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## Explaining negative outgroup attitudes between native Dutch and Muslim youth in The Netherlands using the Integrated Threat Theory

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### ABSTRACT

Like in many other western countries the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in The Netherlands is characterized by segregation and negative intergroup attitudes. This study focusses on negative outgroup attitudes among adolescents. We tested whether the Integrated Threat Theory can explain prejudice in native as well as Muslim immigrant youth in The Netherlands. Using a sample of 671 native Dutch and 303 Muslim adolescents we found that Dutch natives scored higher on Negative Outgroup Attitudes, Intergroup Anxiety, Negative Stereotypes, and Negative Experiences, and lower on Contact and Multiculturalism than Muslims. Partial support for the Integrated Threat Theory was found in both samples, and explained variance was higher in the native Dutch sample. Implications include suggestions for interventions aimed at improving relationships.

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Relations between native Dutch people and Muslims in The Netherlands are problematic. [Gonzalez, Verkuyten, Weesie and Poppe \(2008\)](#) reported that 54% of the Dutch adolescents in their sample had negative feelings towards Muslims. This proportion is similar to the one reported by [Van der Noll and Dekker \(2010\)](#) who reported a negative to very negative attitude in native Dutch youth toward Islam and Muslims. All these previous studies focused on the attitudes of the Dutch majority toward the Muslim minority and neglected the attitudes of Muslim immigrants toward the majority. For a thorough understanding of intergroup prejudicial attitudes knowledge is required of the dynamics of these attitudes in both directions ([Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006](#)).

The current study examines mutual attitudes between Muslim adolescents in The Netherlands and native Dutch adolescents and tries to explain these mutual attitudes within Stephan and Stephan's Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) of prejudice (2000). [Stephan and Stephan \(2000\)](#) defined prejudice as negative affect associated with outgroups. According to their integrated threat theory of prejudice, negative intergroup attitudes are predicted by proximal factors that consist of different kinds of perceived threats from members of the outgroup, which are predicted by other variables like individual multiculturalism endorsement and (positive or negative) intergroup contact.

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## 1. Threat variables

Two important variables in ITT are realistic and symbolic threats. Realistic threat involves threats to the existence of the ingroup, threats to the political and economic power of the ingroup, and threats to the physical or material well-being of the ingroup (Stephan et al., 2002). The idea of symbolic threat originated in theories of symbolic racism, which state that feeling that one's values, morals and beliefs are threatened by an outgroup is a form of prejudice (Kinder & Sears, 1981). Stephan and Stephan (2000) consider these feelings of symbolic threat to be one of the causes of prejudice, that may influence outgroup attitudes simultaneously with realistic threats. Wirtz, Van der Pligt and Doosje (2015) found that in The Netherlands realistic threat plays a less important role in intergroup relations than symbolic threat. For an explanation they refer to the public debate in The Netherlands in which competition between Muslims and non-Muslims for houses, jobs, economic power, or physical safety hardly plays a role. The fear of losing values and traditions, in short symbolic threat, plays a more important role.

Two other variables that constitute the integrated threat model are intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes. Stephan and Stephan (2000) argue that people feel threatened in intergroup interactions because of their concern about negative outcomes for the self like being ridiculed or rejected. Intergroup anxiety refers to feelings of awkwardness and uneasiness in the presence of outgroup members because of uncertainty about how to behave toward them, which may cause an experience of threat (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). A similar kind of reasoning applies for negative stereotypes. Because stereotypes serve as a basis for expectations, negative stereotypes create expectations and fear of negative consequences. For instance, when outgroup members are stereotyped as aggressive, people may feel threatened by the prospect of interacting with them (Stephan et al., 2002).

## 2. Context and group dependence of the relative weight of the threat variables

The strength of relations between threat variables and negative intergroup attitudes may vary between situations but also between majority members and immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). Corenblum and Stephan (2001) tested the integrated threat theory of prejudice between white and native people in Canada toward each other. Corenblum and Stephan (2001) showed that relations between specific threats and prejudice, and therefore integrated threat theory in general, received stronger support among majority than minority group members. Stephan et al. (2002) conducted a study on mutual attitudes of whites and African Americans in the US. Just as the Canadian minority in the study by Corenblum and Stephan (2001), African Americans provided significantly higher ratings than whites on all of the measures. And just as among the Canadian white majority, realistic threats were a stronger predictor in the US white majority sample than in the African American minority one. Although the predictions of the integrated threat theory were well supported in both samples, similar to the study by Corenblum and Stephan (2001), the variables in the model accounted for more variance in whites' attitudes toward African Americans than in African American's attitudes toward whites (Stephan et al., 2002).

Tausch, Hewstone, and Roy (2009) referring to Hindu – Muslim relationships in India found that for Hindus symbolic threat was the main predictor of negative attitudes, while for the Muslims realistic threat was. The researchers attribute this difference to an unbalance in economic and institutional power relations, favoring Hindus; they need not worry about their economic position. The Muslim community experiences poverty and exclusion from the labor market; hence, to them economic threat is very real. Leong and Ward (2011) studied the way European descent New Zealanders and native New Zealanders (Maori) perceive the influential and growing group of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand. They stipulate that the legal and political system regulating intergroup permeability plays a role. New Zealand's democracy and particularly their policy and ruling on ethnic minorities and immigrant integration makes that the dominant in-group status is open for the Chinese. This societal condition is common, hence, similar for the European and the native New Zealanders. And yet, this common situation leads to negative feelings, feelings of threat in those communities that feel most vulnerable in society. Leong and Ward showed that the Maori sample experienced higher levels of threat than the European New Zealanders. Tausch, Hewstone, Kenworthy, Cairns, and Christ (2007), echoing notions and findings earlier presented by Stephan (Stephan & Renfro, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) provided a similar explanation in demonstrating that the relatively lower societal status of the in-group, in their case Catholics as compared to Protestants in Northern Ireland, corresponded to higher reported levels of threat to the ingroup.

## 3. Antecedents of threat

As antecedents that predict perceptions of the four types of threat a number of alternatives have been identified (personality traits, attitudes, personal experiences, and situational factors; Stephan, 2014). The current study tests intergroup contact, endorsement of multiculturalism, and negative experiences as antecedents. The first and last refer to personal experiences and multiculturalism deals with particular intergroup attitudes. In a review of studies Stephan (2014) clarified that studies focusing on similar antecedents have shown that these variables are related to threat variables as well as to the consequences. In addition he clarified that the relations are not unidirectionally running from antecedents to consequences, through the mediating threat. Many of the relations appeared reciprocal.

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