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Assimilation ideology and situational well-being among ethnic minority members

Maykel Verkuyten

Utrecht University

Abstract

Two experimental questionnaire studies were conducted to test whether assimilation ideology affects the relationship between ethnic self-esteem and situational well-being of Turkish-Dutch participants. Social identity theory argues that ethnic identity can buffer the effects of group identity threat on well-being, and self-esteem research suggests that a positively evaluated self-aspect can form an important source of well-being. Results show that in an assimilation context, ethnic self-esteem is positively related to feelings of global self-worth and general life-satisfaction. The findings suggest that ethnic self-esteem is an important factor for well-being in an assimilation context that undermines minority group members ability to live their ethnic identity and threatens their group's positive distinctiveness.

'They want us to assimilate but that would mean that we lose our culture and identity.

We cannot do that, we have to defend who we are and we need to be able to practice our own culture' (Turkish-Dutch male, 22 years).

Although the professed goal of assimilation is equality, assimilationist thinking provides intellectual and moral justification for the superiority and unchanging character of the dominant identity and culture (Fredrickson, 1999). Majority groups tend to favor assimilation of ethnic minorities which requires that minority group members conform to dominant values and abandon their minority group identity (e.g., Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; Verkuyten, 2005). In the Netherlands there is a lively public debate on the so-called failure of multiculturalism and the need for assimilation. Leading politicians and opinion makers have explicitly rejected the idea of multiculturalism which would mean the abolishment of Dutch identity, pleading instead for assimilation (see Vasta, 2007; Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). The quote above indicates that for ethnic minority members, the emphasis on assimilation undermines their ethnic identity and forms an identity threat. Assimilation compromises one's ability to live by one's identity and threatens the value and distinctiveness of the group identity. There is not only anecdotal but also systematic evidence for the fact that ethnic minorities tend to see assimilation as identity undermining and threatening (e.g., Brug & Verkuyten, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Threats to group identity make people increasingly turn toward the minority ingroup and this can have psychological benefits that compensate for misrecognition (see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). When an important aspect of the self is undermined or threatened it tends to become more central to one's situational well-being and when this self-aspect is evaluated positively it might act as a protective factor (e.g., Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Mossakowski, 2003).

The present research focuses on the relationship between ethnic self-esteem and situational well-being of ethnic minority group members in the Netherlands. It was expected

that the ideology of assimilation makes ethnic minority identity more salient leading to a stronger association between ethnic self-esteem and situational well-being. This expected effect was examined in two studies that used global self-worth (Study 1 and 2) and general life-satisfaction (Study 2) as indicators of well-being. The studies had an experimental questionnaire design to examine the situational effects on well-being of assimilation in comparison to multiculturalism (Studies 1 and 2), in which the emphasis is on the social recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity and minority group identities, and to color-blindness (Study 1), in which the focus is on people as unique individuals rather than as ethnic group members. Following principles of cultural knowledge and lay theories activation (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, Benet-Martínez, 2000; Levy, West & Ramirez, 2005), the research tries to show that the activation of assimilation ideology strengthens the role that ethnic self-esteem plays in psychological well-being.

Assimilation and well-being

Situations or events that reflect negatively on an aspect of the self are viewed as threatening to the extent that one's self-worth is invested in the domain (Rosenberg, 1979). In general, research consistently indicates that ethnic minorities attach great value to the distinctive qualities of their group and have high levels of ingroup identification (see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, Verkuyten, 2005). Assimilation undermines minority members ethnic identity and threatens their group's positive distinctiveness. Threats to the ethnic self evoke distress and can make one's ethnic identity a more important contingency of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). In addition, threats to group identity make people turn to the minority ingroup that provides a sense of belongingness and inclusion that enhances positive self-feelings (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Research has found strong associations between the feeling of identity undermining and ingroup identification (Brug & Verkuyten,

2007; Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Thus, situational threats can be expected to make ethnic identity more salient and thereby more relevant for well-being. Using an event-contingent daily recording strategy, Downie, Mageau, Koestner and Liodden (2006) found that people feel more positively about themselves in daily interactions in which one's heritage culture is being evaluated. Further, studying Chinese Americans, Yip (2005) found that the salience of ethnic identity fluctuates across daily situations and that ethnic salience bolstered positive self-feelings and reduced negative feelings (see also Yip & Fuligni, 2002).

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), high ethnic self-esteem may serve to buffer the effects of negative experiences and to maintain one's well-being by reinforcing ingroup aspects. Therefore, in a context in which the importance of assimilation is emphasized, I expected a positive association between ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth (Studies 1 and 2) and life-satisfaction (Study 2). The influence of assimilation on the relationship between ethnic self-esteem and well-being was compared to that of a perspective which fosters an appreciation of diversity by recognizing and respecting minority group identities and cultures (Studies 1 and 2), and a perspective that de-emphasizes the importance of ethnic categories (Study 1).

Multicultural recognition and color-blindness

Multiculturalism tries to foster understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity by acknowledging and respecting minority group identities and cultures (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). The public acceptance and recognition of one's group and culture are considered valuable as conditions for a positive group identity that sustains feelings of self-respect and self-worth (Burnet, 1995; Taylor, 1994). Research in the Netherlands has found that multiculturalism provides a favorable social context for self-worth of minority group members, but only for high group identifiers (Verkuyten, 2009).

Thus, it can be expected that in a context of multicultural recognition there also is a positive association between ethnic self-esteem and well-being, but for different reasons than in an assimilation setting. Multicultural recognition makes ethnic identity more salient by acknowledging and supporting ethnic minority group membership which contributes to one's general well-being. In contrast, an emphasis on assimilation makes ethnic identity more salient by undermining one's group membership, and under threatening circumstances positive ethnic self-esteem can act as a contributing factor to well-being. In addition, it can be argued that the relationship will be weaker in a multicultural context compared to assimilation. Self-esteem research shows that people are particularly sensitive to negative and threatening outcomes (e.g., Brown & Dutton, 1995; Park & Maner, 2009). Furthermore, across multiple psychological domains, research has found that unpleasant or harmful outcomes have stronger, larger and more consistent effects than pleasant and beneficial outcomes (see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). This negativity bias leads to the expectation of a stronger relationship between ethnic self-esteem and general well-being in the assimilation context compared to the multicultural one.

In contrast to assimilation which emphasizes a one-group perspective, and to multicultural recognition which supports ethnic minority groups, a color-blind perspective places the emphasis on disregarding social categories. Color-blindness stresses that ethnic distinctions should be ignored in favor of considering and treating people as unique individuals. Color-blindness is not uncontested and has been shown to facilitate either social tolerance or intolerance depending on its intergroup meaning (Levy, et al., 2005). Here I focus on the individualistic interpretation of color-blindness in which personal identity and the uniqueness of individuals is emphasized. In the color-blind ideology the emphasis is on individual abilities and achievements and these individual qualities have implications for self-feelings and well-being. The implication for the present study is that in the color-blind

condition in which ethnic group membership is not salient, ethnic self-esteem should not be related to self-worth. Group identities can be expected to not contribute to global self-feelings in a context where the focus is on individual differences and qualities. In such a context, the merit of one's ethnic group is not at stake: the uniqueness of individuals and individual differences are relevant rather than one's ethnic identity. Empirical evidence for this reasoning was found in a study in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2009).

To summarize, I expected that in a context where ethnic minority members are encouraged to think in terms of assimilation, ethnic self-esteem would relate positively to global self-worth (Studies 1 and 2) and to general life-satisfaction (Study 2). A similar but less strong association was expected in the multicultural recognition condition. In contrast, in the context where color-blindness is emphasized (Study 1) no association between ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth was expected. Turkish-Dutch students participated in the two studies. People of Turkish origin are the numerically largest ethnic minority group in the Netherlands (2.3% of the population) and together with the Moroccan-Dutch are accepted the least and face the highest levels of identity threat (Hagendoorn, 1995; Verkuyten, 2005).

Study 1

Method

Participants

The study was conducted with 135 Turkish-Dutch students from the cities of Rotterdam and Leiden. The students' were recruited via local contacts and their participation was requested for a research on contemporary social issues. The students participated on a voluntary basis and received 5 euro for their cooperation. It took about 15 to 20 minutes to complete the anonymous questionnaire in Dutch. All participants were born and raised in the

Netherlands and no information is available about their parents. There were 70 females and 65 males. The mean age was 22.7, and age ranged between 17 and 29.

Design

An experimental between-subjects questionnaire study was carried out. There were three different versions of the questionnaire, which were distributed randomly among the participants. One version focused on personal identity and the uniqueness of individuals (color-blindness), another on multicultural recognition, and a third focused participants' attention on the importance of assimilation.

The experimental manipulations induced by the questionnaire were set up by following the procedure outlined by Wolsko, Park, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2000). Wolsko and colleagues experimentally manipulated color-blind versus multicultural ideology by providing participants with a one-page statement that endorsed either a color-blind or a multicultural approach to inter-ethnic relations. Subsequently, participants were asked to make a list of five reasons why color-blindness (or multiculturalism) is an adequate approach to group relations. They were then presented with a list of responses that, presumably, had been provided by previous participants, and were asked to encircle the responses similar to their own. This procedure has been adopted in other studies (e.g., Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Verkuyten, 2009), and is the one I used for this study, although with some changes. One change is that in the individualistic color-blind manipulation I more explicitly emphasized the importance of seeing people as unique individuals with distinctive personal identities (see Verkuyten, 2009). The other change is that I developed a threatening assimilation condition in which the emphasis is on the need for ethnic minority groups to assimilate to Dutch society by leaving their ethnic identity behind. The importance of this was argued for in terms of the social cohesion of society and the maintenance of Dutch national culture. For the multicultural

experimental manipulation I followed Wolsko et al's (2000) introduction that emphasizes mutual recognition and the valuable contribution that all ethnic groups make to Dutch society. Several discursive devices were used to render the introductions plausible and acceptable. This means that an effort was made to present the stories as 'factual' rather than based on personal opinions (see Edwards & Potter, 1992). For example, an authoritative and consensual source was provided ('Sociologists, psychologists, economists and political scientists all agree...'), supporting evidence was given ('Research has shown...'), and an empirist account was used in which the conclusion about the importance of the particular ideology was presented as following from the 'facts' (So, it can be concluded that ...).¹ The participants were asked to read the one-page statement on the merit of the approach; to provide reasons why the approach was adequate; and to encircle similar responses in the other response lists.

Measures

Ethnic self-esteem was measured with six bipolar scales. In a short introduction it was stated that people belong to all kinds of groups and that some of these groups have to do with one's ethnic and cultural background. Subsequently, participants were asked to indicate how they felt about their ethnic group membership. The responses were on nine-point scales, with higher scores indicating higher regard. The traits used were: positive (negative), (un)satisfied, (in)secure, strong (weak), (un)pleasant, and nice (annoying). Alpha was .94.

Global self-worth as a key indicator of well-being was assessed by means of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Using seven-point scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly), participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with each of the ten items on the scale. With this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .84

An additional measure was used for examining how the experimental manipulations were perceived (Verkuyten, 2009). This measure was meant to see whether the three

introductions were equally compelling. After reading and completing the introduction the participants were asked to indicate on a seven point scale how well argued and convincing they found the message: 'How convincing and well-argued do you find this statement?'

Results

Preliminary analyses

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with 'message' as the dependent variable and experimental condition (colour-blind, multiculturalism, assimilation) as factor. There was no main effect for condition indicating that the three frames were considered equally well argued and convincing, $F(2, 133) = 2.76, p > .05$. The overall mean score was 5.83 ($SD = 1.72$) indicating that the messages were considered compelling.

The mean score for ethnic self-esteem was high ($M = 7.87, SD = 1.32$) and significantly above the neutral mid-point of the 9-point scale, $t(134) = 24.75, p < .001$. To examine mean differences in ethnic self-esteem, an analysis of variance was conducted with experimental condition as factor. The effect of the experimental condition was not significant, $F(2, 133) = .15, p > .10$. Thus, ethnic self-esteem did not differ across the three conditions.

Well-being: global self-worth

The mean score for global self-worth ($M = 5.68, SD = .83$) was significantly above the 7-point scale, $t(134) = 23.05, p < .001$. Considering the experimental design, differences in self-worth were examined using the general linear model (GLM) univariate procedure. The general linear model is a flexible generalization of regression analysis and analysis of variance and yields similar results (Rutherford, 2001; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Between-subjects analyses were conducted in which experimental condition was included as a factor, and ethnic self-esteem a continuous centered variable. Significant interaction effects were

examined by testing the relationship between ethnic self-esteem and well-being within each of the three experimental conditions.

The effect for experimental condition was not significant ($p > .05$), whereas ethnic self-esteem was positively associated to global self-worth, $F(1, 134) = 10.58, p < .001; r = .27, p = .002$. The interaction effect between experimental condition and ethnic self-esteem was also significant, $F(2, 133) = 4.03, p = .02$. As expected, analyses within the experimental conditions revealed that in the color-blind condition, ethnic self-esteem was not significantly related to global self-worth ($B = -.03, t = .32, p > .10$). In the multicultural condition, higher ethnic self-esteem was related to more positive global self-worth, ($B = .15, t = 2.34, p = .04$). However, and as expected, the strongest association was found in the assimilation condition ($B = .36, t = 3.55, p < .001$). The difference between the latter two correlations was significant, $z\text{-value} = 1.96, p = .045$. The findings are shown in Figure 1.

Discussion

When the ethnic minority participants were faced with an assimilation context, ethnic self-esteem was positively associated with global self-worth. Assimilation undermines minority members ability to live by their ethnic identity whereas this identity is very highly valued by most minority group members (Verkuyten, 2005). High ethnic self-esteem was found in Study 1 and it appears to buffer the effect that assimilation has on well-being. Thus, when the ethnic minority self is undermined it tends to become more central to one's situational well-being and when this self-aspect is evaluated positively it might act as an important contingency of self-worth (e.g., Greene et al., 2006; Mossakowski, 2003).

A similar, but weaker, positive association between ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth was found in the multiculturalism condition. This association has also been found in a previous study in the Netherlands, but only for high group identifiers (Verkuyten, 2009). It

indicates that multiculturalism with its emphasis on recognition of ethnic groups and the acceptance of cultural diversity provides a context in which people with high ethnic self-esteem can feel good about themselves.

In the individualistic color-blind condition, ethnic self-esteem was not associated to feelings of self-worth. In this condition, the emphasis is on individual differences and personal identities rather than on the recognition and acceptance of ethnic group differences. In such a context, personal characteristics and not ethnic group identity is the relevant contingency to base one's global self-feelings upon.

Study 2

A second study was conducted to examine whether these findings were reliable and if they could be generalized to another experimental manipulation and to other measures. There are different ways in which ideological contexts can be manipulated and not all manipulations might have the same effects. The evidence for the proposed process is more convincing and reliable when different manipulations produce the same results. In Study 2, I adopted an experimental questionnaire manipulation that has been used in two other studies in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2005). Furthermore, there was a control condition in addition to the assimilation and the multicultural condition. Thus, the color-blind condition was replaced by a neutral one. The reason is that there was no association between ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth in the color-blind condition and that I wanted to see whether the relationships in the two other conditions differ compared to a situation in which no ideological frame is presented.

The generality of the findings from Study 1 were further examined by using other measures of ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth, and by including general life-satisfaction as an additional indicator of situational well-being. The inclusion of a measure of

general life-satisfaction makes it possible to examine whether the effects involve psychological well-being more generally. Again, I expected that in the assimilation condition, ethnic self-esteem would be more strongly related to global self-worth and to general life-satisfaction than in the other two conditions.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted with 105 students living in the city of Utrecht. The students' were recruited through local contacts and their participation was requested for a research on contemporary social issues. The questionnaire took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The participants received 5 euro for their cooperation. The sample consisted of 105 Turkish-Dutch participants; 58 females and 47 males. All participants were born in the Netherlands or had migrated to this country before the age of five (13% of the sample). No information about the parents was available. The mean age was 22.2, and age ranged between 17 and 29.

Design

I used the experimental procedure as developed in two earlier studies in the Netherlands (see Verkuyten, 2005, for details). There were three different versions of a questionnaire that were divided randomly among the participants. One version focused on assimilationism, another on multiculturalism, and a third control condition focused participants' attention on leisure time. The experimental manipulations were induced in the questionnaire first by its title, which was printed on the first page of the questionnaire and repeated in italics and in bold at the top of every page of the booklet, as well as by a short introduction, and five attitude statements.

The assimilation condition questionnaire was entitled 'Social Cohesion and Assimilation in Society'. The participants were informed that: 'The aim of this study is to find out about people's opinions on the importance of social cohesion and assimilation by ethnic minorities. We would like to know what people in the Netherlands think about cohesion and assimilation. The questions deal with various aspects, but are all about assimilation and social cohesion in society. Their essence is assimilation by minorities and cohesion'. Five statements on assimilation followed on from this introduction. Using a seven-point scale, the participants were asked to indicate to what extent people in Dutch society tend to agree with each statement. The statements were adapted from Berry and Kalin's (1995) Multicultural Ideology Scale. As part of the assimilation priming manipulation, all statements were worded in such a way that they stressed the importance of assimilation of ethnic minorities. The items are, 'people who have chosen to come to the Netherlands should simply adapt to Dutch society', 'paying too much attention to differences between various groups only leads to conflicts', 'ethnic minorities should give up their own identity and 'dutchify' as much as possible', 'minorities should not be allowed to express their identity in cultural life', and 'minorities should assimilate as much as possible'.

The multicultural condition questionnaire was entitled 'The Multicultural Society' and the participants were informed that: 'The aim of this study is to find out about people's opinions on cultural differences and the multicultural society. We would like to know what people in the Netherlands think about multiculturalism. The questions deal with various aspects but are all about the multicultural society. Their essence is multiculturalism'. Five statements on multiculturalism, again taken from Berry and Kalin's (1995) scale, followed on from this introduction and statements were positively worded. The items are 'Minorities should be able to maintain their own culture as much as possible', 'the more different cultures there are in the Netherlands, the better it is', 'every ethnic group is entitled to a culture of its

own', 'in public life everyone should be able to be proud on their culture', and 'multiculturalism is a good thing for the country'.

The third version of the questionnaire was a control condition. The title of this questionnaire was 'Social Developments in Society', and the participants were informed that: 'The aim of this study is to find out about people's opinions on various subjects, such as leisure time'. We would like to know what people in the Netherlands think about the above, as well as about other aspects of life. The questions are diverse, but in essence are all about social developments in Dutch society'. Five statements (using seven-point scales) followed on the introduction about the importance of leisure time (e.g. 'nowadays most people have too little time to do the things they'd like to do', and 'for most people, the day is way too short').

Measures

In all three versions of the questionnaire, ethnic self-esteem was measured using the four items of the private regard subscale of the collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). The alpha was .81. Two sample items are 'I feel good about the ethnic group I belong to', 'In general, I'm glad that I'm a member of my ethnic group'.

Global self-worth was measured with six bipolar scales. Participants were asked to indicate how they felt about 'themselves in general'. The responses were coded on nine-point scales, with higher scores indicating higher global self-worth. The traits used were: positive (negative), (un)satisfied, (in)secure, good (bad), strong (weak), and (un)happy. Alpha was .92.

Life satisfaction was assessed by five items (five-point scales) taken from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). For this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .82

Results

Preliminary results

Global self-worth and life-satisfaction were positively correlated $r = .31, p < .01$, and, similar to Study 1, the experimental manipulation did not have an effect on ethnic self-esteem, $F(2, 103) = .77, p > .10$. The mean score for ethnic self-esteem was significantly above the neutral midpoint of the 7-point scale, $M = 5.71, SD = .93, t(104) = 14.62, p < .001$. The mean score for global self-worth ($M = 7.36, SD = 1.22$) was also significantly above the midpoint of the 9-point scale, $t(104) = 19.70, p < .001$, and the mean score for life-satisfaction was at the positive end of the 5-point scale, $M = 3.77, SD = .61, t(104) = 20.69, p < .001$.

Well-being: global self-worth and general life-satisfaction

Similar to Study 1, a two-way analysis of variance (GLM) was performed with experimental condition as a between-subjects factor and ethnic self-esteem as a centred continuous factor. Global self-worth and general life-satisfaction served as multiple dependent variables. The multivariate effects (Pillai's) for condition, $F(4, 101) = 2.64, p = .035$, and for ethnic self-esteem, $F(2, 103) = 5.71, p = .005$, were significant. These main effects were qualified by the multivariate interaction effect (Pillai's) between experimental condition and ethnic self-esteem, $F(4, 101) = 3.21, p = .014$. Univariate analyses showed a significant interaction effect for global self-worth, $F(2, 103) = 4.36, p = .015$, and for life-satisfaction $F(2, 103) = 3.59, p = .031$. The within-condition analyses revealed that only in the assimilation condition, and similar to Study 1, ethnic self-esteem was significantly related to global self-worth, $B = .65, t = 2.94, p < .01$. No significant relationships were found in the multicultural and in the control conditions ($p_s > .10$). These findings are shown in Figure 2. The result for life-satisfaction was similar: ethnic self-esteem was positively related to life-

satisfaction but only in the assimilation condition, $B = .51$, $t = 5.01$, $p < .001$ ($p_s > .10$ for the other two conditions).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended the findings of Study 1. Despite the different procedures designed to manipulate the ideological context, the key finding is the same: in an assimilation context ethnic minority participants more strongly base their global self-worth on feelings about their ethnic group membership. The same result was found for general life-satisfaction. Thus, in a context that undermines one's ethnic identity, high ethnic self-esteem seems to play an important role in well-being. In the multicultural and the neutral condition, no significant association between ethnic self-esteem and well-being was found.

General Discussion

The purpose of this research was to test the influence of assimilation ideology on the situational well-being of ethnic minority members. Assimilation undermines minority members' ability to live by their ethnic identity and is felt as threatening the ingroup's positive distinctiveness (Brug & Verkuyten, 2007; Wolsko et al., 2006). The main prediction was that an emphasis on assimilation makes ethnic self-esteem a more important contingency for global self-worth and life satisfaction. The results for the two studies are consistent with the predicted interaction between assimilation and ethnic self-esteem. Ethnic self-esteem was positively associated with well-being in the assimilation context. This indicates that assimilation ideology makes the ethnic self more salient and suggests that high ethnic self-esteem can serve to buffer the effects of identity threatening situations and to maintain one's well-being (e.g., Greene, et al., 2006; Mossakowski, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In both studies, the effect of assimilation was compared with that of multicultural recognition. It turned out that in the context of multiculturalism ethnic self-esteem was positively associated with global self-worth, but only in Study 1. Together with similar findings in a previous study in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2009), this result indicates that multicultural recognition can have favorable effects on self-worth for those who have a positive and secure ethnic self. Thus, for ethnic minority members with high ethnic self-esteem, multiculturalism seems to provide a favorable context to feel good about themselves. However, it should be noted that the positive association between ethnic self-esteem and self-worth was not found for multiculturalism in Study 2, and, in Study 1, it was weaker in the multicultural condition compared to the assimilation context. This difference is consistent with the proposition that negative or threatening information (assimilation) is more exceptional and diagnostic and therefore given more attention and weight than positive information (multicultural recognition). Research in different psychological domains has consistently found that unpleasant or harmful outcomes have stronger, larger and more consistent effects than pleasant and beneficial outcomes (see Baumeister et al., 2001). In addition, self-esteem research shows that people are particularly sensitive to negative and threatening outcomes and that they consistently respond to these events in ways that maintain or restore their feelings of self-worth (e.g., Brown & Dutton, 1995; Park & Maner, 2009).

The results of Study 1 show that self-worth was not related to ethnic self-esteem in the individualistic color-blind condition in which the focus is on individual differences and personal identities (see also Verkuyten, 2009). Ethnic identity and group status become relevant for self-feelings when the emphasis is on groups and group identities, as was the case in the assimilation and the multicultural condition. In contrast, group identities can be expected to not contribute to self-worth in a context where the focus is on individual differences and qualities. In such a context, group identities are not salient and the merit of

one's ethnic group is not at stake: the uniqueness of individuals and individual differences are relevant rather than one's ethnic identity.

To evaluate the present results and to give some suggestions for further studies, two points will be raised. First, in this research the relationship between assimilation and well-being was examined by using an experimental design. This makes it possible to assess the causal effects of temporary induced normative frameworks but also raises questions of ecological validity. However, field studies have reported similar contextual findings of ethnic identity salience on well-being (Downie, et al., 2006; Yip, 2005). In addition, research on lay theories has shown that studies that experimentally activate lay theories provide similar findings as when the endorsement of theories are measured by self-report (e.g., Haslam & Ernst, 2002; Verkuyten, 2009).

Second, in this research I focused on ethnic self-esteem but the distinction of this construct with group identification is somewhat blurred. For example, the private subscale of the collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) that was used in Study 2 is also often used to assess ingroup identification (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Further, ingroup identification items or subscales are sometimes treated as part of collective self-esteem scales (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Rubin and Hewstone (1998) point out that separate operationalizations of collective self-esteem and ingroup identification are needed. In the current research the focus was on ethnic self-esteem in terms of feelings for oneself as an ethnic group member. These feelings can differ from the importance attached to one's ethnic identity or the sense of commitment to co-ethnics. Future research is needed to investigate the distinction between ethnic self-esteem and ethnic group identification. This research should also assess whether our findings are specific for high group identifiers because various studies have found that the Turkish-Dutch tend to have high ingroup identification (see Verkuyten, 2005).

In conclusion, the present research shows that higher self-esteem is associated with higher well-being in the assimilation condition. This suggests that ethnic self-esteem is an important factor against assimilationist notions that undermine minority members' ability to live by their ethnic identity and that threaten their group's positive distinctiveness. An emphasis on assimilation appears to make the evaluation of one's ethnic self more important to one's situational well-being. Because most members of ethnic minority groups evaluate this self-aspect positively (Berry, et al., 2006; Verkuyten, 2005) it can act as an important contingency of self-worth. One possible implication that can be addressed in future studies is that minority members with high ethnic self-esteem might have sufficient psychological resources to maintain or enhance their situational well-being following group identity threat. In contrast, minorities with low ethnic self-esteem might be more vulnerable to discourses that argue for dominant group values and require minority groups to abandon their ethnic identity.

The debate on assimilation and multiculturalism continues and in many West European countries there is a clear shift from multiculturalism to assimilation policies (Joppke, 2004). Some social scientists have argued that it is necessary to rethink and rehabilitate assimilation theory as an alternative to multiculturalism (e.g., Alba, & Nee, 1997; Gans, 1999). The evaluation of this debate depends on how assimilation is understood and on the sociological, political, cultural and social psychological outcomes that are considered. Here, I focused on well-being and on assimilation as an ideological framework that argues for the disappearance of minority group identities. This kind of assimilationist thinking threatens the value of ethnic minority identities and the ability to live by one's minority identity. It also justifies the unchanging character of the dominant identity and culture. The result is that people increasingly turn toward their minority ingroup and that their ethnic identity becomes more salient and important for well-being. Furthermore, assimilation will make people more

motivated to reestablish a positive and distinctive minority identity and therefore to show increased levels of ingroup bias. Threats to intergroup distinctiveness will instigate attempts to restore distinctiveness, particularly among those who evaluate their ethnic group membership highly (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). In time, assimilation might slowly happen but from a social psychological perspective it does not seem a promising normative approach for dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity. It makes the ethnic minority self a more important contingency of self-worth and of well-being more generally. This can be functional in coping with negative circumstances but it might also mean that there is less psychological engagement with successes and failures in other domains of life, like academic achievement (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998).

Note

1. The exact wording of the manipulations is available on request. See also Verkuyten (2009).

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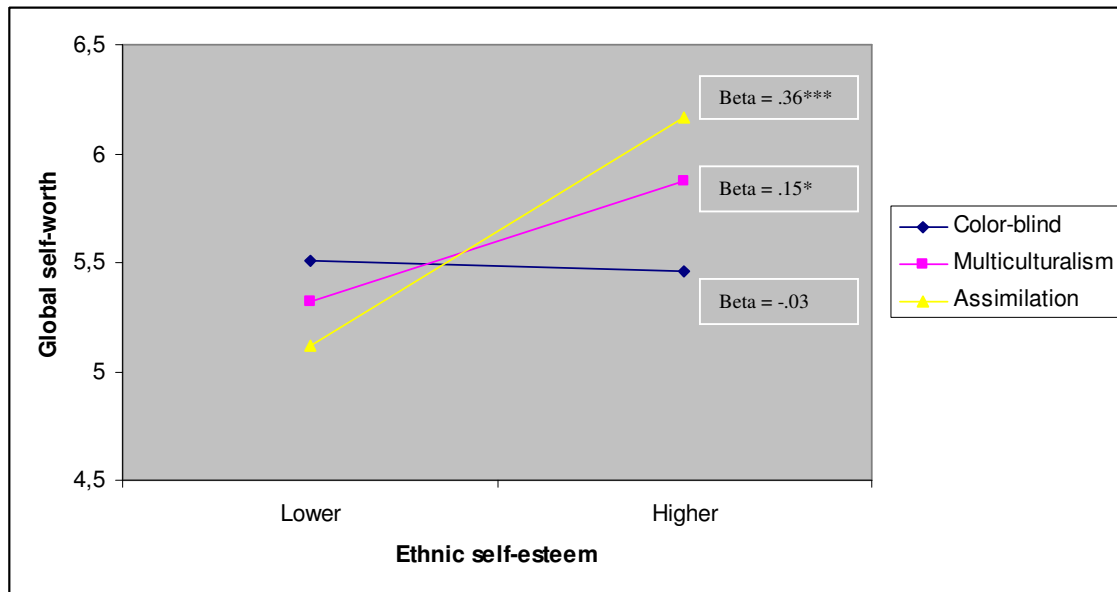


Figure 1. Associations between Global Self-worth (seven-point scale) and Ethnic Self-esteem in Three Experimental Conditions (Color-blind, Multiculturalism, Assimilation), Study 1.

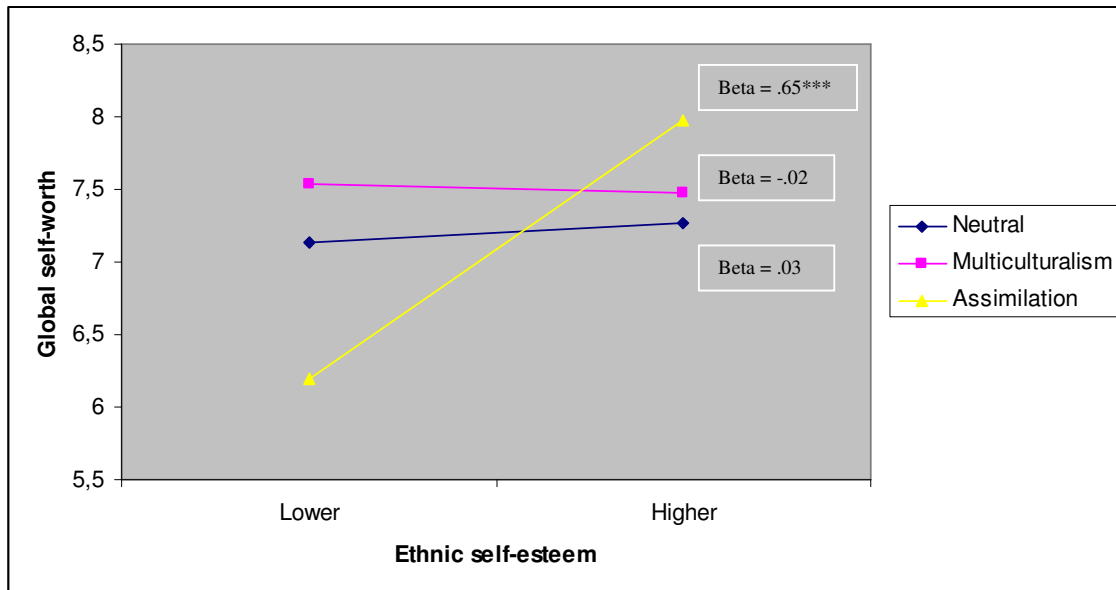


Figure 2. Associations between Global Self-worth (nine-point scale) and Ethnic Self-esteem in Three Experimental Conditions (Neutral, Multiculturalism, Assimilation), Study 2.