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Ethnic identity and acculturation of Turkish-Bulgarian adolescents☆,☆☆

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A B S T R A C T

We investigated associations of ethnic identity, acculturation orientations, and acculturation outcomes (psychological well-being and socio-cultural adjustment) in a sample of 279 Turkish-Bulgarian adolescents through self-reports and parent reports. This group has a long history of discrimination and exposure to assimilation pressure. According to both the youth and their parents, their Turkish ethnic identity was more pronounced than their Bulgarian identity. As expected, the Turkish identity was positively related to the tendency to maintain one's heritage culture, whereas the Bulgarian identity was associated with the adoption of the national culture. A good fit was found for a multigroup path model (testing the invariance of parental and self-reports) in which ethnic identity and acculturation orientations affect acculturation outcomes. Particularly Turkish ethnic identity and Turkish maintenance were significantly associated with acculturation outcomes. Findings highlight the centrality of Turkish domains of identity and acculturation for both well-being and positive acculturation outcomes in Turkish-Bulgarian youth. We discussed how an adolescent's heritage culture might be important for his or her identity and acculturation.

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1. Introduction

Ethnicity is important for the acculturation of adolescents from culturally diverse communities (Phinney, 2003; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). In the numerous studies on youth's social identities in the areas of ethnicity and acculturation, there has been little work on the joint role of ethnic identity and acculturation processes in adolescent well-being and adjustment. There is almost no work on ethnic identification and acculturation in Eastern European minority groups. This study therefore set out to explore ethnic identity, acculturation orientations, and acculturation outcomes (psychological well-being and socio-cultural adjustment) of Turkish-Bulgarian minority youth, a historically stigmatized group that was in its past repeatedly exposed to pressure to conform to the dominant Bulgarian culture. We refer here to this group as an ethnic minority rather than an immigrant group, because Turkish-Bulgarians are not a newly arrived immigrant group but have lived in Bulgaria for centuries. In this study, we investigated whether ethnic identity and acculturation orientations are associated with well-being and adjustment in this group. In the following, we first provide a brief overview of the relevant relations among identity, acculturation orientations (maintenance and adoption), and outcome variables (psychological and socio-cultural adjustment).

1.1. Ethnic identity and acculturation orientations

Theories on ethnic identity and acculturation have increasingly recognized that both ethnic self-understanding and acculturation strategies of ethnic minorities relate to how individuals negotiate their interactions with their culture of origin and the culture of settlement. In fact, recent years have witnessed an increase in research exploring ethnic identity and acculturation as dynamic processes intertwined with social and cultural behaviors, and interactions and practices in specific cultural contexts (Smith & Silva, 2011). So far, however, much of this work has focused upon ethnic identity or acculturation as two significant, yet separate aspects of minority groups (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Given the prevalence and everyday importance of ethnic identification and acculturation, it is likely that these concepts are aspects that jointly influence the well-being of minority youth.

Ethnic identity has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, including the manner in which people position themselves in various cultural contexts and the extent to which they value their own ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). Correspondingly, ethnic identity can refer to heritage identity associated with the immigrant culture as well as to the combination of heritage and mainstream identity. To clarify the distinction between heritage and mainstream identities, the notion of national identity has been adopted. National identity reflects the degree of identification with the culture of settlement, including feelings of belonging and commitment to the host society (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Ethnic identity, viewed here as an individual's sense of belonging and commitment to a group or culture (Phinney, 1990), is part of the acculturation process. Currently, the most widely applied model of acculturation refers to a two-dimensional process including both the preservation of one's ethnic culture and the adoption of the dominant society, and there is sound empirical evidence for the existence of these two dominant dimensions of acculturation (Berry, 1990, 1997; LaFromboise et al., 1993). A similar two-dimensional process can be envisaged in ethnic identity, denoting the identification with the culture of origin and with the new society. It is important in this line of reasoning to assess both ethnic and heritage identity components in ethnic minority groups (Costigan & Su, 2004).

There is a considerable body of research showing that ethnic identity is likely to be strong when members of minority groups feel a strong affiliation to their ethnic community as a result of contextual pressures to assimilate to the national culture (Phinney et al., 2001). Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) showed that if there is hostility toward minority groups, a rejection of the ethnic identity and pride of heritage group belonging will be more likely to emerge. The authors suggest that a strong ethnic identity may stem from an increasing awareness of being part of a marginalized ethnic minority, which in turn may limit further opportunities for members of that minority.

1.2. Ethnic identity and acculturation outcomes

(Un)successful acculturation has been operationalized in terms of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment outcomes (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adjustment concerns aspects of stress and coping such as depressive symptoms, mood disturbances, well-being, and satisfaction with life, whereas socio-cultural adjustment refers to cultural learning processes related to successful participation in the host society. Previous research has demonstrated a positive link between ethnic identity and psychological well-being (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2006; Smith & Silva, 2011). However, findings are not consistent. Some studies have shown that ethnic identity is more likely to predict positive outcomes when there is a strong supportive ethnic community, whereas other studies reported positive adjustment outcomes when there is pressure to assimilate into the new culture (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Apparently, there is more consistency in acculturation studies; integration (simultaneous maintenance of ethnic culture and adoption of host culture) has been widely reported to be the most adaptive acculturation strategy in terms of well-being (Berry, 1997; Lieber, Chin, Nihira, & Mink, 2001), self-esteem (Lee & Zhan, 1998; Phinney, 1992), life satisfaction (Ying & Lee, 1999), (less) acculturative stress (Dion & Dion, 1996), and positive psychological functioning (Kim, 2009). However, some studies report that host culture adoption is associated with lower levels of stress (Berry, 2003), better satisfaction with life (Lieber et al., 2001), and self-esteem (Phinney, 1992), whereas others document the opposite; host culture adoption is then positively related to psychological distress, depression (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987; Shin, 1994) and substance abuse (Yi & Daniel, 2001). Finally, heritage and national orientations may vary across different domains of adjustment. Among minority youth, involvement in the host culture has been found to be a strong predictor of better school adjustment, whereas involvement in the heritage culture is more related to psychological adaptation (Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Obradovic, & Masten, 2008).

In light of previous research, we believe that a study of well-being among immigrants involves both ethnic identity and acculturation orientations. We are not aware of studies in which both identity components have been compared in ethnic minority groups in Eastern Europe – much of the current empirical knowledge originates primarily in non-European (USA, Canada, and Australia) and a limited number of European countries (the Netherlands, UK, Germany, and France) (Berry, 2006). Additionally, there is hardly any research on the link between ethnic identity and acculturation processes using other than self-reports. Parents of the target adolescent are potentially interesting informants because they are most likely to observe the adolescent over long periods of time and across different contexts (Bögels & Van Melick, 2004; McConaughy, 1993). Studies on the relation between child and parental reports involve a range of developmental outcomes (Howells Wrobel & Lachar, 1998; Konold, Jamison, Stanton-Chapman, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010), but so far no studies measured the parental perception of their children's ethnic identification and behaviors. Therefore, the present study included parental reports on ethnic identity in addition to the investigation of the relationship between identity and acculturation in