



# Why do majority members prefer immigrants who adopt the host culture? The role of perceived identification with the host nation<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that members of the national majority group generally consider host culture adoption by immigrants as desirable. However, so far, this positive effect of perceived host culture adoption on attitudes toward immigrants has not been explained. We argue that majority members infer national identification of immigrants from their cultural adoption. Moreover, we predict that this inference should decrease majority members' feeling of ingroup threat, therefore also improving their attitudes toward immigrants. We conducted two experimental studies. In Study 1, majority members who were presented an immigrant group that adopted the host culture held more positive attitudes than those who were presented one that disregarded it. In line with our hypothesis, this effect was fully mediated by perceived identification of the immigrants with the host nation, itself decreasing perception of ingroup threat. Study 2 reproduced the same experimental design, but used descriptions of individual immigrants' acculturation strategies, and the immigrant group's status – valued vs. devalued origin – was also manipulated. In addition, Study 2 focused on dimensions of the “Big Two” of social perception. Results replicated the mediational effect of perceived identification on attribution of both warmth and competence traits. The status manipulation had no significant effect and did not interact with cultural adoption. These two studies provide robust evidence that perception of host nation identification explains the effects of perceived cultural adoption on attitudes towards immigrants.

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## 1. Introduction

While migration rates towards Europe have risen over the last few decades (Hooghe, Trappers, Meuleman, & Reeskens, 2008), anti-immigration parties have obtained considerable electoral successes in many European countries (Rydgren, 2007). Attitudes towards immigration and immigrants have attracted the attention of both politicians and scientists. Within the scientific literature, a significant number of studies has been conducted in order to better understand the determinants of these attitudes (see for example Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010). Some of these studies focused more precisely on host

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country nationals' acculturation preferences. These studies have consistently shown that perception of the adoption of the host nation culture by immigrants is a strong determinant of majority members' attitudes towards them, over and above the perception of their heritage culture's maintenance (Barette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis & Bougie, 1998; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). However, few studies have endeavored to understand the social psychological processes behind this effect. Through this article, we aim to fill this gap.

### 1.1. *Acculturation preferences*

Acculturation can be defined as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p.149). Acculturation processes are viewed as a major issue in the relationship between national majority and immigrant minorities (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault & Sénécal, 1997; Brown & Zagefka, 2011). John Berry's (1980, 1997) most influential acculturation approach distinguishes two orthogonal dimensions: preservation of the cultural heritage and desire for contact with national majority members. Four different acculturative strategies can be deduced from the crossing of these two dimensions: integration (maintain culture, high desire for contact), assimilation (relinquish own culture, high desire for contact), separation (maintain culture, low desire for contact), and marginalization (relinquish culture, low desire for contact). However, some authors have proposed alternative models of acculturation (e.g. Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997). One of the most influential is the interactive acculturation model (IAM) proposed by Bourhis et al. (1997). This model substitutes contact with majority members by adoption of the host culture that is more in line with the type of attitudes measured in the first dimension. Moreover, Bourhis et al. (1997), as well as Berry (2001), emphasize the importance, not only of immigrants' acculturation preferences, but also of host country nationals' acculturation preferences. The IAM argues that, if immigrants endorse acculturation strategies, the majority also has acculturative preferences towards them, and that the combination of these two groups' preferences helps predict the tone of their intergroup relations. This model inspired a new trend of studies on acculturation preferences of cultural majorities (Barette et al., 2004; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007; Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011a).

Studies conducted so far consistently showed that the adoption of the host culture is a key predictor of majority attitudes towards immigrants. Host culture adoption has been shown to predict general attitudes towards immigrants (Matera, Stefanile & Brown, 2012; Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011b; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunks, 1998), as well as warmth and competence traits attribution (López-Rodríguez, Zagefka, Navas & Cuadrado, 2014; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007).

The present paper aims at complementing this emerging knowledge about the psychological processes underlying these effects.

### 1.2. *A functionalist approach to attitudes*

According to the functionalist and pragmatic perspective supported by Fiske (1992) and already described by William James (1890), individuals construct their attitudes toward the people or groups with whom they interact in light of the goals they are pursuing. In other words, our attitudes are closely dependent on our aspirations. One of the main aspiration of human beings is to minimize threats for themselves and their ingroup (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). In line with this reasoning, feelings of ingroup threat were shown to play an important role in shaping majority members' attitudes towards immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, Martnez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). Indeed, Celeste, Brown, Tip, and Matera (2014) first replicated the positive effect of the perception of cultural adoption on majority members' attitudes towards immigrants, then also showed that this effect was partially mediated by the feeling of threat.

In the present research, we hypothesize that perception of immigrants' identification with the host nation mediates the effect of perception of host culture adoption on feelings of ingroup threat, which, in turn, influence attitudes towards immigrants. So far, perception of identification has been neglected in the acculturation literature. This absence is surprising given the existing evidence of close ties between national identification and national culture, as well as the potential impact of perceived identification on feelings of threat.

### 1.3. *Culture and national identity*

According to the political scientist Kymlicka (2001), the idea that the liberal democrat states are ethno-culturally neutral is false. These nations – such as the United States and most European countries – have developed a cultural conception of society in which one main culture is promoted and where membership in the national group is constrained to the adoption of this dominant culture. This cultural conception of national identity has also been investigated from a social psychological perspective. Hence, national culture has emerged as a distinctive criterion in the definition of the national ingroup. For example, Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, and Duriez (2013) showed that, besides the ethnic and civic representations of citizenship, a cultural representation of citizenship has become dominant in some contexts. Citizens who endorse a cultural representation of their citizenship tend to consider that their national ingroup is best characterized by the cultural norms, customs, and language of the majority. Reijerse et al. (2013) showed that this conception of national identity was associated with more negative attitudes towards immigrants.

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