Are your cross-ethnic friends ethnic and/or national group identifiers? The role of own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s identities on outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism

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Abstract

We investigated how own ethnic and national identities and perceived ethnic and national identities of close cross-ethnic friends may predict outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism among Turkish (majority status, N = 197) and Kurdish (minority status, N = 80) ethnic group members in Turkey (M_age = 21.12, SD = 2.59, 69.7% females, 30.3% males). Compared with Turkish participants, Kurdish participants were more asymmetrical in rating their cross-ethnic friend’s identities relative to their own, reporting higher ethnic identity, but lower national identity for themselves. Own ethnic identity was negatively associated with attitudes and multiculturalism, whereas own national identity was positively associated with only attitudes. Perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was positively related to both outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. Shared national identification (high levels of own and friend’s national identity) led to most positive outgroup attitudes and highest support for multiculturalism. Findings were discussed in the light of social identity and common ingroup identity models.

Ethnic and National Identities, Outgroup Attitudes, and Multiculturalism

While ethnic identity refers to the degree to which individuals feel closeness to their ethnic group and identify with their ethnic group (Phinney, 1996; Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006), national identity refers to the degree to which individuals feel part of their national groups (Shils, 1995). Both identities become salient especially in societies where prolonged interethnic conflict exists, by representing two independent orientations of identities (Sabatier, 2008). Ethnic and national identities have been often examined by an orthogonal model in which each identity is viewed as a distinct dimension (Berry, 1997). However, these identities are not always compatible and mostly group members have to struggle to combine different aspects of ethnic and national identities by trying to protect their ethno-cultural traditions and values while being a member of the wider society they live in (Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007).
Previous research has shown that both ethnic and national identities were associated with outgroup attitudes, yet this research literature has demonstrated mixed findings providing evidence for distinct theories. On the one hand, social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) stated that individuals strive to become part of groups as a way of affirming their own identities and maintaining a positive social identity would eventually lead to higher levels of personal self-esteem (e.g., Brown, 2000). Ethnic and national identities therefore represent two different forms of group memberships through which individuals are likely to form a positive view of themselves. In line with this, ethnic competition theory (Blalock, 1967) suggested that competition over scarce resources and conflict between groups would foster ethnic ingroup identification through which group members maintain their distinctiveness (e.g., Jetten & Spears, 2003). Therefore, ingroup favoritism, favoring one’s ingroup relative to outgroups in order to maintain a positive personal self-esteem, has been suggested to enhance distinctiveness threat that leads to higher levels of outgroup hostility and more negative outgroup evaluations (Brewer, 1991). Empirical research has shown evidence for this exclusionary effect of social identity theory and demonstrated that higher levels of national identification was related to more negative outgroup attitudes (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004) and lower levels of endorsement of a multiculturalist ideology (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Verkuyten, 2006; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). Similarly, a sense of a strong ethnic identity has been indicated to be substantially related to ingroup preference (Masson & Verkuyten, 1993), stronger vulnerability to discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001), prejudice (Negr, Shreve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003), and negative outgroup attitudes (Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001).

According to the common ingroup identity model (CIIM, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), on the other hand, the process of recategorization among different group members leads to reduced intergroup bias and negative outgroup attitudes. That is, by recategorizing themselves as members of a single inclusive superordinate group, group members are likely to form more personalized and positive perceptions of outgroup members (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). Conceptualizing ethnic and national identities through the basic tenets of CIIM, previous empirical research has shown that holding high levels of ethnic identity combined with high levels of superordinate national identity leads to more positive outgroup evaluations and attitudes, and decreases in perceived conflict (e.g., Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). This literature has demonstrated that both ethnic and national identities were related to positive outgroup attitudes. For example, Phinney et al. (2007) found that ethnic minority status group members with achieved ethnic identity status held more positive outgroup attitudes, because these individuals were able to show greater awareness and understanding of intergroup relations. Phinney, Ferguson and Tate (1997) also 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. Research in national identification showed similar positive associations between national identity and positive outgroup attitudes; high levels of national identification has been found to be related to higher levels of intergroup harmony (Vollhardt, Migacheva, & Tropp, 2009), positive outgroup attitudes (Jasinska-Laihi, Mähönen, & Ketokivi, 2012; Martinez, Calzado, & Martinez, 2011), and endorsement of a multiculturalist ideology (e.g., Asari, Halikiopoulou, & Mock, 2008).

Other research, more specifically the dual identity perspective, has shown that the interplay between the two identities, that is the interaction between ethnic and national identities may be more important as regards outgroup attitudes, rather than the effect of one type of identity per se (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996). Therefore, the mixed findings regarding associations between ethnic and national identities and outgroup attitudes and support for multiculturalism may be explained by differential aspects of identities a person tries to integrate in a multicultural society. Moreover, ethnic group status also seems to influence the way identities relate to outgroup attitudes and behaviors (Verkuyten, 2005). For example, Masson and Verkuyten (1993) found that ethnic identification was associated with higher ingroup bias among ethnic majority status participants, whereas for ethnic minority participants, an achieved ethnic identity may be associated with higher tolerance of outgroups (Phinney et al., 2007) and may function as a protective factor against the negative effects of discrimination on well-being (Lee, 2005). Moreover, how ethnic and national identities relate to outgroup attitudes may be dependent on the context where identities develop. Although both identities are likely to influence outgroup attitudes and behaviors, in socio-political contexts where ethnocultural conflicts exist, different interrelationships between identities and outgroup behaviors may be observed. The current study therefore aimed to reveal how ethnic and national identities are associated with outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism in the unique setting of Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Turkey.

**Cross-Ethnic Friends’ Ethnic and National Identities**

Although individuals’ own ethnic and national identities have been demonstrated to be one of the important determinants of outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism (e.g., Phinney, Cantu, et al., 1997; Sniderman et al., 2004), previous research has not yet investigated whether close others’ ethnic and national identities may also have influences on the evaluation of outgroups. In the current study, we examined this suggestion, focusing particularly on the role of perceived ethnic and national identities of close cross-group
friends on Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members’ outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism in Turkey.

Cross-group friendships, as the strongest form of intergroup contact, do not only improve positive outgroup attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007), they also provide new social skills, increasing resilience and well-being, and fostering perspective-taking between members of different groups (Bagci, Rutland, Kumashiro, Smith, & Blumberg, 2014; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). Compared with mere intergroup contact, cross-group friendships are especially effective in promoting outgroup attitudes, because they provide long-term, intimate, and naturally positive relationships that include interpersonal processes such as self-disclosure and empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Turner et al., 2007) and thereby constitute important opportunities for group members to learn about the outgroup, exchange personal and group-based information, and reevaluate negative outgroup perceptions.

We first aimed to explore how ethnic minority and majority group members perceived their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities relative to their own. That is, we investigated whether participants would be symmetrical/asymmetrical in reporting identities for themselves compared with their cross-ethnic friends. The asymmetry in ratings should occur when participants perceive their own ethnic and/or national identities as either lower or higher compared with their cross-ethnic friend’s identities. Although how group members perceive an outgroup friend’s ethnic and national identity relative to their own has not been previously examined, findings in intergroup research literature have shown that both minority and majority group members display intergroup bias in evaluating outgroup members. For example, ingroup members often show the outgroup homogeneity effect where the outgroup is perceived to be as more homogeneous compared with the ingroup (e.g., Judd & Park, 1988) and the ethnocentrism effect where outgroup members are derogated and ingroup members are favored (e.g., Grant & Brown, 1995; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Previous research has shown that often majority group participants are likely to feel higher levels of threat when interethnic conflict occurs, because they would fear losing their powerful position in the society (Essex, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001), and thereby show more ingroup bias (e.g., Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001; Brewer & Brown, 1998), as well as more negative outgroup attitudes and higher levels of ingroup favoritism compared to the minority group participants (Verkuyten, 2007). Other research has shown that minority group members would display more ingroup bias, because they would try to protect their distinctiveness in a culturally competitive setting (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007), especially when they perceive group differences as unstable (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993). Therefore, it is possible that both group members would perceive their own and their cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic and national identities in different ways and show asymmetry in their perceptions.

We further suggested that along with own ethnic and national identities, perceived cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic and national identities would have influences on group members’ outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. Previous empirical studies have provided evidence for this suggestion. Prior studies demonstrated that meta-perceptions—the perception of what the other group thinks or wants—influence outgroup attitudes such as outgroup prejudice and trust (Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005; Vorauer, Main, & O’Connell, 1998). Struch and Schwartz (1989), for example, showed that people’s negative outgroup attitudes were determined by the extent to which they perceived hostility and conflict from outgroup members. Zagófski, Brown, Broquard, and Martin (2007) demonstrated that the perception of acculturation preferences of ethnic minority group members had an impact on ethnic majority members’ attitudes towards immigrants. The authors showed that outgroup members’ desire for culture maintenance was related to more negative outgroup attitudes among majority group members. Another study by Biernat, Vescio, and Theno (1996) indicated that perceived value violation from the part of the outgroup was associated with negative outgroup judgments among majorities.

Other social experimental research demonstrated that learning about how other group members evaluate the ingroup is an important factor in prejudicial attitudes (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994). Gómez, Dovidio, Huici, Gaertner, and Cuadrado (2008) explored whether perceptions of outgroup members’ common identities led to lower intergroup bias and found that the recategorization of other group members’ membership was significantly related to participants’ own intergroup bias. Overall, these findings suggest that along with own ethnic and national identities, the perception of the extent to which close cross-ethnic friends identify with their ethnic and national groups is likely to predict outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism.

We also aimed to examine whether own and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities would interact in various ways. Prior empirical research has shown the importance of similarity-dissimilarity approach in intergroup relationships, such that people often display higher levels of liking for outgroup members who share similar cultural values and beliefs (e.g., Duckitt, Callaghan, & Wagner, 2005). Hence, similarity-attraction hypothesis suggested that people are attracted to the other ones on the basis of similarities in opinions, attitudes, abilities, emotional states (e.g., Fehr, 2001), and personality traits (Morry, 2005). Further research demonstrated that the relative fit between immigrant and host society’s acculturation strategies were influential on outgroup attitudes (Zagefka & Brown, 2002). Therefore, it is possible that in addition to own and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national
identities per se, the interaction between identities, that is the combination of how the person perceives his/her own ethnic and national identity and how he/she perceives identities of a close other from another ethnic group, may have an overall impact on outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism.

The Context

The current study took place in Turkey where interethnic relationships between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups have politically and socially deteriorated in the last two decades. Although the Kurdish group constitutes the largest ethnic minority group in Turkey (18% of the population; KONDA, 2011), Turkish State’s nationalist and assimilationist policies over years have led Kurdish people to become a historically oppressed ethno-cultural group (Mutlu, 1996; Yegen, 1996). The Kurdish-Turkish conflict in Turkey is now an intractable one especially since July 2015 when violence between the Turkish State and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) resumed after a period of two and a half year cease-fire. Recent studies in Turkey have shown that there is increased intergroup distrust between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups (Seta/Pollmark, 2009), which is further reinforced by the recently emerging anti-Kurdish discourse in different aspects of social life, including social media and daily life (Bora, 2006; Saracoğlu, 2009).

Previously, few research papers have focused on national and ethnic identities of Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members in relation to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. Among these, Bilali (2014) investigated associations between ethnic and national identification and conflict construals of Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members and found that national identification was related to similar conflict construals among ethnic minority and majority group members, whereas ethnic identification was associated with opposing conflict construals that served to maintain intergroup conflict. The author concluded that in assimilationist cultures such as Turkey, a shared national identification may reduce interethnic conflict and improve intergroup relationships. In the same study, the author also found that while ethnic and national identification was strongly correlated among the Turkish sample, these identities were not associated with each other among the Kurdish sample, demonstrating how different types of identities may develop independently among ethnic minorities. Other research has indicated that the superordinate Turkish state discourse has undermined the existence of Kurdish identity, and in fact, the assimilationist state policies over the years have reinforced the creation of distinct Kurdish and Turkish identities (Saatci, 2002; Yegen, 1996). More recent research has shown that both Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members hold negative outgroup stereotypes that are likely to play a role in the deterioration of intergroup attitudes and the perpetuation of interethnic conflict at the political and societal levels (Bilali, Çelik, & Ok, 2014).

The Current Study

In summary, the current study examined own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities in the context of Turkish-Kurdish intergroup relations. We first aimed to investigate whether ethnic minority and majority group members would show any asymmetry in reporting their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities relative to their own. Most critically, we tested whether own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s identities, as well as the interaction between own and cross-ethnic friend’s identities, would predict outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism.

We extended prior research in intergroup relations in several ways. First, although ethnic and national identities have been previously studied in relation to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism (e.g., Masson & Verkuyten, 1993; Sniderman et al., 2004), these have been rarely examined in the context of prolonged interethnic conflict such as Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Turkey (Bilali, 2014; Çelebi, Verkuyten, & Smyrnioti, 2015; Dixon & Ergin, 2010). Although Turkish-Kurdish interethnic conflict has been a socio-political issue in Turkey since 1990s, interpersonal and intergroup relationships between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups have become even more unstable in the last decade, due to inconsistent peace-war periods between PKK and the Turkish State and the failure of the State’s initiatives in granting rights to Kurdish ethnic group (Çelik, 2012). Ethnic and national identities are therefore likely to become more or less salient during these different periods, which require up-to-date research studies to fully understand the role of ethnic and national identification on Turkish-Kurdish interethnic relationships.

Second, intergroup relations research has provided information about how the perception of outgroup members’ common ingroup identification (e.g., Gómez et al., 2008) and acculturation preferences (Zagefka et al., 2007) have impacts on intergroup attitudes; however, previous research has not yet considered whether perceived outgroup members’—specifically close cross-ethnic friends’—ethnic and national identities may have influences on outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. While previous research has focused on how participants evaluated other group members’ identification or acculturation strategies in general, we used close cross-group friendships as mechanisms through which participants perceive and understand outgroup members at the individual level. By providing an understanding of matching and non-matching identities in cross-ethnic friendships in which both group members engage in various interpersonal processes such as mutual self-disclosure and perspective-taking (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), this study reveals how outgroup attitudes may be formed through the influence of interpersonal relationships between different ethnic group members.

We first suggested that both Turkish and Kurdish participants would show an asymmetry in rating their cross-ethnic friend’s identities compared to their own, because it was shown that both minority and majority
status members are likely to display differences in the evaluation of the outgroup, regardless of group status (e.g., Brown, 2000). Research in the Turkish-Kurdish intergroup research literature has shown that both ethnic minority and majority status members are likely to show ingroup serving bias (e.g., Çelebi, Verkuyten, Köse, & Maliepaard, 2014) and hold negative outgroup stereotypes (Bilali et al., 2014). Therefore, it was hypothesized that both ethnic group members would perceive differently their own and their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities (Hypothesis 1).

In relation to own ethnic and national identities, two rival hypotheses have been tested. Based on SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it is possible that ethnic and national identification would be negatively related to positive attitudes and endorsement of a multiculturalist ideology (Hypothesis 2a). Based on CIIM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), on the other hand, it is possible that dual identities—high ethnic and national identification—would lead to more positive attitudes and multiculturalism (Hypothesis 2b). Similarly, regarding cross-ethnic friend’s identities, two scenarios are plausible. Based on distinctiveness threat theory and SIT, higher levels of perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities are likely to result in higher levels of perceived threat and thereby lead to more negative attitudes and lower levels of endorsement of a multicultural ideology (Hypothesis 3a). On the contrary, based on CIIM, higher levels of perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities would provide an integrationist outgroup attitude that would imply dual identities and would be associated with more positive outgroup attitudes and higher levels of multiculturalism (Hypothesis 3b).

Most critically, it was hypothesized that own and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities would interact. Based on both distinctiveness threat theory and SIT, we suggested that when participants report matching ethnic identities (when both own and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identities are low or high), own ethnic identity would be positively related to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism, while both groups can protect their distinctiveness by simultaneously affirming or not affirming their ethnic identities (Hypothesis 4). However, in terms of national identities, a CIIM approach, where cross-ethnic friends share similar higher levels of national identities as an inclusive category, seems more plausible. Therefore, we suggested that shared higher national identities would predict more positive outgroup attitudes and higher endorsement of multiculturalism (Hypothesis 5).

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

Initially, a total of 536 participants were recruited for the study (59.7% Turkish, 28.5% Kurdish, and 11.8% other ethnic group). Because for the current study, we were exclusively interested in Kurdish-Turkish inter-ethnic relationships, which are relatively more problematic compared with other interethnic relationships in Turkey, we excluded participants from other ethnic minority groups, which resulted in a total of 473 participants. Moreover, because we were concentrated on cross-ethnic friendships between the Turkish and Kurdish groups, we only included participants who reported a Kurdish/Turkish cross-ethnic friend as their best cross-ethnic friend in our cross-ethnic friendship assessment (participants were asked: “Please indicate your closest friend from another ethnic group and write their ethnic group”). Therefore, we excluded participants with no cross-ethnic friends (8.4% of the Turkish group and 11.8% of the Kurdish group), as well as the ones who reported having a best cross-ethnic friend from an ethnic group other than Kurdish/Turkish (30% of the Turkish group and 35.9% of the Kurdish group), resulting in a total of 277 participants (197 Turkish and 80 Kurdish, M_{age} = 21.12, SD = 2.59; 69.7% females and 30.3% males). Previous research has shown cross-ethnic friendships to be of lower quality, to be less stable, and intimate than same-ethnic friendships (e.g., Shelton, Trail, West, & Bergezieker, 2010); therefore, we focused only on best Turkish-Kurdish cross-ethnic friendships to examine intimate and high quality cross-ethnic friendships, which are more likely to provide opportunities for sharing information about ethnic and national identities.

Research assistants distributed questionnaires to students in various universities located in different cities in the Western and Eastern parts of Turkey. Students completed pen and paper questionnaires in the university setting (in lecture theatres). Ethical clearance was obtained from the affiliated universities of the authors, and all participants were given informed consents and debriefing forms. Because the questionnaires included questions that may be considered sensitive especially among the Kurdish sample, it was emphasized to participants that they could withdraw from the study any time they felt uncomfortable. The completion of the questionnaire took 20 minutes.

**Measures**

**Control variables.** We took into account a number of control variables in the study. First, we included demographic variables such as socio-economic status (SES), age, and gender in the models. SES was included, because previous research has shown that SES differences are influential in negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., Halperin, Pedahzur, & Canetti-Nisim, 2007). We used a subjective SES measure that asked participants to report their own SES on a scale that ranged from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). Next, we accounted for age, which has been found to have an impact on outgroup attitudes. It has been demonstrated that negative outgroup attitudes increase significantly with age (e.g., Stewart, von Hippel, & Radavansky, 2009). Finally, we included gender as a potential variable, based on previous findings demonstrating the effect of gender on outgroup attitudes (e.g., Brown, Vivian, & Hewstone, 1999).
To control for ethnic diversity, we used a measure of “ethnic composition” that assessed whether the Kurdish group formed the numerical minority or majority based on the city participants lived in. The Eastern and Western parts of Turkey have totally different ethnic compositions; while in the West, Kurdish people are numerical minorities, in some of the Southeastern cities, the Kurdish group is the numerically dominant group. 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.

Moreover, we included “friendship quality” as a potential variable that could account for the associations between cross-ethnic friends’ identities and outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism, because these associations may be stronger when the quality of cross-ethnic friendships increases. The quality of cross-ethnic friendships was measured by the composite score of two questions assessing how frequently participants interacted with their cross-ethnic friends ranging from 1 (not frequently at all) to 7 (very frequently) and how close they felt to their friends ranging from 1 (not close at all) to 7 (very close). This assessment has been previously used in the literature (Bagci et al., 2014).

**Ethnic group.** 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).

**Own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities.** Participants were asked to respond to two sets of ethnic and national identity scales. They were first asked to report their best cross-ethnic friend and then rate how they perceived their cross-ethnic friend to belong to one of the national/cultural groups (R). The response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was satisfactory with a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .78.

**Multiculturalism.** Five items adapted from Verkuyten (2007) assessed how much participants endorsed a multiculturalist ideology. Example items were: “I can learn a lot from other ethnic/cultural groups” and “It is never easy to understand people from another ethnic/cultural group (R)”.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are presented in Table 1. The mean closeness with cross-ethnic friends was 3.69 (SD = 1.25) and the mean interaction with cross-ethnic friends was 3.44 (SD = 1.36). The mean composite score of cross-ethnic friendship quality was 3.57 (SD = 1.22). Preliminary analyses demonstrated that the Kurdish group had marginally significantly higher quality cross-ethnic friendships (M = 3.76, SD = 1.21) compared to the Turkish group (M = 3.49, SD = 1.22), t(274) = −1.74, p = .08.

**Ethnic and National Identities Across Ethnic Group and Identity Source**

We conducted a 2 (ethnic group: minority vs. majority) × 2 (source of identity: own vs. cross-ethnic friend) × 2 (identity type: ethnic vs. national identity) mixed between-within subjects design ANOVA test to examine whether Turkish and Kurdish participants would differentially rate their own and their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities. Findings showed that there was a significant main effect of ethnic group, F(1, 268) = 10.12, p < .01, η² = .04; overall Turkish participants reported higher identification levels than the Kurdish group. There was no significant main effects of identity source or identity type, F(1, 268) = .09, p > .05, η² = .001 and F(1268) = .28, p > .05, η² = .001, respectively. However, there were significant interactions between ethnic group and source of identity and ethnic group and identity type. Findings demonstrated that in general the Turkish group assigned higher levels of identification to their own compared with their friends (M = 3.80, SD = 1.03 and M = 3.44, SD = .77, respectively), whereas the Kurdish group reported lower ratings for their own identities (M = 3.12, SD = .81) compared to their cross-ethnic friend’s identities (M = 3.44, SD = 1.14), F(1, 268) = 26.05, p < .001, η² = .09. Moreover, ethnic group interacted with identity type, F(1, 268) = 59.30, p < .001, η² = .18, such that the Turkish group reported higher levels of national identification (M = 3.90, SD = .95) compared with ethnic identification (M = 3.33, SD = 1.01), whereas the Kurdish group reported higher levels of ethnic identification (M = 3.03, SD = .82) compared to their cross-ethnic friend’s identification (M = 2.30, SD = 1.17).
identification \( (M = 3.56, SD = 1.02) \) compared with national identification \( (M = 2.94, SD = 1.13) \). Source of identity also interacted with identity type, \( F(1, 268) = 73.23, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .22 \); overall, participants perceived higher levels of own ethnic identity \( (M = 3.62, SD = 1.23) \) than their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identity \( (M = 3.21, SD = 1.27) \); whereas they reported lower levels of national identification for themselves \( (M = 3.59, SD = 1.47) \) compared with their cross-ethnic friends \( (M = 3.67, SD = 1.26) \). This was further moderated by ethnic group, \( F(1, 268) = 132.91, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .33 \). The three-way interaction between ethnic group, source of identity, and identity type showed that the asymmetry in the ratings occurred in relation to both ethnic and national identities among the Kurdish group, whereas the Turkish group was asymmetrical in their ratings concerning only national identities. Figure 1 displays own and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities among both groups.

### Multiple Regressions

Two multiple regression models were run to predict positive outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism endorsement. While SES, age, gender, ethnic composition, ethnic group, and perceived friendship quality were entered as control variables, own and friend’s identities were entered as main predictors, along with the interaction terms of own x cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identity and own x cross-ethnic friend’s national identity. Simple slopes were further plotted with \(-1\) and \(+1\) standard deviation values of the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991).

#### Outgroup attitudes

The model predicting outgroup attitudes explained 27% of the variance in the dependent variable, \( F(11, 256) = 7.90, p < .001 \). Among the control variables, friendship quality was significantly and positively associated with positive outgroup attitudes \( (β = .13, p < .05) \). Both own and friend’s ethnic and national identities were significantly related to positive outgroup attitudes. While own ethnic identity was negatively related to outgroup attitudes \( (β = –.31, p < .001) \), own national identity was positively related to attitudes \( (β = .39, p < .001) \) and was the strongest determinant of this outcome. Regarding perceived cross-ethnic friend’s identities, both ethnic and national identities were positively associated with attitudes \( (β = .13 \text{ and } β = .14 \text{ respectively, both } p < .05) \).
Moreover, the interaction between own and cross-ethnic friend’s national identities were significant ($\beta = .12$, $p = .05$). Further simple slope tests indicated that among low national identifiers, cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was not significantly associated with more positive attitudes, $t = .98$, $p > .05$. However, among high national identifiers, cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was strongly and positively associated with attitudes, $t = 4.96$, $p < .001$. See Figure 2 for the interaction effect.

**Multiculturalism.** The model predicting multiculturalism was significant, $F(11, 256) = 3.20$, $p < .001$ and explained 13% of the variance in the outcome variable. Among control variables, ethnic group had a significant effect ($\beta = –.22$, $p < .05$). Kurdish participants had higher support for multiculturalism compared with Turkish participants. Own ethnic identity, but not national identity, had a negative relationship with multiculturalism ($\beta = –.28$, $p < .001$). Among cross-ethnic friend’s identities, a higher level of perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was positively associated with multiculturalism ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). A further interaction was observed between own and cross-ethnic friend’s national identities. Simple slope analyses showed that lower national identifiers experienced a decrease in multiculturalism when perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was higher, $t = –2.07$, $p < .05$. However, among high identifiers, own national identity increased multiculturalism with higher levels of perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity, $t = 1.79$, $p = .07$. Figure 3 illustrates this interaction. Table 2 demonstrates multiple regression models.\(^1\)

Additional analyses were run by adding the two-way interactions between ethnic group status and own ethnic and national identity and ethnic group status and cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identity. We also added the three-way interactions of ethnic group x own ethnic identity x cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identity and ethnic group x own national identity x cross-ethnic friend’s national identity in the models.

\(^1\)Additional regression models excluding control variables demonstrated that the significant results were intact after the exclusion of control variables.

However, these interaction terms did not add significant changes to the models; both three-way interaction coefficients were non-significant in relation to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism and explained the variance by less than 1%; therefore, they were not included in final regression models.

**Discussion**

The current study aimed to examine own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities among Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members in Turkey. Specifically, we investigated whether participants would display any asymmetry in rating their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities relative to their own. Most importantly, we sought to understand whether, along with own ethnic and national identities, perceived levels of cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic and national identities would be associated with positive outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. Findings demonstrated that Turkish participants were less asymmetrical than Kurdish participants in reporting their own and cross-ethnic friend’s identities. While the Turkish group indicated similar levels of ethnic identity for their own and their friends from the outgroup, the Kurdish group attributed higher levels of ethnic identity to themselves than to their cross-ethnic friends. Regarding national identities, the Turkish group assigned lower levels of national identity to their Kurdish friends, whereas the Kurdish group assigned higher levels of national identity to their Turkish friends. Moreover, own ethnic identities were negatively related to both outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism, whereas own national identity was positively related to attitudes, but not to multiculturalism. Concerning friend’s identities, perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identity was positively related to attitudes, while perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was positively related to both outcomes. Findings further indicated that high national group identifiers reported more positive outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism when perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identity was also higher.

In relation to the first research question of this study, which examined whether Turkish and Kurdish participants would report different levels of ethnic and
national identities for their cross-ethnic friends compared with their own, findings showed that Turkish participants were only asymmetrical in their ratings in terms of national identities, whereas asymmetries in ratings were much more pronounced among the Kurdish group and were relevant for both identity types, providing partial evidence for Hypothesis 1. This is an expected result taking into account the current socio-political context in Turkey where interethnic conflict has gradually increased in recent years. Recent psychological research on conflict perception has shown that intergroup relationships between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic group members are generally negative, shown by high levels of intergroup distrust, as well as negative outgroup evaluations and stereotypes between both ethnic groups (Çelebi et al., 2014). Therefore, in such a context, it is possible that both groups would show bias in their ratings.

Moreover, significant ethnic group differences emerged. The Kurdish group, but not the Turkish group, seemed to be asymmetrical in rating ethnic identities by assigning significantly higher levels of ethnic identities to themselves compared with their friends. This indicated that ethnic minorities perceived themselves to be more affirmative of their ethnic identities compared with members of outgroups. This fits previous research that has shown ethnic minority group members to be more affirmative around their ethnic group to protect their distinctiveness (e.g., Brewer, 1999), and in fact, previous research has shown that ethnic minority groups usually report higher levels of ethnic identification compared with ethnic majority groups (Verkuyten, 2005).

On the other hand, the Kurdish group perceived themselves to have lower national identity compared to their friends, whereas the Turkish group seemed to view themselves, to a lesser extent, higher in national identity compared with their friends. This implies that ethnic minority status members evaluated themselves as ethnically more distinct, but less assimilated compared with ethnic majority status members. Because the assimilation policies in Turkey have led the Kurdish group to be a repressed ethnic minority group (e.g., Yegen, 1996), this group members may in fact react against forming strong national identities. Previous research among Turkish and Kurdish participants showed a similar pattern (Bilali, 2014); the Kurdish group reported higher levels of ethnic identity, but lower levels of national identity, whereas the Turkish group reported higher levels of national identity, but lower levels of ethnic identity. Other research from Western socio-political contexts also showed that minorities may display higher ingroup bias compared with majorities. African Americans, for example, were found to report higher outgroup homogeneity compared to White Americans who did not show any significant intergroup bias (Judd, Park, Ryan, Brauer, & Kraus, 1995). According to Brauer (2001), this shows the “inferiority effect” which states that low status group members would have more biased perceptions of the outgroups compared with high status group members. Overall, these findings showed the Kurdish group to be more asymmetrical towards evaluating their cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities relative to their own.

In line with Hypothesis 2a, which predicted that higher identification with the ingroup would lead to less positive outgroup attitudes based on SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), we found ethnic identities to be related to less positive outgroup attitudes and lower levels of endorsement of a multicultural ideology. This fits previous research literature showing ethnic identification to be related to negative outgroup evaluation (e.g., Masson & Verkuyten, 1993), but contrasts research showing ethnic identity to be positively related to outgroup attitudes through a higher understanding and awareness of outgroups (e.g., Phinney et al., 2007). The fact that we found own ethnic identities detrimental for positive intergroup relationships is possibly due to the socio-political context of Turkey where interethnic conflict has gradually increased in recent years. Higher levels of ethnic identification may

|Table 2. Multiple regression models predicting outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism |
|---|---|
| | Outgroup attitudes | Multiculturalism |
| **Age** | -.06 (.02) | -.05 (.02) |
| **Gender** | -.04 (.13) | .01 (.10) |
| **SES** | -.04 (.06) | .01 (.05) |
| **Ethnic composition** | -.06 (.20) | .02 (.15) |
| **Ethnic group** | -.05 (.19) | -.22 (.15)* |
| **Friendship quality** | -.13 (.04)* | -.10 (.03) |
| **Own ethnic identity** | -.31 (.05)*** | -.28 (.04)*** |
| **Own national identity** | .39 (.06)*** | -.01 (.04) |
| **CE friend’s ethnic identity** | .13 (.05)* | .08 (.04) |
| **CE friend’s national identity** | .14 (.05)* | .15 (.04)* |
| **Own X CE friend’s ethnic identity** | -.01 (.05) | -.01 (.04) |
| **Own X CE friend’s national identity** | .12 (.06)* | .15 (.05)* |
| **Model fit** | \( R(11256) = 7.90** * R^2 = .27 \) | \( R(11256) = 3.20** * R^2 = .13 \) |

Note. CE = Cross-ethnic; SES = socio-economic status. Standardized coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses) were presented.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.
worsen intergroup relationships especially in the context of high interethnic conflict where affirming ethnic identities may provide ways to maintain ingroup distinctiveness (e.g., Brewer, 1999). Previous research has shown that ingroup identification led to negative intergroup relationships, especially when the level of conflict was high (e.g., Struch & Schwartz, 1989). Evidence in the Turkish literature provided similar results, such that for both Turkish and Kurdish group members, ethnic identification was negatively related to outgroup trust (Celebi et al., 2014).

On the other hand, supporting Hypothesis 2b, which was derived from the CIIM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), higher national identification was positively associated with outgroup attitudes. The positive influence of national identity as a superordinate category on outgroup attitudes has been previously demonstrated in this literature (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2012). These findings are critical showing the negative influence of ethnic identification and the positive role of national identification on outgroup attitudes in a country where interethnic conflict has been a socio-political problem over years. Higher levels of ethnic identities may therefore increase the perception of conflict and threat among groups and thereby trigger negative attitudes, while a common ingroup identity such as national identification may provide benefits for the formation of positive outgroup attitudes. Consistent with these findings, previous research in Turkey demonstrated that higher levels of shared national identification led the Turkish and Kurdish groups to have similar conflict construals and thereby fostered intergroup harmony, while ethnic identification was related to opposing conflict construals that increased the perception of conflict (Bilali, 2014).

Concerning cross-ethnic friends’ identities, the perception of a high national identity in cross-ethnic friends was related to better outgroup attitudes and higher multiculturalism, supporting Hypothesis 3b and the CIIM. This is a promising finding especially within the current setting where anti-Kurdish beliefs are widespread (Dixon & Ergin, 2010) and intergroup trust is generally low (Seta/Pollmark, 2009). In line with this, previous empirical research has shown that perceived integrationist attitudes of outgroup members often result in better outgroup attitudes. For example, Zagufka et al. (2007) found that perceived outgroup members’ preference for intergroup contact was related to less negative outgroup attitudes, which was in turn related to ingroup willingness to integrate. So when close cross-ethnic friends imply the willingness to identify with a common ingroup identity and be part of a unified group, participants may perceive this as a positive attitude towards their ingroups and thereby show reciprocally positive outgroup attitudes (Zagufka et al., 2007).

Higher levels of both ethnic and national identities of cross-ethnic friends were related to more positive outgroup attitudes, showing that when close outgroup members displayed a dual identity, that is both high levels of ethnic and national identities, participants were likely to show more positive outgroup attitudes. It is interesting that although own ethnic identity was negatively associated with attitudes, perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic identity was positively related to outgroup attitudes. This is contrary to previous research which found that culture maintenance of outgroup members was related to more negative outgroup attitudes (Zagufka et al., 2007). One reason for this counterintuitive finding may be that the perception of high levels of ethnic identity in cross-ethnic friends may increase the salience of ethnic group differences. While cross-ethnic friends’ national identities may imply high levels of integration, high levels of cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic identity may also be beneficial in the formation of positive outgroup attitudes, because these identities would imply the distinctiveness of participants’ own ethnic groups. In line with this, Zagufka, González, and Brown (2011) found that perceived integration of outgroup members (assigned by high culture maintenance and outgroup contact) was related to more positive outgroup attitudes among ethnic minority participants in Chile.

As regards the interaction between own and cross-ethnic friend’s identities, it was predicted that matching ethnic identities, that is low or high levels of own and friend’s ethnic identities, would increase positive outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism (Hypothesis 4), but we failed to find such an interaction effect. However, we found that national identities significantly interacted such that higher levels of national identities in both parties led to most positive attitudes and highest endorsement of multiculturalism (Hypothesis 5). This showed substantial evidence for the CIIM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), demonstrating the positive impact of shared national identities on positive intergroup relationships, which has been previously demonstrated in the literature (Vollhardt et al., 2009). Therefore, shared national identification among cross-ethnic friends is likely to produce positive effects for outgroup attitudes and the endorsement of a multiculturalist ideology.

We also found that when the perception of cross-ethnic friend’s national identity increased, low national group identifiers actually experienced a significant decrease in multiculturalism. This suggests that when group members’ own superordinate identity was low, the other group member’s willingness to integrate and affirm national identities may provide a sense of perceived ingroup threat and therefore lead to lower support for multiculturalism (Brewer, 1991). These findings are partly in line with previous research conducted among high school students which demonstrated that students who learned that outgroup members identified with a superordinate group membership showed more negative outgroup attitudes, except when ingroup members also identified with a superordinate identification (Gómez et al., 2008). Hence, national identification seems to be beneficial for positive attitudes and multiculturalism, only when it is a shared common ingroup identification with members of both groups.
Limitations and Future Research

We need to state a number of limitations of the current study. First of all, we measured cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic and national identities by a subjective assessment based on the perception of participants. Although we focused on best cross-ethnic friendships in which interpersonal processes such as self-disclosure and empathy are likely to develop (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) and thereby both group members are likely to self-disclose about their ethnic and national identities, some participants may not have an accurate perception of their cross-ethnic friends’ identities, because it is possible that some group members may hold high levels of ethnic and national identities, but may not be affirmative about these identities at all. Further research may use dyadic research designs to examine simultaneously how both parties perceive their own identities in cross-ethnic friendships. Relatedly, ethnic identity, for example, has been suggested to be a multidimensional construct, which has been conceptualized to have different components such as identity exploration and commitment (Phinney, 1990). In the current study, we were only able to consider ethnic and national identities as unidimensional constructs; future research may examine how different dimensions of ethnic and national identities in cross-ethnic friendships may relate to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism.

We further need to take into account the sociocultural context of the study in generalizing current findings to other contexts. The Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey has been an oppressed ethno-cultural group over years (Mutlu, 1996). For example, although some minority rights have been granted to Kurdish people, the use of Kurdish language in educational settings is still prohibited (Minority Rights Group International, 2015), while anti-Kurdish discourses have been recently used widely in popular media (Bora, 2006). This may explain why the Turkish group did not perceive their Kurdish friends to have a high ethnic identity, because Kurdish group members may be reluctant to affirm their identities in their friendships because of the fear of discrimination. Such antagonist views of the Kurdish ethnic group in media have portrayed the Kurdish as a stigmatized group (Bora, 2006), which may have led this ethnic group members to become less publicly affirmative of their ethnic identities. Another related avenue may be examining perceived identities of same-ethnic friends compared with cross-ethnic friends; it is possible that individuals in same-ethnic friendships would be more symmetrical in perceiving their own and their friends’ ethnic and national identities. Further research may investigate how different types of relationships may lead to differential perceptions of own and others’ ethnic and national identities.

Furthermore, in Turkey, the term “Turk” or “Turkish” is used interchangeably to refer to the ethnicity and nationality of Turkish individuals and the state’s assimilationist policies of minority groups over years have led different ethnic minority group members to unify under the “Turkish citizenship.” Although the national identity scale emphasized Turkish nationality and citizenship as an inclusive category, for Turkish people, national identity may be viewed as part of an ethnic group identification rather than an inclusive identification (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007), while for the Kurdish participants, national identity is more likely to be considered an inclusive category.

In terms of methodological issues, one main problem was the inclusion of participants who reported a Turkish/Kurdish cross-ethnic friend as their best cross-ethnic friends. This assessment of Turkish-Kurdish cross-ethnic friendships challenges the findings of the study to some extent, because we had to include participants who already reported a close cross-ethnic friend; therefore these participants may be somehow more positive towards outgroups compared with the ones with no Turkish/Kurdish cross-ethnic friend, based on intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Another methodological point was the relatively low reliability of the multiculturalism scale and the fact that this scale measured general multiculturalism towards different ethnic/cultural groups, rather than specific Turkish/Kurdish outgroups. Future research should use more appropriate measures of multiculturalism within this context.

Conclusions

The current research shed light upon how ethnic minority and majority status group members perceived their own and their cross-ethnic friends’ ethnic and national identities in a socio-political context characterized by prolonged interethnic conflict. Moreover, we examined whether own and perceived cross-ethnic friend’s ethnic and national identities would relate to positive outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism. Findings demonstrated that participants, especially Kurdish ethnic group members, were asymmetrical in rating their cross-ethnic friend’s identities relative to their own such that they indicated higher ethnic identity, but lower national identity for themselves compared with their cross-ethnic friends. In addition, we found that, along with own ethnic and national identities, how one perceives a close cross-ethnic group member’s identity may also influence attitudes. We demonstrated that own ethnic identities were negatively associated with outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism, whereas cross-ethnic friend’s national identities were positively related to both outcomes. Moreover, the association between national identification and positive attitudes was strengthened when perceived cross-ethnic friend’s national identification was also higher, which provided substantial evidence for the CIIM. Further research should be conducted to reveal which processes may explain how and when the associations between own and cross-ethnic friends’ identities relate to outgroup attitudes and multiculturalism.
References


