

Ethnic In-Group Favoritism Among Minority and Majority Groups: Testing the Self-Esteem Hypothesis Among Preadolescents

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The self-esteem hypothesis in intergroup relations, as proposed by social identity theory (SIT), states that successful intergroup discrimination enhances momentary collective self-esteem. This hypothesis is a source of continuing controversy. Furthermore, although SIT is increasingly used to account for children's group attitudes, few studies have examined the hypothesis among children. In addition, the hypothesis's generality makes it important to study among children from different ethnic groups. The present study, conducted among Dutch and Turkish preadolescents, examined momentary collective self-feelings as a consequence of ethnic group evaluations. The results tended to support the self-esteem hypothesis. In-group favoritism was found to have a self-enhancing effect among participants high in ethnic identification. This result was found for ethnic majority (Dutch) and minority (Turkish) participants.

In-group favoritism about ethnicity is commonly found among children. In general, children have a more positive attitude toward their ethnic in-group as compared to out-groups (for reviews, see Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995; Nesdale, 2001). There are different approaches accounting for the development of children's intergroup attitudes and behavior. Apart from the social developmental context influencing children's reactions (e.g., Kiesner, Maass, Cadinu, & Vallese, 2003; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Weigl, 1995), research has emphasized and investigated cognitive and motivational factors to explain the development of children's intergroup attitudes and behavior. From a cognitive developmental perspective, the focus is on cognitive changes during childhood that influence changes in prejudice (Aboud, 1988, 2003; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). Particularly, cognitive developmentalists claim that the decrease in prejudice after kindergarten is related to increased ability to make within-group distinctions and focus attention on individual rather than group characteristics.

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From a motivational perspective, the interest is in desires and needs that account for ethnic in-group favoritism. The dominant theory here is social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to this theory, social groups influence intergroup relations because people strive to maintain or enhance a positive social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). The emphasis in the theory is on collective self-esteem as an outcome of positive group differentiation (see Long & Spears, 1997; Turner, 1999).

Establishing a favorable distinctiveness of one's group vis-à-vis other groups would function to achieve a positive group identity. Although an increasing number of studies have emphasized and examined the relevance of SIT for understanding intergroup relations among children (for a review, see Bennett & Sani, 2004), very few of these studies have directly assessed SIT's self-esteem hypothesis. Existing studies have focused on adults and adolescents (e.g., Hunter, Platow, Howard, & Stringer, 1996; Hunter, Stringer, & Coleman, 1993). In his review, Nesdale (2001) concluded that "Few, if any, studies with children have directly assessed SIT's fundamental assumption that individuals identify with particular groups in order to achieve, maintain, or enhance positive self-esteem" (p. 70).

An exception is a study by Verkuyten (2001) among Dutch preadolescents. He found an increase in momentary self-feelings as a result of favorable national intergroup comparison. This study focused on national groups and was concerned only with national majority group children. SIT, however, proposes a general mechanism for in-group favoritism. Hence, it is important to also examine the process in the context of ethnic group relations and among both ethnic majority and minority group children. Such an examination can show whether self-esteem considerations are indeed important for children's intergroup attitudes.

The present study examines the self-esteem hypothesis among Dutch and Turkish preadolescents in The Netherlands. In order to do so, we elicited momentary collective self-feelings directly after children gave trait evaluations of Dutch and Turkish contemporaries. Following the self-esteem hypothesis, it is expected that positive intergroup differentiation or in-group favoritism will enhance momentary collective self-feelings. In examining this prediction, global self-esteem and ethnic identification are also considered.

Self-Esteem Hypothesis

Various studies have examined the effect of in-group favoritism on self-esteem (for reviews, see Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). The results, however, are equivocal. In general, only small positive effects have been found, and negative and zero associations also have

been reported. Hence, empirical evidence for the self-esteem hypothesis is far from conclusive.

Rubin and Hewstone (1998) identified a number of conceptual issues that help to explain the equivocal results. They argued that a distinction should be made between trait and state self-esteem, as well as between personal and collective self-esteem. The SIT self-esteem hypothesis is concerned with changes in collective state self-esteem. However, Rubin and Hewstone pointed out that most research has neglected to investigate whether in-group favoritism actually enhances state collective self-esteem. In order to show this, it is necessary to assess momentary feelings about the collective self directly after group evaluations are made.

In addition, according to SIT, individuals who identify strongly with their group are particularly motivated to evaluate their own group positively in comparison to other groups. For these individuals, group membership has important implications for the self-concept and, as such, for the striving for a positive self. SIT argues that to the extent that people identify with their group, they are motivated to establish in-group favoritism. Hence, in the present study, it is expected that for preadolescents with a high degree of in-group identification, in-group favoritism will enhance social identity momentarily and thus elevate collective self-feelings. For relatively low identifiers, no such effect is expected.

Our analysis focuses on evaluation of the in-group relative to the out-group. Various authors have pointed out, however, that there may be different processes that determine in-group and out-group aspects of intergroup differentiation among children (e.g., Aboud, 2003; Brewer, 1999; Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). In-group-oriented patterns of preference do not have to be accompanied by rejection of other groups. However, in-group and out-group difference scores correspond to the SIT idea of in-group favoritism and have the advantage that the effects of some response biases are taken into account, such as children's tendency to give positive responses.

To summarize, following SIT, it is expected that preadolescents will report more positive collective self-esteem after positively evaluating the in-group relative to the out-group. This is expected for participants scoring high in ethnic identification in particular. In examining these predictions, global self-esteem is taken into account also. Global self-esteem has been found to be related to in-group favoritism (see Aberson et al., 2000; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997) and probably is related strongly to collective self-feelings. This could mean that a possible relationship between in-group favoritism and momentary ethnic self-feelings is a result of global self-esteem as a third factor, rather than group evaluations as such. Controlling statistically for global self-esteem allows us to test whether in-group favoritism

indeed has a self-enhancing effect. In addition, it can be explored how this variable is related to group evaluations and collective self-feelings.

The study was conducted among Dutch and Turkish participants. Although not tested previously, the general nature of the self-esteem hypothesis leads to the assumption that there will be no ethnic group differences in the effect of in-group favoritism on ethnic self-feelings. Hence, we expect that both Dutch and Turkish participants will show enhanced collective self-feelings after making favorable in-group distinctions. However, SIT also argues that group status has an impact on group identification and inter-group differentiation.

There are clear indications that the Turks are among the groups that are evaluated most negatively by the Dutch. Studying preferences for contact among Dutch early adolescents, Verkuyten and Kinket (2000), for example, found that Turkish children were the least liked. Furthermore, Turkish children have been found to experience more ethnic victimization than other minority groups (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Under these conditions, Turkish children may stress their ethnic identification in order to counteract a negative social identity. However, their lower status also will prevent them from clearly differentiating their group in a positive sense from the majority group (Ellemers, Van Rijswijk, Roefs, & Simons, 1997; Hunter et al., 1993). Hence, compared to the Dutch, Turkish early adolescents probably will identify more strongly with their ethnic in-group, but also will show less in-group favoritism.

Method

Participants

In total, 113 preadolescents (53 girls, 60 boys) from three ethnically mixed primary schools participated in the present study. The children were between 10 and 12 years of age, and the mean age was 11.3 years ($SD = 0.89$). There were 66 participants of ethnic Dutch background, and the father and mother of 47 participants originated from Turkey. There were no significant differences between Dutch and Turkish participants with regard to gender. All of the Turkish participants were born in The Netherlands.

Design and Measures

The preadolescents completed a questionnaire under supervision during regular school hours. The research was introduced to the children as a study

on how children evaluate various aspects of life, including school, themselves, and others. Each questionnaire consists of three parts, and the order of the parts corresponded with the predicted pattern of influences.

The first part of the questionnaire contains questions on evaluations of school and the self. Here, Rosenberg's (1965) measure for global self-esteem was presented. We modified the scale by reformulating the items slightly for our age group and by expanding the 4-point format to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*No, certainly not*) to 5 (*Yes, certainly*). Principal components analysis with varimax rotation indicate that two items ("All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure" and "At times, I think I am no good at all") loaded on a separate factor. The remaining scores on eight items were summed, and the Cronbach's alpha was .79.

In the second part of the questionnaire, in-group and out-group evaluations were measured first. Participants were asked to indicate how many children of the in-group (Dutch or Turks) as well as the out-group (Turks or Dutch) were *friendly*, *honest*, *smart*, *nice*, and *quarrelsome* (reverse-scored). In trying to make the intergroup comparative context salient, both ethnic groups evaluated the out-group first and then the in-group. This is important because people have been found to undertake within-group comparisons, rather than between-group comparisons, if the in-group is defined without explicit reference to the out-group (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994). Each attribute was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*all*).

Directly after the group evaluations, participants were asked to indicate how they felt about their ethnic group membership "now, at this particular moment." Thus, in trying to assess their momentary collective self-feelings, participants were asked to focus on their current feelings about their ethnic group membership. The items were adapted from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) private collective self-esteem scale, which is the "group-level equivalent of global personal self-esteem" (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990, p. 62). The four items are "Do you feel good about being Turkish/Dutch?"; "Do you dislike being Turkish/Dutch?" (reverse-scored); "Are you happy about being Turkish/Dutch?"; and "Do you feel bad about being Turkish/Dutch?" (reverse-scored). Each question was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The four questions were summed, and Cronbach's alpha for the sample was .86.

In the last part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, length of stay in The Netherlands, and the ethnic background of their father and their mother. In addition, to measure ethnic group identification, the children were presented with the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. This pictorial scale uses seven Venn-like diagrams depicting increasingly overlapping circles representing the relationship between self and other. This is a valid and reliable single-item measure to assess the degree

to which a particular in-group is included in the self (Tropp & Wright, 2001). In addition, the pictorial nature of the scale makes it appropriate for measuring ethnic identification among different cultural groups and children (Li, 2002; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2002). Furthermore, this measure focuses more on the cognitive aspect of group identification (i.e., importance of the group), rather than the affective aspect (i.e., liking for the group), which would be very close to our dependent measure of momentary collective self-feelings. Hence, we focus on the more cognitive component of Tajfel's (1981) definition of group identification. Participants were asked to choose the pair of circles that best represents their sense of connection to their ethnic group. The choices were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*no overlap*) to 7 (*high overlap*). Higher scores indicate stronger ethnic group identification.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

For descriptive purposes, mean scores and the relationship between global self-esteem and ethnic identification were examined. The two measures were not significantly related ($r = -.02, p > .10$). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. For global self-esteem, the Turks had a significantly higher score than did Dutch participants, $t(102) = 2.81, p < .01$.

On the 7-point scale, the mean score for ethnic identification was 5.36 ($SD = 1.86$), indicating relatively strong group identification. The Turks

Table 1

Means for Different Measures for Total Sample and for Dutch and Turkish Participants

| | Total | | Dutch | | Turks | |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Global self-esteem | 3.60 | 0.67 | 3.41 | 0.64 | 3.79 | 0.71 |
| Ethnic identification | 5.36 | 1.86 | 5.14 | 1.82 | 5.62 | 1.89 |
| In-group evaluation | 3.61 | 0.63 | 3.71 | 0.66 | 3.49 | 0.57 |
| Out-group evaluation | 2.64 | 0.93 | 2.51 | 0.97 | 2.81 | 0.87 |
| In-group favoritism | 0.96 | 1.18 | 1.21 | 1.19 | 0.68 | 1.10 |

Note. Dutch, $N = 56$; Turkish, $N = 47$.

tended to identify more strongly with their ethnic group than did the Dutch (Table 1), but this difference was not significant, $t(102) = 1.54, p > .10$.

Group Evaluations

Principal components analysis with varimax rotation yields two factors for the trait evaluations. The first factor explained 31% of the variance, and the second factor explained 20%. On the first factor found, the evaluations of the Turks loaded above .65, and the load of these evaluations on the second factor was below .12. On the second factor, the trait evaluations of the Dutch loaded above .54, and these evaluations loaded below .18 on the first factor. Thus, participants differentiated between trait evaluations of Turkish and Dutch contemporaries. Summed scores for in-group and out-group evaluation were computed. Correlations on the summed scores reveal a low negative, but nonsignificant correlation ($r = -.11, p > .10$).

On the basis of a 5-point scale ranging from *low* to *high*, the mean score for in-group evaluation was higher than for out-group evaluation (see Table 1). Only the score for in-group evaluation differed significantly from the scale midpoint, $t(102) = 17.97, p < .001$. To examine differences in group evaluations between the Dutch and the Turkish participants, a repeated-measures MANOVA was conducted with the two group evaluations as a repeated-measures factor. The analysis yields a significant main effect for group evaluations, $F(1, 106) = 67.62, p < .001$. Participants evaluated their in-group more positively than the out-group (see Table 1), indicating in-group favoritism. However, this main effect is qualified by an interaction effect between group evaluation and ethnicity, $F(1, 106) = 5.15, p < .05$. As expected, the positive evaluation of the in-group relative to the out-group was stronger among the Dutch than among the Turks.

Following SIT's emphasis on intergroup differentiation, in-group favoritism scores were computed by subtracting the out-group evaluation scores from the in-group evaluation. Hence, a positive score indicates a relative evaluation in favor of the in-group, whereas a negative score indicates an evaluation in favor of the out-group.

Multiple regression analysis was performed in predicting in-group favoritism. Ethnic group was included as a dummy variable (Dutch = 0, Turks = 1), and ethnic identification and global self-esteem were continuous predictors. The three predictors together accounted for 10% of the variance in in-group favoritism, $F(3, 102) = 3.45, p < .05$. The effect for ethnic group was significant ($\beta = -.27$), $t = 2.66, p < .01$. The Dutch early adolescents showed higher in-group favoritism than did the Turks (see Table 1). However, the Turks also showed significant in-group favoritism, $t(46) = 4.23,$

$p < .001$. In addition, higher global self-esteem was related to more in-group favoritism ($\beta = .24$), $t = 2.37$, $p < .05$. Ethnic identification had no independent significant effect on in-group favoritism. There were no significant first-order interaction effects.

Predicting Collective Self-Feelings

On the basis of a 5-point scale, the mean score for momentary collective self-esteem was high ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.72$). Because the measure of ethnic identification was negatively skewed, a distinction between high and relatively low identification was made using a median split. Subsequently for testing the predictions, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed in predicting momentary collective self-esteem. This analysis allows us to examine changes in explained variance and, thus, whether in-group favoritism explains additional variance in collective self-esteem.

In the first step, ethnic group, global self-esteem, and ethnic identification were included as predictors. In the second step, in-group favoritism was entered. In the third step, the first-order interaction between ethnic identification and in-group favoritism was included in the regression equation. Centered scores were used for the continuous predictors, whereas the criterion measure was left uncentered (Aiken & West, 1991). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Momentary Collective Self-Esteem

| | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 |
|----------------------------|---------|----------|--------|
| Ethnic group (Turkish) | .19* | .29** | .29** |
| Global self-esteem | .34*** | .26** | .27** |
| Ethnic identification (EI) | .10 | .07 | .08 |
| In-group favoritism (IF) | — | .33*** | .48*** |
| EI \times IF | — | — | -.23* |
| R^2 | .21 | .32 | .35 |
| $R^2\Delta$ | .21 | .11 | .04 |
| F_{change} | 8.59*** | 14.66*** | 5.11* |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The full model accounted for 35% of the variance in collective self-feelings. In Step 1, there was a main effect for ethnic group and for global self-esteem. The Turks had higher momentary collective self-esteem than did the Dutch, and more positive global self-esteem was related to higher collective self-feelings. The entry of in-group favoritism in Step 2 accounted for an additional 10.5% of the variance in collective self-feelings. Independent of global self-esteem, stronger in-group favoritism was associated with higher momentary collective self-feelings. However, and as expected, this effect was qualified by a significant interaction effect between ethnic identification and in-group bias in Step 3. This interaction accounted for an additional 3.5% of the variance. Simple slope analysis shows a positive association between in-group favoritism and collective self-feelings for high identifiers ($\beta = .36$), $t = 3.61$, $p < .001$; but not for relatively low identifiers ($\beta = .04$), $t = 0.41$, $p > .10$.

The dependent measure of collective momentary self-feelings was negatively skewed. Therefore, an additional logistic regression analysis was performed. The score for collective self-feelings was dichotomized, using a median split. The two-way, factorial loglinear analysis with global self-esteem, ethnic identification, and in-group favoritism as factors yielded similar effects for global self-esteem ($B = 1.29$, $p < .001$), and for the interaction between ethnic identification and in-group bias ($B = 1.01$, $p < .05$).

Additional analyses were performed to examine whether the effects on collective self-feelings were similar for Dutch and Turkish preadolescents. None of the higher order interaction effects with ethnic group were significant ($ps > .05$). Hence, the effects for global self-esteem, in-group bias, and for the interaction between ethnic identification and in-group bias were similar for the Dutch and Turkish preadolescents.

Discussion

SIT proposes a motivational explanation for in-group favoritism; namely, the desire for a positive social identity. By making a distinction in favor of one's own group, a positive social identity, and thus positive collective self-esteem, is established. This motivational mechanism is plausible, but the empirical evidence for the self-esteem hypothesis is scarce and limited (see Aberson et al., 2000; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998) and, moreover, does not include children (however, see Verkuyten, 2001). In particular, it must be demonstrated that the act of making a favorable in-group comparison actually elevates momentary collective self-feelings. In addition, it is important to examine the generality of the self-esteem hypothesis by focusing on both ethnic majority- and minority-group children, as well as high and relatively low identifiers.

In agreement with the self-esteem hypothesis, the present findings show that in-group favoritism indeed had an enhancing effect on momentary collective self-feelings of preadolescents. A stronger distinction in favor of one's own group was associated with more positive collective self-feelings. This effect was moderated, however, by ethnic identification. It turns out that only preadolescents with a high score on ethnic identification showed self-enhancing effects.

This result is in agreement with many studies with adults that have found that group identification moderates group-level responses (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). However, it should be noted that group identification had no independent effect on in-group favoritism. This could be a result of the pictorial measure used, which tends to capture the more cognitive dimension of in-group ties (Cameron, 2004). This dimension may be less important for intergroup differentiation (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). In addition, other studies on adults (for a review, see Hinkle & Brown, 1990), as well as on children, have found that preference for one's group may be unrelated to group identification and even may antecede self-identification as a group member (e.g., Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Piaget & Weil, 1951). Bennett, Sani, Lyons, and Barrett (1998), for example, asked children who failed to identify themselves as members of their national group to make evaluative judgments about nationalities, including their own. National identification was not found to be a necessary precondition for in-group favoritism.

The results for momentary collective self-feelings were found after controlling statistically for global self-esteem. Global self-esteem clearly was related to momentary collective self-feelings, and had a positive association with in-group favoritism. Other studies among children also have found such a positive relationship (e.g., Bigler et al., 1997), and there are studies that have found no relationship (e.g., Kiesner et al., 2003; Verkuyten, 2001).

Hence, among children, there seems to be little evidence for the so-called second corollary of the SIT self-esteem hypothesis that argues that depressed self-esteem promotes intergroup differentiation (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). However, it should be noted that it is disputed whether the idea that self-esteem promotes in-group favoritism actually was endorsed by the original SIT (see Abrams & Hogg, 2001; Long & Spears, 1997; Turner, 1999). Furthermore, SIT focuses on the group, rather than on the personal level. Therefore, it could be argued that global personal self-esteem is at another level of abstraction than social self-esteem and does not sufficiently account for in-group favoritism (however, see Aberson et al., 2000). In addition, global self-esteem refers to general feelings of self-worth, and such global feelings have been found among adolescents to be a less powerful predictor of specific

ways of behaving than specific measures of self-esteem (e.g., Hunter et al., 1996).

An important characteristic of the present study is that it examined both majority- and minority-group preadolescents. The self-esteem hypothesis argues that making favorable in-group distinctions leads to enhanced momentary collective self-feelings. The general nature of this hypothesis implies that it should work for majority and minority groups. Hence, it was expected that both Dutch and Turkish participants would show enhanced collective self-feelings after making favorable in-group distinctions. The findings supported this expectation; there were no significant interaction effects with ethnic group. Thus, for both ethnic groups, in-group favoritism led to more positive collective self-feelings.

However, SIT also stresses that in-group favoritism is not inevitable, but is a function of, for example, group identification, normative beliefs about group differences, and sociostructural characteristics (Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1999). Status differences are considered particularly important, in combination with the impermeability and relative stability of ethnic boundaries. Under these conditions, minority group members can be expected to stress their ethnic identification. However, at the same time, their lower status prevents them from clearly differentiating their group positively from the majority group (Ellemers et al., 1997; Hunter et al., 1993).

The present results show that the Turks showed in-group favoritism, but to a significantly lesser degree than the Dutch. Further, the Turks had a tendency to identify more strongly with their ethnic group, but the difference with the Dutch was not significant. In addition, the Turks had higher global self-esteem, which is in agreement with numerous studies among different ethnic groups in various countries (for reviews, see Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Verkuyten, 1994).

In conclusion, the present study examined SIT's self-esteem hypothesis among preadolescents from an ethnic minority and an ethnic majority group. The central hypothesis stated that positive intergroup differentiation would enhance collective self-esteem. The results supported this idea for both groups of participants. Hence, making a distinction in favor of one's own ethnic group indeed seems to lead to a more positive momentary evaluation of one's ethnic group membership. However, this effect was restricted to children who strongly identified with their ethnic groups.

Future studies could examine whether these findings can be generalized to other ethnic and age groups, to other social settings, and to other group measures. For example, research has shown that in-group favoritism depends on the type of social judgment; such as perceptions, evaluations, and attributions (e.g., Jackson, Sullivan & Hodge, 1993; Nesdale & McLaughlin,

1987). In addition, Hogg and Abrams (1988) argued that evaluative group ratings, as used in the present study, may implicitly act as measures of momentary collective self-esteem. This could mean that the relationship between in-group favoritism measures and momentary self-feelings is partly artificial, because both may assess momentary collective self-esteem. In order to examine the role of evaluative group ratings, future studies could apply more indirect or subtle measures of intergroup differentiation (e.g., Rutland, 2004). Future studies also could include control groups to examine whether momentary collective self-esteem is enhanced by evaluation tasks that do not involve intergroup comparisons.

In conclusion, the present study aimed to make a contribution to the understanding of processes of intergroup differentiation among children. The findings provide support for the central prediction of social identity theory and indicate its plausibility and usefulness as an explanation of children's interethnic attitudes (Nesdale, 2001). This means that our understanding of the development of these attitudes depends not only on the socialization process and cognitive factors that traditionally have been studied in this domain (see Aboud, 1988). Practically, this study raises the question how ethnic group identification can be combined with positive interethnic relations.

In-group favoritism seems to have positive self-esteem effects for children who identify strongly with their ethnic groups. This suggests that interventions that try to strengthen children's group identities can have the side effect of making children more susceptible to the temptations of intergroup bias. The establishment of a strong and positive ethnic identity can go hand in hand with an in-group focus and a lack of openness to others. It would be worthwhile to study these issues in more detail and in other cultural settings among other ethnic groups.

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