

## *Summary*

# **Ethnic and National Identities: Links to Outgroup Attitudes via Attribution of Responsibility and Perceived Interethnic Conflict**

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Ethnic and national identities become especially critical in countries where intractable conflict between different groups has resulted in extreme violence and hostility such as Northern Ireland (e.g., McGlynn, Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2004) and Israel (e.g., Levin & Sidanius, 1999). Turkey has been experiencing a similar process of interethnic conflict between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups since 1990's (e.g., Mutlu, 1996). Interethnic conflict in Turkey has now spread to all aspects of group memberships at the social and individual levels, affecting relationships negatively between the group members. Recent research in Turkey has shown that Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members still hold fairly negative outgroup stereotypes (Bilali, Çelik, & Ok, 2014) and low levels of intergroup trust (Seta/Pollmark, 2009). This calls for further intergroup relations research specifically in the context of Turkish-Kurdish interethnic conflict, to provide an understanding of how positive intergroup relationships and attitudes between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups may be formed.

Although previous research has provided evidence for the existence of relationships between ethnic and national identification and outgroup attitudes (e.g., Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007; Masson & Verkuyten, 1993), this literature has rarely focused on the processes that could mediate the relationship between identities and outgroup attitudes among ethnic minority and majority status group members. We examined two mediators that could potentially mediate the associations between ethnic and national identification and outgroup attitudes - perceived level of interethnic conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility - among Turkish (ethnic majority status) and Kurdish (ethnic minority status) group members in Turkey.

### ***Ethnic Identity and Outgroup Attitudes***

Previous research has demonstrated that the degree of ethnic identification may be both positively and

negatively associated with outgroup attitudes. Based on the social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986), ethnic identification is a social identity mechanism which serves maintaining a positive individual regard. According to SIT, people would identify strongly with their ingroup and favor their ingroup compared to the outgroup in order to form a positive social identity which would be eventually related to positive personal identity. It has been shown that ethnic identity may be detrimental for outgroup attitudes, since ingroup members would strive to view their ingroup more favourably compared to the outgroup in order to maintain their own self-esteem. Brewer (1991) suggested that ingroup favouritism is likely to foster a distinctiveness threat which would increase outgroup hostility and prejudice. A sense of a strong ethnic identity has been therefore indicated to be related to ingroup preference (Masson & Verkuyten, 1993), stronger vulnerability to discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001), prejudice (Negy, Shieve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003), and negative outgroup attitudes (e.g., Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001).

Contrary to SIT, other research has shown that ingroup identification may not unconditionally lead to outgroup hostility (Brewer, 1999). For example, Phinney (1992) suggested that ethnic identity and other-group orientation are two independent, orthogonal constructs. Phinney et al. (2007) indicated that strong ethnic identification should lead to more positive outgroup attitudes, since people with high levels of ethnic group identification would be secure in their identities and therefore be able to understand other groups. Phinney, Ferguson, and Tate (1997) demonstrated that higher confidence in ethnic group membership was related to higher levels of openness to other groups, eventually leading to more positive outgroup attitudes. Other research has shown the protective role of ethnic identification against the negative effects of perceived ethnic discrimination in ethnically diverse environments (Lee, 2005).

### *National Identities and Outgroup Attitudes*

The relationship between national identity and outgroup attitudes has been found to be inconsistent across different samples and countries, ranging from weakly negative to moderately positive associations (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). When national identity has been conceptualized as a superordinate common ingroup identity which functions as an inclusive group membership based on citizenship and belongingness to the nation (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), it has been related to higher levels of intergroup harmony (Vollhardt, Migacheva, & Tropp, 2009) and positive outgroup attitudes (Jasinskaya-Lahti, Mahonen, & Ketokivi, 2012). Other research has shown evidence for SIT in which higher levels of national identification may also relate to more negative outgroup attitudes (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004) and lower levels of endorsement of a multicultural ideology (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

### *Perceived Level of Conflict as a Mediator*

Prior studies have shown that increases in group competition and hostility produce negative outgroup attitudes and behaviors (Jackson & Esses, 2000). Based on SIT, higher ingroup identification should automatically trigger less favourable attitudes towards the outgroup compared to the ingroup (Brewer, 1991). Ethnic identification is a social identity process which is likely to increase perceived intergroup conflict that should in turn relate negatively to positive outgroup attitudes (Jackson, 2002). Therefore, we proposed that the ethnic identity-outgroup attitudes link should be mediated by increased levels of perceived interethnic conflict. Group members who are high ethnic ingroup identifiers should pay more attention to any perceived threat and conflict from the outgroup to the ingroup and are likely to feel interethnic conflict to a higher extent compared to the ones with lower ethnic ingroup identification and such high levels of perceived threat and intergroup conflict should relate to negative outgroup attitudes and behaviors (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). On the other hand, when national identity is seen as an inclusive common ingroup identity, it should promote positive outgroup attitudes, since through a recategorization process in which an outgroup member identifies with an inclusive category that focuses on similarities and intergroup cooperation, national identification is likely to reduce feelings of intergroup conflict and thereby promote positive outgroup attitudes. Broader categorization under a superordinate identity should therefore lead to positive outgroup attitudes by deemphasizing intergroup competition and conflict (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

### *Outgroup Attribution of Responsibility as a Mediator*

When intergroup conflict and hostility are high, people are more prone to blame the outgroup for the occurrence of negative events (Brewer, 2007). Based on SIT, higher ethnic ingroup identification would increase perceived threat and hostility (Brewer, 1991) and thereby increase the likelihood of blaming the outgroup for the conflict. In order to keep their distinctiveness in a competing environment, both ethnic minority and majority group members would try to affirm their distinct ethnic identities. Such ingroup favoritism would therefore lead to higher levels of outgroup attribution of responsibility which would in turn lead to more negative outgroup attitudes. However, the more group members form outgroup ties with the majority, the less likely they are to blame the outgroup (Ruback & Singh, 2007). For example, Jews attributed lower levels of collective guilt and higher levels of forgiveness towards Germans when they identified with the superordinate human category compared to when they identified with their ingroup ethnic category. Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi, and Branscombe (2012) found that a strong sense of national identity was related to positive outgroup attitudes through decreased outgroup responsibility for war. Hence, we suggested that higher levels of national identity would decrease outgroup attribution of responsibility and thereby promote outgroup attitudes.

Based on the empirical research evidence from SIT and CIIM, we hypothesized that among both Turkish and Kurdish participants ethnic identity would be negatively related to outgroup attitudes (Hypothesis 1) and national identity would be positively related to outgroup attitudes (Hypothesis 2). We hypothesized that the association between ethnic identity and outgroup attitudes would be mediated by increased levels of perceived interethnic conflict (Hypothesis 3) and increased levels of outgroup attribution of responsibility (Hypothesis 4) and national identity would be related to outgroup attitudes through decreased levels of perceived interethnic conflict (Hypothesis 5) and decreased levels of outgroup attribution of responsibility (Hypothesis 6).

## **Method**

### *Participants and Procedure*

A sample of Turkish university students completed the questionnaires in university campuses. Initially, a total of 536 participants were recruited for the study (59.7% Turkish, 28.5% Kurdish, and 11.8% other ethnic group). We excluded participants from other ethnic minority groups which resulted in a total of 473 participants (320 Turkish and 153 Kurdish,  $M_{age} = 21.26$ ,  $SD = 3.11$ ; 67% females and 33% males). To obtain a representa-

tive sample of students from various parts of Turkey, the questionnaires were completed in different cities in the Western and Eastern parts of Turkey during October-November 2015.

### Materials

**Control variables.** To control for ethnic diversity, we used a measure of “ethnic composition” which assessed whether the Kurdish group formed the numerical minority or majority based on the city participants lived in. Therefore, cities where Kurdish people are the numerical minorities were coded as 0, whereas cities where Kurdish people are the numerical majorities were coded as 1. We further controlled for outgroup contact which was measured by asking participants how many Turkish/Kurdish people they know, ranging from 1 (*none*) to 7 (*more than 30*). Ethnic group was assessed by a single self-reported item asking participants to report the ethnic group they felt part of (Konda, 2011). Ethnic group was coded as 0 (Kurdish) and 1 (Turkish).

**Ethnic identity.** Ethnic identity was assessed by a four-item ethnic identity scale measuring how much participants identified with their ethnic groups (Verkuyten, 2005). Sample items were: “I identify with my ethnic group” and “I feel part of my ethnic group”. The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale was excellent (Cronbach’s alpha = .92).

**National identity.** The national identity scale (Verkuyten, 2005) was also composed of four items (e.g., “I identify as a Turkish national/citizen” and “Being a Turkish national/citizen is an important part of my identity”). The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale demonstrated excellent reliability in the current sample assessed by Cronbach’s Alpha (Cronbach’s alpha = .95).

**Perceived interethnic conflict.** This was measured by a single item that assessed the extent to which participants perceived conflict between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups. The single item measure has been previously used in the literature (e.g., Gaunt, 2011). The response scale ranged from 1 (*no conflict at all*) to 7 (*very intense conflict*).

**Outgroup attribution of responsibility.** A single item measure was used to measure how much participants thought the outgroup (Turkish/Kurdish) was responsible for the interethnic conflict between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups. A similar item has been used by Çelebi, Verkuyten, Köse, and Verkuyten (2014) and Bilali, Tropp, and Dasgupta (2012) to assess how much members of groups attributed responsibility to different parties in conflict. The response scale ranged from 1 (*no responsibility*) to 5 (*complete responsibility*).

**Outgroup attitudes.** Outgroup attitudes were assessed by three items that were adapted from previous research (e.g., Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009). Items were “I have positive feelings towards Turkish/Kurdish people”, “I find Turkish/Kurdish people hostile” (R), and “I think Turkish/Kurdish people are nice”. The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale was good with a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .78.

### Results

Mediation analyses were conducted using a path analysis on Mplus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998; 2015). We first conducted a partially mediated model where both perceived conflict and attribution of responsibility and ethnic and national identity were regressed upon outgroup attitudes (Model 1). For this initial model, we did not estimate a correlational relationship between the mediators. The initial model showed that the fit of the model was acceptable,  $\chi^2(7) = 39.14, p = .00, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .04$ . Next, with the addition of a bidirectional path between perceived interethnic conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility, the new model (Model 2) fit significantly improved,  $\chi^2(6) = 8.72, p = .19, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .01$ , demonstrated by a significant chi-square difference [ $\chi^2(1) = 30.42, p < .05$ ]. We further checked whether a fully mediated model (Model 3) would fit better compared to the partially mediated model. The fit of the fully mediated model was good,  $\chi^2(8) = 39.45, p = .00, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .02$ , but was significantly worse compared to the partially mediated model, demonstrated by a significant chi-square difference test [ $\chi^2(2) = 30.73, p < .05$ ]. Hence, we retained the partially mediated model.

The final model showed that the Turkish group had more positive outgroup attitudes compared to the Kurdish group ( $B = .34, p < .05$ ). Outgroup contact was significantly and positively associated with outgroup attitudes ( $B = .16, p < .05$ ). Ethnic identity was positively related to perceived conflict ( $B = .16, p < .05$ ) and outgroup attribution of responsibility ( $B = .34, p < .05$ ). National identity was negatively related to perceived conflict ( $B = -.26, p < .05$ ) and outgroup attribution of responsibility ( $B = -.30, p < .05$ ). In turn, both conflict and attribution of responsibility were negatively associated with outgroup attitudes ( $B = -.11$ , and  $B = -.27$ , respectively, both  $p < .05$ ). Moreover, direct associations between ethnic identity and national identity and outgroup attitudes were still significant. Ethnic identity was negatively related with outgroup attitudes ( $B = -.14, p < .05$ ) and national identity was positively related with outgroup attitudes ( $B = .20, p < .05$ ).

Indirect effects showed that the mediational path from ethnic identity to perceived conflict and from conflict to attitudes was significant ( $B = -.02, p < .05$ ). The same route via outgroup attribution of responsibility was also significant ( $B = -.07, p < .05$ ). The paths from national identity to outgroup attitudes through decreased conflict and outgroup attribution were also significant ( $B = .02$ , and  $B = .06$ , both  $p < .05$ ).

We tested an alternative model where we treated perceived conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility as the independent variables and ethnic and national identities as the mediators, since it is possible that identities would be formed as a result of perceived conflict and attribution of responsibility. The model fit of this model (Model 4) was not acceptable, demonstrated by model fit indices  $\chi^2(7) = 303.23, p = .00, CFI = .48, RMSEA = .31, SRMR = .12$ . A second alternative model was run with outgroup attitudes as the mediator between ethnic and national identity and perceived conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility (Model 5). The model fit was partly acceptable,  $\chi^2(3) = 32.25, p = .00, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .15, SRMR = .04$ . A chi-square difference test with our baseline model indicated that the alternative model was significantly worse compared to the baseline model [ $\chi^2(3) = 23.53, p < .001$ ].

## Discussion

As expected, we found that ethnic identity was negatively related to outgroup attitudes, whereas national identity promoted positive outgroup attitudes, showing evidence for Hypothesis 1 and 2, respectively. These findings revealed evidence for both SIT and CIIM. Based on SIT, a strong sense of ethnic identity should be related to negative outgroup attitudes and behaviors, since individuals would identify with a social identity to foster their own self-esteem and therefore favor their ingroup compared to the outgroup. Such ingroup favoritism should be therefore associated with more negative attitudes towards members of the outgroup (Brewer, 1991). This is in line with previous research in the literature demonstrating ethnic identification as detrimental for outgroup attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Mummendey et al., 2001). On the other hand, in line with CIIM, a strong sense of national identity was positively associated with outgroup attitudes, indicating national identification as a positive mechanism that fosters intergroup attitudes. Previous empirical research has shown evidence for the positive role of national identification on positive outgroup attitudes as a superordinate common ingroup identity (e.g., Martinez et al., 2011; Vollhardt et al., 2009).

Considering the Turkish literature on ethnic and national identities, previous research has shown similar

findings. For example, Bilali (2012) demonstrated that conflict construals which are in line with a shared national identification were related to the maintenance of positive intergroup relationships enhancing intergroup harmony. On the other hand, ethnic identification led to opposing conflict construals which served to maintain the conflict. This showed that national identification serves as a mechanism that decreases the perception of conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility, while ethnic identification led to higher levels of conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility. Our results only concerned outgroup attitudes for both ethnic minority and majority groups and demonstrated the inclusive role of national identification and the exclusive role of ethnic identification.

We found that perceived level of interethnic conflict significantly mediated the associations between both identity types and outgroup attitudes. Results showed that while ethnic identity was related to positive outgroup attitudes through increased conflict level (Hypothesis 3), national identity was related to outgroup attitudes through decreased conflict level (Hypothesis 4). This shows that ethnic and national identities are influential on outgroup attitudes through changing individuals' perceptions of interethnic conflict. While ethnic identity exacerbates the perception of intergroup conflict and thereby decreases positive outgroup attitudes, national identity reduces the perception of conflict and promotes positive outgroup attitudes. The same was true for the mediational role of outgroup attribution of responsibility. Whereas ethnic identity led to higher levels of outgroup attribution of responsibility, national identification reduced the extent to which the outgroup was blamed for the intergroup conflict and thereby provided benefits for the development of positive outgroup attitudes. This provided evidence for Hypotheses 5 and 6. In line with our finding, Licata et al. (2012) has shown that attribution of responsibility mediated the positive associations between national identity and outgroup attitudes. We, therefore, extended the research in this literature by showing that both identity types were associated with positive outgroup attitudes through the extent at which the outgroup was blamed for the interethnic conflict.

Interestingly, we also found that the Turkish group had more positive attitudes towards the outgroup compared to the Kurdish group. Moreover, the Kurdish group reported higher levels of perceived conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility. Previous research among Turkish and Kurdish people indicated that the Turkish group had lower outgroup trust (Çelebi, Verkuyten, Köse, & Maalipard, 2014) and lower support for minority rights (Çelebi, Verkuyten, & Smyrnioti, 2016) compared to the Kurdish group. Moreover, Bilali et al.

(2014) showed that when interethnic conflict was relatively high, the Kurdish group displayed less negative outgroup attitudes and the Turkish group displayed more negative outgroup attitudes. One reason for why the Kurdish group was more negative towards the Turkish group may be due to the fact that the current study was conducted right after changes in State's policies about Turkish-Kurdish relationships in Turkey.

Among the main limitations, we could state the cross-sectional nature of the study. As the best way of testing a mediational model is to conduct longitudinal analyses in order to provide a sense of causality between the independent, mediating and the dependent variables, further research may use longitudinal designs. Although we tested alternative models changing the directions of the hypothesized model, further longitudinal designs are needed to fully understand the causal sequence between variables. Moreover, the study was conducted during a period in which interethnic conflict in Turkey was generally high. In the current sample, both groups showed relatively high levels of perceived interethnic conflict. This requires caution for the generalizability of the findings to other settings where perceived interethnic conflict may not be that intense and therefore may not be as influential in forming outgroup attitudes as in the current study. Finally, from a methodological perspective, we measured

perceived interethnic conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility by single-item scales which cause problems in the assessment of validity and reliability of the measurements. Further research may use more appropriate measures for both mediators.

In conclusion, the current study extended previous research in several ways. For the first time in the literature, we examined how ethnic and national identities may specifically relate to outgroup attitudes. Previous research has shown the existence of associations between ethnic and national identification and outgroup attitudes (e.g., Masson & Verkuyten, 1993; Phinney et al., 1997), however this research literature has been limited to demonstrate how exactly these identities lead to outgroup attitudes. In the current study, we found that perceived interethnic conflict and outgroup attribution of responsibility significantly mediated the effects of both identity types on outgroup attitudes. By showing the inclusive effects of national identity and the exclusive effects of ethnic identity, we revealed psychological mechanisms that could mediate the associations between ethnic and national identities and outgroup attitudes. Further research should be conducted by including other possible mechanisms that could explain the associations and outgroup attitudes.