

## 2 | OUR RESEARCH

This article reports two multigroup models examining the relationship between identification with other mothers living in the same neighbourhood and intergroup contact between Finnish majority and immigrant mothers in Helsinki, Finland. We collected data from both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers, to examine contact from both parties' points of view. We tested three hypotheses using multigroup analyses. First, we expected that the more mothers identified with the superordinate category of neighbourhood mothers, the more often they would have positive intergroup contact with ethnic outgroup mothers (see Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021) (H1). Second, we expected perceived social support to partially account for this effect so that stronger identification would increase the perception that one could receive social support from other neighbourhood mothers, which in turn would increase intergroup contact (see Haslam et al., 2018; Stevenson et al., 2020; Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021) (H2). Third, we hypothesised a conditional direct effect of identification on intergroup contact. Specifically, we expected perceived neighbourhood diversity to moderate the relationship between identification and contact so that a higher perceived proportion of outgroup mothers in the neighbourhood mother community would increase the association between identification and intergroup contact (see Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019) (H3).<sup>1</sup> While we expected all these effects to occur for both Finnish majority and immigrant respondents following SIMRD (Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019), all hypotheses were tested using a multigroup approach to increase knowledge of whether social cure processes apply equally to both majority and minority groups. This is important because any differences could have significant effects, for example, on the success of interventions targeted to both groups in neighbourhoods. Figure 1 outlines our conceptual model.

While we were mainly interested in examining the associations as outlined above due to our interest in the previously unstudied effect of diverse identity content on social cure processes in neighbourhoods, it is likely that these processes are bidirectional creating a virtuous cycle. Although social identification is traditionally thought to be a result of a self-categorisation process in the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), intergroup contact can change contact participants' views of group boundaries resulting in perceiving oneself as part of an inclusive superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Pettigrew, 1998).



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual model (moderated direct effect model).

Furthermore, contact can relate to perception of social support (Seppälä et al., 2023) and an increased perception of support can then intensify social identification (Häusser et al., 2023). Therefore, we also tested the reverse process.

Finland is a country with relatively low levels of immigration. At present, 8% of the Finnish population (5.5 million) has a foreign background. Half of people with foreign backgrounds live in the Helsinki metropolitan area, where every fourth under school-aged child has a foreign background (Official Statistics of Finland, 2021b). Although socio-spatial segregation has been moderate in Helsinki, socioeconomic and ethnic differences between neighbourhoods have increased in the past few decades (Bernelius & Vilkkama, 2019), with the Finnish majority's intraregional migration being the main driver of ethnic segregation (Kauppinen & van Ham, 2019).

## 3 | METHOD

### 3.1 | Participants and procedure

The sample included 733 mothers (age:  $M = 33.42$  years,  $SD = 5.50$ ): 436 Finnish majority mothers and 297 mothers with an immigrant background. All mothers had at least one child aged 7 years or less. We recruited the participants from two maternal and child healthcare centres in Helsinki in January and February 2021, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. These centres were in multiethnic neighbourhoods where the proportion of children aged 6 years or less whose first language is not Finnish is higher than the average (22%) for Helsinki (City of Helsinki, 2021). At the time of the data collection, there were no strict COVID-19 related restrictions regarding contact; the main preventive measure in place was the recommendation that people should maintain a distance of two metres, or if that was not possible, they should wear a mask (Skogberg et al., 2021). Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland, we ran a pilot study. The results of this pilot study are reported in Online Appendix A.

We collected our unique data from public maternal and child healthcare centres because they are estimated to reach over 99.7% of mothers who have given birth (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022b) and 99.6% of

children under school age in Finland (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022a). The data were collected by two researchers who spoke Finnish, English and Swedish, and by two research assistants who additionally spoke either Russian or Somali. When visiting the clinic, the volunteer participants were invited to respond to a paper-and-pencil survey. Alternatively, they had the option to respond to the survey at home and then post it in a pre-paid envelope, or to complete it online. It was possible to respond to the survey in six languages: Finnish, English, Swedish, Russian, Somali and Arabic. These represent Finland's two official languages (Ministry of Justice Finland, n.d.) and its four big foreign-language groups (Official Statistics of Finland, 2021a). Our procedure allowed us to also reach mothers who would not normally participate in surveys due to, for example, language difficulties. We also recruited some immigrant mothers via snowballing and through nongovernmental organisations working with immigrant women. The Tampere Region Ethics Committee gave our research a positive ethical review. This study is part of MAMANET research project that studies mothers' intra- and intergroup relations in Helsinki, Finland.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2 | Measures

We measured *neighbourhood mother identification* with three items (see also Seppälä et al., 2023). We adapted two items from Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995), for example, 'I identify with the community of mothers living in this residential area'. Doosje et al.'s (1995) original measure's two other items were not suitable for our study, and we therefore adapted the third item from Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998): 'Being a member of the community of mothers living in this residential area is an important part of how I see myself'. The three items were measured on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), and they had a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .93).

We measured perceived *social support* from other mothers in the neighbourhood with one item adapted from Haslam et al. (2018): 'Do you get the emotional support, help and advice you need from other mothers in your residential area?' (1 = not at all, 7 = definitely) (see also Seppälä et al., 2023). There is increasing evidence of the appropriateness of using single items (Allen, Iliescu, & Greiff, 2022).

We measured *intergroup contact* with two items adapted from Voci and Hewstone (2003). We measured *intergroup contact frequency* with: 'How frequently do you have contact with (outgroup mothers) living in your residential area?' (1 = never, 7 = every day), and *intergroup contact valence* with: 'When you meet (outgroup) mothers living in your residential area, in general do you find the contact...?' (1 = unpleasant, 7 = pleasant). Finnish majority respondents were asked about their contact with mothers with immigrant backgrounds, whereas immigrant respondents about their contact with native Finnish mothers. The items were significantly and positively correlated ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ). We recoded *contact frequency* to range from 0 (never) to 6 (every day) and *contact valence* from -3 (unpleasant) to 3 (pleasant). In line with the original usage of this measure, the recoded items were then multiplied to form a single index of positive and frequent *intergroup contact* (-18 = unpleasant contact every day, 18 = pleasant contact every day) in which neutral contact and no contact were both equivalent to zero. This commonly used procedure in contact research enabled us to simultaneously examine both aspects (Prati, Moscatelli, Pratto, & Rubini, 2018; Seppälä et al., 2023; Voci & Hewstone, 2003) as mere contact quantity or quality alone is typically not enough to improve intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). However, to provide more information about the respective variation of these two aspects of contact, additional analyses with contact frequency and quality as covarying outcomes are reported in Online Appendix B.

We measured *perceived diversity* with one item adapted from Schmid et al. (2014): 'When you think about the community of mothers living in your residential area, what proportion of mothers in that community are (outgroup mothers)?' (1 = none or very few, 5 = almost all or all). Finnish majority respondents were asked about the proportion of mothers with immigrant backgrounds in the neighbourhood mother community, whereas immigrant respondents were asked about the proportion of native Finnish mothers. While we refer to this measure as 'perceived diversity', it is important to note that for Finnish majority respondents, higher scores reflected higher numbers of

immigrant mothers in the neighbourhood mother community, whereas for immigrant respondents, higher scores reflected higher numbers of Finnish majority mothers.

### 3.3 | Analytical strategy

We used Mplus statistical software version 8.7 to test our models (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We used a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation with a bootstrapping approach to test direct and indirect effects (Shrout & Bolger, 2002), with missing data ranging from 8% to 27%, depending on the variable. First, we tested our multigroup mediation model. As suggested by Muthén, Muthén, and Asparouhov (2017), we began the multigroup analysis by comparing an unconstrained model (where all parameters were allowed to differ between groups) and a constrained model (where all parameters were constrained as equal) with a chi-square difference test and inspected modification indices to improve the model fit by freeing parameter restrictions. Then, we incorporated perceived diversity into the model as a moderator of the direct effect again comparing the unconstrained and constrained models. All predictor variables were grand mean centred before the analysis. Interactions were probed at one SD below the mean and one SD above the mean levels of the moderator. We used the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) as the models' fit indicators. SRMR <0.08, CFI >0.95 and RMSEA <0.06 signalled a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Age was controlled for in the analysis. We report standardised and unstandardised estimates.

## 4 | RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The mean frequency of intergroup contact corresponded to meeting outgroup mothers in the neighbourhood once a month or less for both groups (Finnish respondents:  $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ; immigrant respondents:  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ). Compared with immigrant respondents, Finnish majority respondents had less intergroup contact ( $F[1, 672] = 5.11$ ,  $p = .024$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ) and their mean level of intergroup contact quality was higher (Finnish respondents:  $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ; immigrant respondents:  $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ;  $F[1, 444] = 13.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ).

**TABLE 1** Descriptive and correlational analyses among Finnish majority and immigrant mothers.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
<i>Finnish majority mothers (N = 436)</i>					
1. Neighbourhood mother identification	2.72	1.75	-	-	-
2. Social support	4.09	2.24	0.622***	-	-
3. Intergroup contact (index)	2.72	4.12	0.287***	0.272***	-
4. Perceived diversity	2.68	1.15	-0.288***	-0.231***	0.006
<i>Immigrant mothers (N = 297)</i>					
1. Neighbourhood mother identification	2.86	1.89	-	-	-
2. Social support	3.44	2.45	0.425***	-	-
3. Intergroup contact (index)	2.92	5.15	0.368***	0.324***	-
4. Perceived diversity	3.56	1.35	0.094	-0.016	0.190**

Note:  $N = 733$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .\*\*\* $p < .001$ .



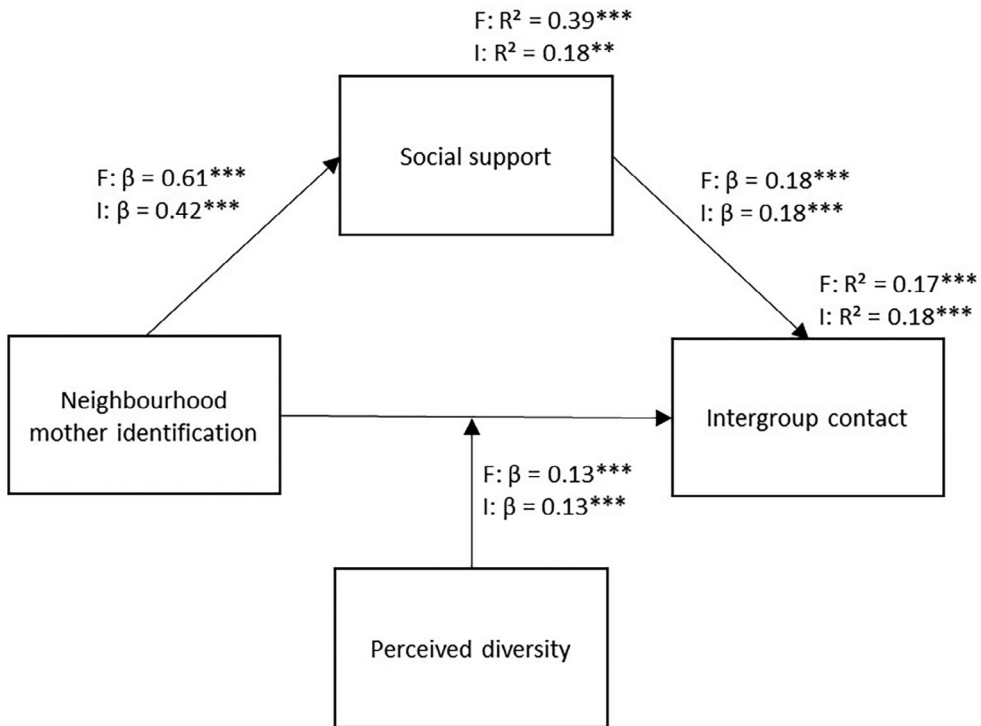
The level of neighbourhood mother identification did not differ between groups ( $F[1, 608] = 0.84, p = .360, \eta^2 = .00$ ), nor did the intergroup contact index ( $F[1, 635] = 0.29, p = .588, \eta^2 = .00$ ). Compared with immigrant respondents, Finnish majority respondents reported that they perceived more social support from other neighbourhood mothers ( $F[1, 626] = 11.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ ) and considered their neighbourhood mother community to consist of fewer outgroup mothers ( $F[1, 537] = 65.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ ). For Finnish majority respondents, all correlations were significant and positive except the correlation between perceived diversity and intergroup contact. For immigrant respondents, perceived diversity did not significantly correlate with identification and social support, but all other correlations were significant and positive. Three correlation coefficients differed significantly between the groups: identification and social support ( $F[1] = 6.23, p = .013, \eta^2 = .01$ ), identification and perceived diversity ( $F[1] = 17.29, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ ) and social support and perceived diversity ( $F[1] = 5.46, p = .020, \eta^2 = .01$ ).

First, we analysed the multigroup mediation model. Due to limitations of space, we report only the main findings here; detailed analyses and results are reported in Online Appendix C. The results of the final model supported H1 and H2 for both groups: neighbourhood mother identification was positively associated with intergroup contact both directly (Finnish respondents:  $b = 0.37, SE = 0.16, p = .019, \beta = .16$ ; immigrant respondents:  $b = 0.78, SE = 0.21, p < .001, \beta = .29$ ) and indirectly through perceived social support (Finnish respondents:  $b = 0.27, SE = 0.08, p = .001, 95\% CI [0.108-0.427], \beta = .12$ ; immigrant respondents:  $b = 0.18, SE = 0.06, p = .004, 95\% CI [0.059-0.309], \beta = .07$ ). Identification was positively and significantly associated with perceived social support (Finnish respondents:  $b = 0.79, SE = 0.05, p < .001, \beta = .62$ ; immigrant respondents:  $b = 0.55, SE = 0.09, p < .001, \beta = .42$ ), which in turn was positively and significantly associated with contact (Finnish respondents:  $b = 0.34, SE = 0.10, p = .001, \beta = .18$ ; immigrant respondents:  $b = 0.34, SE = 0.10, p = .001, \beta = .16$ ). While all paths were positive and significant for both groups, the association between identification and social support was stronger for Finnish majority respondents than for immigrant respondents (see Online Appendix C).

Next, we incorporated perceived diversity as a moderator of the direct effect (Figure 2). First, we compared an unconstrained model ( $\chi^2[4] = 5.801, p = .215, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.02$ ) with a model with equality constraints ( $\chi^2[11] = 19.898, p = .047, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04$ ). The models were significantly different ( $\chi^2[7] = 14.097, p = .049$ ). Next, we freed parameter restrictions until the modification indices suggested no additional changes. The final refitted model (where the path from identification to social support was unconstrained) was significantly different from the constrained model ( $\chi^2[2] = 11.006, p = .004$ ) and its fit was good ( $\chi^2[9] = 8.892, p = .447, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, SRMR = 0.02$ ).

The results of our final model are presented in Table 2. After the moderator of the direct effect was added to the model, the indirect effect of identification on contact through perceived social support remained positive and significant for both groups. This gave support to H2. The association between identification and social support was again stronger for Finnish majority respondents than for immigrant respondents according to the Wald test ( $W[1] = 6.658, p = .010$ ). Significant differences occurred also in the indirect ( $W[1] = 4.331, p = .037$ ) and total effects ( $W[1] = 4.333, p = .037$ ). The total effect of the model was positive and significant for both groups.

In support of H3, the association between the interaction term (neighbourhood mother identification  $\times$  perceived diversity) and contact was significant for both groups. So, perceived diversity moderated the direct effect of identification on contact (Table 2). The moderation effect did not differ between the groups via the Wald test ( $W[1] = 0.209, p = .647$ ). Simple slope analyses showed that immigrant respondents who identified with a neighbourhood mother community and perceived it as consisting of many Finnish majority mothers had more frequent positive contact with Finnish majority mothers in the neighbourhood ( $b = 1.06, SE = 0.23, p < .001$ ) than did those who identified with a neighbourhood mother community and perceived it as consisting of some Finnish majority mothers ( $b = 0.73, SE = 0.16, p < .001$ ) or as mainly consisting of immigrant mothers ( $b = 0.40, SE = 0.14, p = .003$ ). For Finnish majority respondents, neighbourhood mother identification was associated with higher frequency of positive contact with immigrant mothers when the neighbourhood mother community was perceived to include many immigrant mothers ( $b = 0.80, SE = 0.17, p < .001$ ) or some immigrant mothers



**FIGURE 2** Multigroup direct effect moderation model.  $N = 733$ . Standardised coefficients reported separately for Finnish majority ( $F, N = 436$ ) and immigrant respondents ( $I, N = 297$ ).  $**p \leq .01$ .  $***p \leq .001$ .

( $b = 0.52, SE = 0.14, p < .001$ ), but not when the community was considered as mainly consisting of Finnish mothers ( $b = 0.24, SE = 0.15, p = .118$ ). The simple slopes significantly differed between the groups via the Wald test ( $W[1] = 11.311, p = .001$ ). See Figure 3.

We also tested two alternative models in which we examined reversed associations between our model variables. According to the reversed mediation model, intergroup contact was positively and significantly associated with neighbourhood mother identification both directly and indirectly through social support for both respondent groups. In the reversed direct effect moderation model the indirect association between contact and identification via social support remained significant for both groups, but there was no significant moderation effect of perceived diversity on the association between contact and identification. See Online Appendix B for detailed analyses of the reversed models.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Our aim was to analyse how and when identification with one's own neighbourhood mother community was related to contact with ethnic outgroup mothers living in the same neighbourhood. We focused on both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers. First, we showed that neighbourhood mother identification was associated with more frequent positive intergroup contact, both directly and indirectly via perceived social support from neighbourhood mothers, for both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers. Second, we showed that the perceived proportion of outgroup mothers in the neighbourhood mother community moderated the direct association between identification and contact for both groups. The association was stronger the more diverse the community was perceived to be.

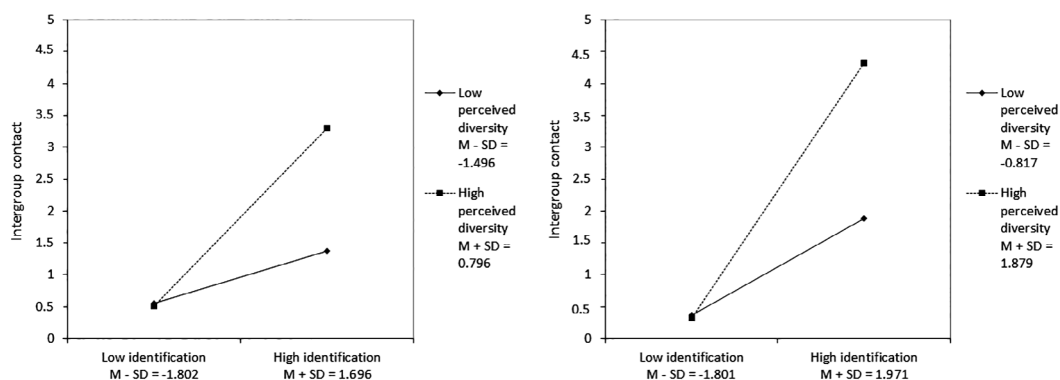
**TABLE 2** Multigroup moderated direct effect model.

	Finnish majority respondents (N = 436)				Immigrant respondents (N = 297)			
	B	SE	95% CI	$\beta$	b	SE	95% CI	$\beta$
Total effect	0.87***	0.12	[0.645, 1.103]	0.35***	0.79***	0.12	[0.547, 1.032]	0.31***
Indirect effect	0.27***	0.08	[0.108, 0.434]	0.11***	0.19**	0.07	[0.058, 0.314]	0.07**
Direct effects								
Neighbourhood mother identification → intergroup contact	0.60***	0.14	[0.325, 0.881]	0.24***	0.60***	0.14	[0.325, 0.881]	0.24***
Perceived diversity → intergroup contact	0.43***	0.13	[0.164, 0.685]	0.12***	0.43***	0.13	[0.164, 0.685]	0.12***
Neighbourhood mother identification X perceived diversity → intergroup contact	0.24***	0.07	[0.098, 0.390]	0.13***	0.24***	0.07	[0.098, 0.390]	0.13***
Neighbourhood mother identification → social support	0.79***	0.05	[0.706, 0.882]	0.61***	0.55***	0.10	[0.359, 0.733]	0.42***
Social support → intergroup contact	0.34***	0.10	[0.143, 0.539]	0.18***	0.34***	0.10	[0.143, 0.539]	0.18***

Note: N = 733.

\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

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



**FIGURE 3** Moderation effect of perceived diversity based on unstandardised estimates. Panel on the left: moderation effect of perceived diversity among Finnish majority respondents (N = 436). Panel on the right: moderation effect of perceived diversity among immigrant respondents (N = 297). Higher values indicate more frequent positive contact. M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

These findings help us to understand social cure models of residential diversification in many ways. First, our results show that just as identification with the whole neighbourhood community facilitates intergroup contact in neighbourhoods (Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021), identification with specific neighbourhood subgroups can facilitate intergroup contact as well. Common ingroup identification is directly associated with a higher frequency of positive contact, presumably through a shared sense of identification with outgroup members

(Stevenson, Easterbrook, et al., 2019). It is simultaneously also associated with higher perceived social support from the common ingroup of neighbourhood community, which in turn is associated with higher levels of intergroup contact within the community (Stevenson et al., 2020). This time, however, the group was not the neighbourhood per se but neighbourhood mothers, building on previous insights into how and why motherhood can facilitate contact within local communities (Paajanen et al., 2022, 2023; Riikonen et al., 2023; Seppälä et al., 2022).

Second, using multigroup analyses, our research reveals that these social cure processes facilitate contact for both majority and minority group members. Previous research has called for an examination of the bilateral identity processes that underlie residential mixing between majority and minority groups (Stevenson, McNamara, et al., 2019), but to the best of our knowledge, this has not been tested before. Moreover, although the models worked similarly for both Finnish majority and immigrant mothers, the association between neighbourhood mother identification and social support was consistently stronger for the former group. It is possible that strongly identifying majority group members have more trust in their neighbours' willingness to support them, whereas strongly identifying minority group members may not have the same level of certainty of their access to local resources. In addition, the direct effect of identification on contact was not significant for Finnish majority mothers at low levels of perceived diversity. This suggests that for these mothers the content of the neighbourhood mother identity needs to be at least somewhat diverse for identification to be directly associated with intergroup contact. In lack of such diversity, the role of the secondary appraisal process via social support from the ingroup (Haslam et al., 2005) becomes more important in enabling intergroup encounters.

Third, our research provides insights into how the perceived diversity of the neighbourhood community impacts on social cure processes. Where the common ingroup was perceived to be more ethnically diverse, the direct path between common ingroup identification and actual contact between its ethnic subgroups was stronger, suggesting that a more inclusive understanding of the common ingroup better supports contact. This finding fits with previous research showing that the existing diverse character of a community shapes the subsequent impact of diversification (Laurence, 2014). In addition, our research provides evidence that an inclusive identity content is associated with more positive intergroup relations also in the neighbourhood context (for other contexts, see for example Visintin et al., 2018).

Interestingly, our findings suggest that community identification may have positive effects on intergroup contact within a community even when that community is not defined by diversity. When tested further, perceived diversity did not moderate the association between identification and support; thus it would appear that, regardless of the perceived diversity of the neighbourhood, social support from members of the superordinate category of neighbourhood mothers still facilitates intergroup contact between the category's subgroup members (see Online Appendix B). Moreover, as noted above, the direct effect of identification on contact was still evident at low levels of the moderator for immigrant mothers, indicating that perceived diversity is not essential for common ingroup identification to be associated with higher levels of contact between its subgroups. Of course, we would expect neighbourhood mother identification to be associated with positive interactions between ethnic ingroup mothers, but to find that it is associated with positive intergroup contact between mothers is further evidence suggesting that social cure processes can be harnessed to overcome potentially negative intergroup dynamics.

There were some interesting additional findings regarding the correlations between the studied variables. For Finnish majority mothers only, the perceived diversity of the neighbourhood mother community was negatively associated with identification and perceived social support. This suggests that for majority group members, perception of increased diversity in residential areas may be linked to a decreased solidarity and sense of community and cohesion, thus providing some support for Putnam's (2007) claim. It may also provide some insight into why some majority Finns are moving out of more ethnically diverse areas of Helsinki, thereby reproducing ethnic segregation (Kauppinen & van Ham, 2019). It is also possible that perceptions of change in diversity over time impact residents' identification and prosocial behaviour, especially majority group members', for whom the change typically involves a more homogeneous neighbourhood becoming a more heterogeneous one. However, the longer-term consequences

of these apparently countervailing effects of ethnic diversification on neighbourhoods and the effect of change in diversity perceptions remain to be determined.

Finally, our research contributes to the broader understanding of residential diversification and integration. Our findings suggest that to effectively support intergroup contact and integration in diverse neighbourhoods, it is important to understand the processes whereby neighbourhood identities are associated with contact within the community. Recent research has demonstrated the possibility to increase neighbourhood identification by interventions that enhance perceived similarity (Cruwys, Fong, Evans, Batterham, & Calear, 2022). Our findings suggest that such interventions should also take account of the neighbourhood identity content to ensure that the interventions lead to the desired result. According to our findings, interventions that both heighten identification and promote a diverse view of the neighbourhood group are most likely to lead to more frequent and positive intergroup contact.

From a practical perspective, our findings also suggest that integration initiatives could strategically target specific subgroups within neighbourhoods to effectively support integration. Focusing on mothers, for example, might be particularly beneficial, because mothers have many encounters with other residents, pre-existing family ties and often an increased interest in the area (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2019). Furthermore, as mothers' attitudes have an effect on their children's attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013), such initiatives might also affect the next generation. Our study suggests that mothers' contacts with outgroup mothers in their neighbourhood—which previous research has found to be rare and fleeting (Paajanen et al., 2022, 2023)—could be supported through initiatives that focus on constructing an inclusive identity around neighbourhood motherhood.

Of course, our study is not without limitations. First, our research was conducted in Finland, a country with relatively little immigration. Thus, although our results are in line with other studies on social cure processes in neighbourhoods, they need to be replicated in other contexts. Second, we collected our data during the COVID-19 pandemic. This begs the question of our findings' generalisability insofar as the pandemic limited people's contact. However, we collected a pilot study before the pandemic (reported in Online Appendix A), and its results are very similar to the findings reported here although we could not estimate multigroup models due to a small sample size. Nevertheless, these analyses provide evidence that mothers' contact frequency with outgroup mothers in their residential area had not changed due to COVID-19. Mothers with small children tend to spend a lot of time close to home in any case (Witten et al., 2009), and although the pandemic may have decreased some mothers' contact, it may also have increased the neighbourhood's importance for some mothers as a key site for social contact.

Finally, our study's cross-sectional design prevents us from making firm conclusions about causal relationships between the study variables. Our model was theoretically derived from previous work on residential contact based on the social cure approach, according to which identification provides individuals with the necessary resources and confidence to engage in intergroup contact (Stevenson, Turner, & Costa, 2021). However, it could also be argued that in community groups, such as majority mothers in neighbourhoods, repeated contact with group members forms the basis from which identification develops (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Seppälä et al., 2023). While this may be the case for many community groups, merely spending time in the same place rarely leads to intergroup contact between Finnish majority and immigrant mothers as mothers tend to seek the company of ethnic ingroup mothers (Paajanen et al., 2023). Therefore, we approached the case of intergroup contact between mothers from the point of view that identification with the superordinate group of neighbourhood mothers is necessary to facilitate contact between its subgroup members. However, as our additional analyses showed, the reverse process is also plausible: positive and frequent intergroup contact may increase perception of social support which then intensifies identification (see Online Appendix B). However, we note that within this model there is no moderation effect of perceived diversity which suggests that diversity functions specifically as identity content. Thus, further studies using experimental or longitudinal designs are needed to verify the effects' directions and whether they are bidirectional, as is probably the case. Future studies could also benefit from using additional measures, such as contact intentions and outgroup attitudes, to capture attitudinal shifts related to identification as well as different measures related to residents' social contacts in their neighbourhood to better dissociate overall sociability from intergroup contact.

Despite these shortcomings, our research provides novel insights. It proposes that both the strength of identification and the way the group is defined in terms of diversity should be considered if we wish to understand how to support intergroup contact in neighbourhoods. It also demonstrates the potential of specific neighbourhood subgroups in improving intergroup relations in neighbourhoods. Future research is needed to see whether these processes also apply to other neighbourhood subgroups with different particularities.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The Tampere region Ethics Committee in Finland gave our research a positive ethical review.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We did not expect perceived diversity to moderate the relationship between identification and perceived social support because the support was measured on a common ingroup level and thus the measured support was about support from the common ingroup regardless of the source.
- <sup>2</sup> The study was not pre-registered. While the questionnaire's measures were mainly derived from the contact theory and the social cure tradition, there were also more exploratory measures as very little is known about immigrant mothers' contacts in their neighbourhoods. The questionnaire included questions about different types of identification, places and types of contact and children's intergroup contacts (see Online Appendix D for the questionnaires in Finnish and English). The data will be archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive upon completion of the MAMANET project.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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