

Multiculturalism and Attitudes Toward Immigrants: The Impact of Perceived Cultural Distance

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Abstract

Multiculturalism can be construed in different ways with different effects on majority members' attitudes toward immigrant-origin groups. Thinking about *why* the broad goals of multiculturalism are important for society might reduce feelings of outgroup threat and less prejudicial attitudes. In contrast, thinking about *how* exactly these goals can be accomplished might evoke feelings of threat that lead to prejudice. The aim of this experimental research conducted in France and the Netherlands was to examine the effect of these two construals of multiculturalism of attitudes toward immigrants and whether these effects depend on perceived cultural distance. The findings show that a focus on why multiculturalism is important for society is more beneficial for attitudes toward immigrant-origin groups for people perceiving relatively high cultural distance. In contrast, a focus on how the goals of multiculturalism can be accomplished has a more detrimental effect on attitudes for people perceiving relatively low cultural distance.

Keywords

multiculturalism, cultural distance, intergroup relations/prejudice, perceived threat, cultural psychology

European countries are increasingly culturally diverse and are seeking new ideas on ways to manage this diversity. One important issue to consider is the perceived cultural distance between immigrant-origin groups and the majority population. Cultural distance between social groups has been proposed as an important factor for negative intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954). Immigrants with different cultural worldviews are often regarded as a threat to the culture and identity of the majority group, which in turn results in prejudicial attitudes and discrimination (González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008).

However, high cultural distance is not systematically linked to prejudice (Mahfud, Badea, & N'gbala, 2015). Moreover, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people are motivated to perceive their ingroup as distinctive from other groups to maintain a clear distinction between "us" and "them." Low perceived cultural distance implies low intergroup distinctiveness

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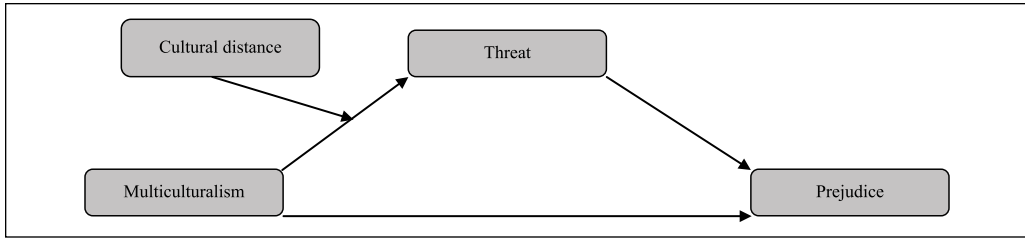


Figure 1. Expected moderated mediation effect of multiculturalism on prejudice.

which undermines the ingroup identity and therefore instigates attempts to restore ingroup distinctiveness. In other words, low cultural distance is threatening and leads to “reactive distinctiveness” which can take the form of negative outgroup attitudes and behaviors (see Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Prejudice toward ethnic minority groups is a way of reclaiming positive social identity in both cases of perceived high and low cultural distance between immigrant-origin minorities and majority group.

Thus, the management of the perceived cultural distance between immigrants and the majority group become an important issue in many countries. The endorsement of multiculturalism has been found to decrease the negative impact of perceived cultural distance on prejudice against minority groups (e.g., Guan, Verkuyten, Fung, Bond, Chan, & Chen, 2011; Mahfud et al., 2015). Nevertheless, some social psychological research demonstrates that multiculturalism can also lead to lower acceptance of outgroups (see Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Rattan & Ambady, 2013, for reviews), and that the outcome depends on, for example, the level of intergroup conflict (Correll, Park, & Smith, 2008), ingroup identification (Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010), and whether the ideology is construed in abstract (*why* multiculturalism is important) or concrete (*how* precisely multiculturalism is implemented) terms (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). In general, people might support the broad ideal of multicultural recognition and group equality, but thinking about how exactly this ideal will be accomplished and therefore what the actual implications are in daily life might trigger feelings of threat with the related prejudices (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

Based on the social identity perspective, we argue that the effect of these varying construals of multiculturalism depends on perceived cultural distance between immigrants and majority group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). More specifically, we propose that a focus on *why* multiculturalism is important for society is more beneficial for attitudes toward immigrant-origin groups for people perceiving relatively high cultural distance. In contrast, a focus on *how* the goals of multiculturalism can be accomplished is expected to have a particular detrimental effect on attitudes for people perceiving relatively low cultural distance (see Figure 1). We will test these propositions using an experimental design and in two European countries, France and the Netherlands.

Abstract Versus Concrete Construals of Multiculturalism

Social psychological research has demonstrated that majority members can react differently to multiculturalism. On one hand, survey and experimental research has found that multiculturalism has positive associations with and effects on attitudes toward ethnic minority and immigrant groups (Gieling, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2014; Hahn, Banchevsky, Park, & Judd, 2015; Pedersen, Paradies, & Barndon, 2015; Ryan, Casas, & Thompson, 2010; Zagefka et al., 2014). On the other hand, there also is a stream of research that has demonstrated that multiculturalism can be threatening to majority group members and therefore lead to more negative attitudes (Kauff, Asbrock,

Thörner, & Wagner, 2013; May, 2015; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2011). For example, recent work conducted in France shows that multiculturalism can be perceived as a threat to national identity leading to higher levels of prejudice toward immigrants (Mahfud, Badea, Guimond, Anier, & Ernst-Vintila, 2016).

Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) noted that in public debates and in research, multiculturalism can be presented in terms of broad societal goals of cultural equality, tolerance, and inclusion. These goals indicate *why* multiculturalism is important and beneficial for society. However, multiculturalism can also be construed by specifying *how* exactly these goals will be achieved by (local) governments. Consequently, “why” question refers to the abstract level of the multiculturalism, while “how” question refers to the concrete level of this integration model. Previous research shows that attitudes and behaviors can be influenced by the manner in which people think about goals and actions (Levy, Freitas, & Salovey, 2002). People who represent their action in abstract terms are more inclined to perceive themselves as sharing common goals with other individuals (Foster, 2009), and this perception leads to more empathic attitudes (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) and pro-social behaviors (Batson et al., 1997). Priming abstract relative to concrete mind-sets leads perceivers to focus less on intergroup differences and more on intergroup similarities, eliciting a more inclusive categorization (McCrea, Wieber, & Myers, 2012).

In addition, Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) proposed that highlighting why the broad goals of multiculturalism are important for society poses no threat because it does not challenge the majority identity and the existing social system. In contrast, an emphasis on the concrete steps necessary for accomplishing the multicultural goals of equality and inclusion highlights imminent changes to the status quo and therefore is more threatening to the majority group. In their experimental research in the context of the United States, Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) found that primes emphasizing the “why” of multiculturalism did indeed lead to lower feelings of threat and therefore to less prejudice, while concrete primes (“how”) lead to higher threat and an increase in prejudice.

In the current experimental study, we aimed to extend this finding in the European context. Specifically, we expected that, compared with a control condition, an emphasis on why multiculturalism is important for society will lead to lower feelings of threat and via threat to lower prejudice. In contrast, an emphasis on how specifically the broader goals of multiculturalism will be achieved will lead to higher feelings of threat and thereby to higher prejudice (compared with a control condition).

The Role of Perceived Cultural Distance

In their research, Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) found that the effect of multiculturalism construal on threat and prejudice depended on people’s political orientation. The effect was found for conservatives who tend to show low support for diversity policies, but not for liberals who tend to be more supportive of these policies and are less threatened by social change. In the current study, we did not examine the moderating role of political orientation but rather of perceived cultural distance (see Figure 1).¹ In Europe, conservative political orientation is associated with the perception of relatively high cultural distance between majority group members and immigrant minorities (Mahfud et al., 2016).

The concept of cultural distance, as defined by Triandis (1994), includes several characteristics such as differences in mother tongue, religion, family and marriage life, and values. On one hand, larger perceived cultural distance has been found to be associated with stronger feelings of threat and more negative outgroup attitudes (e.g., Guan et al., 2011; Lam, Chiu, Lau, Chan, & Yim, 2006). For example, when French people perceive more cultural distance between immigrants and the majority group, they display higher levels of prejudice toward immigrants (Mahfud

et al., 2015). On the other hand, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), low perceived cultural distance is threatening and leads to “reactive distinctiveness” which can take the form of prejudice against immigrants (see Jetten et al., 2004).

Based on the social identity perspective, we argue that perceived cultural difference is not only directly linked to feelings of threat and prejudice but can also moderate the effect of multiculturalism construal (abstract vs. concrete) on threat and prejudice toward immigrant minority groups. This reasoning means that a concrete construal of multiculturalism will be particularly threatening for people who perceive small cultural distance between their majority culture and that of immigrant-origin groups. Indeed, thinking about the specific ways in which the goals of multiculturalism are accomplished will more strongly focus participants on the intergroup distinctiveness (Foster, 2009; McCrea et al., 2012). This leads to the expectation that a concrete construal of multiculturalism (vs. control) has more negative effects on feelings of threat and therefore on prejudice for people who perceive relatively low, compared with high, cultural distance between majority members and immigrants.

Abstract construals of multiculturalism are less threatening to the distinctive identity of the majority group than concrete construals of multiculturalism (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). The broad multicultural goals of promoting tolerance and inclusiveness do not imply imminent changes to democratic national values and culture. However, promoting the ideals of accepting and recognizing cultural differences makes most sense in the case of a rather large perceived cultural distance. The relevance of multiculturalism for these ideals is greater when people perceive more cultural group differences. Therefore, we expect that abstract multiculturalism (compared with control) is most beneficial for intergroup relations among individuals who perceive a relatively large cultural distance. When perceived cultural distance is relatively large, focusing on why multiculturalism is important for society should evoke less feelings of threat and, in turn, less prejudice toward ethnic minorities.

The Present Research

In the present experimental study, we examined the effect of abstract versus concrete construals of multiculturalism on majority group members' attitudes toward Moroccan immigrants in France and the Netherlands, a minority group existing massively in France and also in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau Voor de Statistiek, 2016; Eurostat, 2014). This minority is object of prejudice and discrimination in both countries (Badea, Er-rafiy, Chekroun, Légal, & Gosling, 2015; Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001). First, we aimed to extend Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) findings in the European context: We expected that a focus on why the broad goals of multiculturalism are important for society (abstract construal vs. control) leads to lower feelings of threat and via threat to lower prejudicial attitudes. In contrast, a focus on how exactly these goals will be achieved (concrete vs. control) was expected to lead to higher feelings of threat and therefore to higher prejudice. Second, based on social identity theory, we expected that the positive effect of construing multiculturalism in abstract terms (why) is stronger for individuals who perceive higher cultural distance between immigrants and majority members. In contrast, the negative effect of construing multiculturalism in concrete terms (how) was expected to be stronger for individuals who perceived lower cultural distance.

We examined these expectations in France and the Netherlands and we did not have clear reasons to expect different associations in these two West European countries. Both countries score similarly on the multiculturalism policy index (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013), and in both countries, similar associations have been found between multiculturalism endorsement and attitudes toward immigrant minority groups (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014; Verkuyten, 2014). Yet, there also are political, cultural, and historical differences between the two countries, and therefore, we will explore in additional analyses whether the predicted effects are similar in both countries.

Method

Participants

The research was conducted in two countries: France and the Netherlands. The study was carried out with native people recruited via the Internet, using the software and panel of Thesistool in the Netherlands, and in France using LimeSurvey. In France, we asked for participants' mother tongue and we only included participants who checked the option "French." In the Netherlands, we ask participants to report their nationality and we included those who reported being Dutch ($n = 808$: 421 French and 387 Dutch). In all, 60% of the sample were women ($n = 484$) and 40% male ($n = 324$). The mean age was 42 years (range between 14 and 90). All political orientations were represented: the center (27%), the moderate right (23%), the moderate left (38%), the extreme right (4%) and the extreme left (8%).

Procedure

Participants had to complete a questionnaire online. They were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions (abstract multiculturalism, concrete multiculturalism, control) using a between-subjects design. We used the instructions developed by Yogeewaran and Dasgupta (2014) which were translated and adapted to the Dutch and French national context.

In the condition of *abstract* multiculturalism, participants first had to read a text which deals with *why* multiculturalism would be a benefit for the society:

With an increasingly diverse population in countries such as the Netherlands [France], figuring out how to manage intergroup relations among diverse racial and ethnic groups has become an important topic of national interest. Multiculturalism is one way of managing growing diversity in such countries by calling for the recognition and celebration of cultural differences. What are the broad goals of multiculturalism in contemporary Netherlands [France]? Why might it be useful to encourage multiculturalism in the Netherlands [France]? Think about these broad questions for a few minutes and write a few paragraphs describing in your own words what you think are the broad goals of multiculturalism and why it can be beneficial for Netherlands [France].

Subsequently, they had to think about the broader goals of multiculturalism and to indicate why multiculturalism might be useful in the Netherlands (France).

In the condition of *concrete* multiculturalism, participants had to read a text about *how* multiculturalism can be achieved:

With an increasingly diverse population in countries such as the Netherlands [France], figuring out how to manage intergroup relations among diverse racial and ethnic groups has become an important topic of national interest. Multiculturalism is one way of managing growing diversity in such countries by calling for the recognition and celebration of cultural differences. How can multiculturalism be achieved in contemporary Netherlands [France]? What are some concrete strategies by which multiculturalism is encouraged and achieved? These may be existing strategies, interventions, and policies you are aware of in schools, universities, and workplaces; or new ideas that you generate. Think about these questions for a few minutes and write a paragraph or two describing in your own words some concrete ways in which multiculturalism is implemented in Netherlands [France]. Please be as specific as possible and describe these policies or programs.

Next, they had to think about the concrete ways in which multiculturalism is often practiced and implemented.

Finally, participants were presented with a list of answers allegedly given by other participants in an earlier study to the same questions "why multiculturalism might be useful in the Netherlands

[France]” for the abstract condition, and “how multiculturalism can be implemented in the Netherlands [France]” for the concrete condition. Participants had to choose the answers that were similar to their own in a list of 15 answers expressed during the procedure of activation of abstract multiculturalism (e.g., “Understand each other better,” “Work together better,” “Learn new cultures,” “Exposed to diverse traditions, foods, clothing, music”). The list of answers in the concrete condition included items like “Supporting bilingual communities,” “Recognizing multiple citizenships,” “Government support for newspapers, television, and radio in minority languages.” This task focuses participants on the main elements of the experimental manipulation and has been used in previous research (Correll et al., 2008; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

We run an ANOVA 2 (country: France vs. Netherlands) \times 15 (type of answers) mixed design separately for concrete and abstract conditions. Results show a significant interaction between country and type of answer— $F(14, 3962) = 5.92, p < .001$ (for the answers checked in the abstract condition) and $F(14, 5428) = 3.66, p < .001$ (for the answers checked in the concrete condition). However, the effect of the country for each type of item was not significant with only one exception: the item “learn new cultures”—this item got a higher score in Netherland (Bonferroni test, $p = .04$). These results suggest that globally, the manipulation of concrete versus abstract multiculturalism was equivalent in both countries.

In the control condition, participants had to complete a questionnaire with the same measure (cultural distance, perceived threat, prejudices) but without reading any text before. This part was different from the work of Yogeewaran and Dasgupta (2014) who gave a neutral text unrelated to multiculturalism. We did not present a neutral text because of the cultural context and cultural differences between France and the Netherlands.

Measures

The questionnaire included several measures: the perception of cultural distance between majority group and immigrants (in this study, Moroccans were the target group because they are well represented in both France and the Netherlands), the perceived national threat, and a measure of prejudices expressed against immigrants. The questions on perceived cultural distance were asked before the experimental manipulation because this is the moderator variable in our model. The questions of threat and prejudice were presented directly after the experimental manipulation. All ratings were made on 9-point scales ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, excepted for the measure of prejudice that we describe below.

Cultural Distance

In this part of the questionnaire and based on the work of Babiker, Cox, and Miller (1980), Shwartz (1961), and Triandis (1994), participants were asked to estimate the difference or distance perceived between natives and Moroccan immigrants (e.g., “Regarding the mother tongue, what is the distance between Dutch [French] and Moroccans; Regarding the economical level of the native country, what is the distance between Dutch [French] and Moroccans; and Regarding the religion, what is the distance between Dutch [French] and Moroccans”). In total, 15 items were used in the first part of the questionnaire, before the experimental manipulation, and Cronbach’s alpha = .92 (in France, alpha = .93; in the Netherlands, alpha = .91).

Outgroup Threats

After the experimental manipulation, participants were asked to respond to 12 items that measure feelings of threat (see González et al., 2008; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Three example items are “Immigrants are a threat to the Dutch [French] culture,” “I am afraid that the Dutch

Table 1. Correlations Between Cultural Distance, Perceived Threat, and Prejudice.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3
All				
1. Cultural distance	5.80 (1.59)		.55**	.37**
2. Threat	4.13 (2.49)			.68**
3. Prejudice	4.48 (1.75)			
France				
1. Cultural distance	5.47 (1.68)		.49**	.32**
2. Threat	3.82 (2.49)			.69**
3. Prejudice	4.28 (1.88)			
The Netherlands				
1. Cultural distance	6.17 (1.39)		.61**	.39**
2. Threat	4.47 (2.46)			.66**
3. Prejudice	4.71 (1.56)			

** $p < .001$.

[French] will find a job less rapidly because of the presence of immigrants,” and “The Dutch [French] are slowly losing their right to decide about their own country to immigrants.” Those items were submitted to a factorial analysis Direct Oblimin which has shown that all the items saturate in one factor separately in each country (in France, $R^2 = .79$; in the Netherlands, $R^2 = .79$) and with the combined sample ($R^2 = .79$), Cronbach’s alpha for these 12 items is .97 (in France, alpha = .97; in the Netherlands, alpha = .97).

Prejudice

To assess the level of prejudice, we used a bipolar scale attributing personality traits to immigrants, adapted from the measure of Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997). Instructions were as follows: “Please describe how you feel about Moroccan immigrants by making a rating on the following scales. Just circle the number on each scale that describes how you personally feel toward Moroccan immigrants.” Participants had to complete a 9-point scale for the following feelings: warm–cold, negative–positive, friendly–hostile, suspicious–trusting, respect–contempt, admiration–disgust. The Cronbach’s alpha for this measure is .89 (in France, alpha = .90; in the Netherlands, alpha = .87).

Results

Descriptive Findings

Means scores and correlations between cultural distance, threat, and prejudice for the whole sample and for the two countries separately are presented in Table 1. In the Netherlands, the mean scores for perceived cultural distance, feeling of threat, and prejudice were significantly higher than in France (all $ps < .001$). Yet, the associations between the three measures were remarkably similar in both countries. There is in both countries a similar positive correlation between cultural distance and threat and between cultural distance and prejudice. Furthermore, there is in both countries a strong positive association between threat and prejudice.

Multiculturalism Construal

In an ANOVA, we first examined whether perceived cultural distance differed between the experimental conditions. This was found not to be the case, $F(2, 804) = 0.79, p > .45$. However,

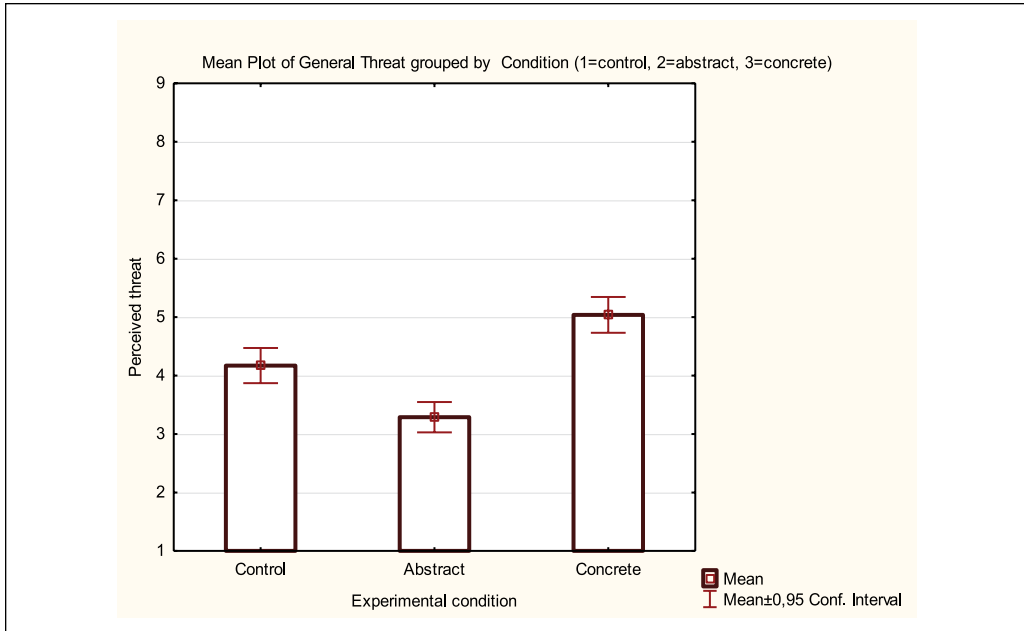


Figure 2. The level of prejudices and threat depending on the experimental conditions.

the experimental manipulation had a significant effect on perceived threat, $F(2, 804) = 35.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .082$, and also on prejudice, $F(2, 804) = 28.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .066$. As predicted, post hoc analyses (Bonferroni) indicated that participants in the abstract multiculturalism condition perceived less threat ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 2.23$) and reported lower prejudice ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.73$) compared with the control condition ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 2.50$, and $M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.59$, respectively; $ps < .001$), while participants in the concrete condition had higher mean scores for perceived threat ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 2.48$) and for prejudice ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.75$, $ps < .001$)—see Figure 2.

The Moderating Role of Cultural Distance

Using a general linear model (GLM), we then investigated whether the interaction between experimental condition and perceived cultural distance predicted perceived threat and prejudice. In line with our hypothesized model, the interaction was significant in predicting threat, $F(2, 801) = 11.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .027$, but not in predicting prejudice, $F(2, 801) = 2.82$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$.

Subsequently, we used Hayes's (2013) PROCESS software (Model 7, bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples) to test the hypothesized moderated mediation model (Figure 1). Considering the mean differences in threat and prejudice between the three experimental conditions, effects coding was used for the experimental manipulation. A first contrast compared the abstract multiculturalism condition with the control condition (abstract = 1, concrete = 0, control = -1), and a second contrast compared the concrete multiculturalism condition with the control condition (abstract = 0, concrete = 1, control = -1). These two contrasts were used alternately as predictor variables in the regression analysis with the other contrast as a control (Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

Results of the analysis with the first contrast revealed a moderated mediation effect, $b = -.113$, $SE = .02$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = $[-.158, -.071]$. The indirect conditional effect for the abstract multiculturalism condition compared with the control condition via threat on prejudice was examined for low ($-1 SD$), mean, and high ($+1 SD$) level of perceived cultural distance. For

low perceived cultural distance, the indirect effect was $b = -.188$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.275, -.010]$; at mean level of perceived distance, $b = -.368$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.460, -.281]$; and at the high level of cultural distance, $b = -.548$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = $[-.688, -.417]$. In other words and as expected, abstract multiculturalism leads to lower perceived threat and thereby to lower prejudice when participants perceived higher cultural distance. Thus, making people aware of why multiculturalism is important for society is particularly beneficial for intergroup relations when people perceive clear cultural differences.

Results of the analysis for the second contrast comparing concrete multiculturalism and the control condition also showed a significant moderated mediation effect, $b = -.069$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI = $[-.118, -.024]$. For low perceived cultural distance, the indirect effect was $b = .507$, $SE = .07$, 95% CI = $[.386, .643]$; at mean level of perceived distance, $b = .397$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = $[.301, .501]$; and at the high level of cultural distance, $b = .286$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = $[.167, .411]$. Thus as expected, making participants aware of how multiculturalism will be achieved in society is particularly detrimental for intergroup relations when people perceive relatively low cultural distance.

Country Comparison

We examined whether the findings differed between the two countries using PROCESS, Model 11. In a first model, the predictor variable was the first contrast, the outcome was prejudice, perception of threat was the mediator, and the two moderators were cultural distance (W) and country (Z). The moderated mediation model was significant, $b = -.15$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.252, -.061]$. This indicates that the pattern of associations did differ between both countries. In France, there was significant evidence for the proposed moderated mediation model (Figure 1), $b = -.202$, $SE = .025$, 95% CI = $[-.252, -.152]$, while this was not the case in the Netherlands, $b = -.048$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI = $[-.128, .033]$. Additional analysis for the Netherlands indicated that perceived cultural distance did not moderate the effect of the experimental condition (abstract multiculturalism vs. control) on perceived threat, $b = -.059$, $SE = .09$, 95% CI = $[-.242, .123]$.

In the analysis with the second contrast, the moderated mediation was not significant, $b = -.087$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.189, .013]$. Thus, the model in which concrete multiculturalism was compared with the control condition was similar in both countries.

Discussion

Social psychological research has demonstrated not only that multiculturalism can have beneficial effects for majority members' attitudes toward immigrant groups but also that multiculturalism can backfire and lead to resistance (see Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). These differential effects are likely to depend on the ways in which multiculturalism is construed (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014), in combination with the perceived cultural distance between natives and immigrant groups (Guan et al., 2011; Mahfud et al., 2015).

Multiculturalism can be discussed in terms of its broad ideals of group equality, tolerance, and cultural recognition and why these abstract goals are important for society. However, multiculturalism can also be discussed in more concrete ways, in terms of how exactly these goals can be accomplished in practice. Thinking about the broad goals of multiculturalism can be expected to lead to more positive attitudes toward immigrant groups, while considering the specific steps and social changes necessary to achieve these goals can evoke feelings of identity threat. We found clear experimental evidence for these expectations: in the abstract multiculturalism condition, participants reported lower feelings of threat and via threat lower prejudice (compared with the control), while in the concrete condition, they had higher threat and higher prejudice (compared with the control). These findings replicate partially the results of research conducted in

the context of the United States (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014) and thus contribute to the increasing emphasis on the importance of replication studies in psychology (Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012). Together, the findings indicate that the distinction between “why” and “how” multiculturalism has similar intergroup consequences in North America and Europe.

In addition, we found clear evidence that perceived cultural distance between natives and immigrants moderates the effect of the multiculturalism construal. In agreement with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a focus on how concretely the goals of multiculturalism can be accomplished had a particular detrimental effect on feelings of threat and prejudice, for participants perceiving relatively low cultural distance. People are motivated to perceive their ingroup as positively distinctive from other groups making low cultural distance more threatening and therefore leading to increased prejudice as a way of reclaiming a distinctive identity (“reactive distinctiveness,” Jetten et al., 2004). In contrast, a focus on why multiculturalism is important for society was found to be more beneficial for attitudes toward immigrant-origin groups, for participants perceiving relatively high cultural distance. Thinking about the broad goals of multiculturalism (i.e., tolerance, inclusiveness) makes democratic national values salient and does not imply imminent social changes and therefore is less likely to evoke threat. Yet, the relevance and importance of these goals is higher when there exist more cultural differences that require recognition and acceptance. We note that we do not measure directly the perception of intergroup distinctiveness in our research and future research should test this theoretical inference.

We conducted our study in France and the Netherlands and we found similar associations in both West European countries. Although, perceived cultural distance, feelings of threat, and prejudice were higher in the Netherlands, the pattern of associations between these constructs was very similar. Furthermore, we found in both countries, evidence for the same moderated mediation model in which concrete multiculturalism was compared with the control condition. Thus, in both countries, and in agreement with social identity theory, a focus on how concretely the goals of multiculturalism can be accomplished had a stronger detrimental effect on feelings of threat and prejudice for participants perceiving relatively low cultural distance.

However, in contrast to France, in the Netherlands, there was no evidence that higher perceived cultural distance moderated the positive effect of abstract multiculturalism (vs. control) on perceived threat. Of all European countries, the Netherlands has shown in the last 15 years the most dramatic retreat from multiculturalism (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). In this country, there has been a strong move away from the public recognition of cultural differences toward an emphasis on cultural integration and assimilation (Vasta, 2007). This means that the broad ideals of multiculturalism do not have the same appeal they once had, and that higher perceived cultural distance does not make multiculturalism more relevant or important. The Republican French integration model emphasizes the principles of “liberty, equality, brotherhood” and democracy for all citizens, independently of their cultural or ethnic background (Laborde, 2010; Schnapper, 2004). These principles are in agreement with the promotion of recognition and inclusive national values as broad goals of multiculturalism. And these goals become more relevant and important when the perceived cultural distance is higher.

Research among majority group members has shown that multiculturalism can not only promote positive intergroup relations but can also evoke resistance and hinder intergroup harmony (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). This raises the theoretical question about the conditions that elicit positive or rather negative reactions. Extending earlier findings (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014), the current study demonstrates that perceived cultural distance and the way in which multiculturalism is discussed matters. It matters whether the focus is on why multiculturalism is important for society or on how exactly multiculturalism is implemented. Thinking about why multiculturalism should be pursued as a broad societal goal reduces feelings of threat and leads to less prejudicial attitudes toward immigrant-origin groups. The

broad societal goals of equality, tolerance, and cultural recognition contribute to intergroup harmony and are particularly important when people perceive clear cultural differences. In contrast, thinking about concrete programs and measures of multiculturalism and how society and society's institutions must change leads to more feelings of threat and prejudicial attitudes, especially among people who perceive low ingroup distinctiveness.

These findings are important and also provide possible directions for future research. We focused on how construals of multiculturalism affect attitudes and it remains to be seen whether similar effects exist for actual behavior toward immigrant-origin groups. Furthermore, we examined people's attitudes toward Moroccan immigrants and it is possible that a different pattern of results will be obtained when, for example, East European immigrants are the target. The perceived cultural difference with East Europeans might be much smaller which could make concrete multiculturalism more threatening and abstract multiculturalism less relevant. Future work should explore whether the different construals of multiculturalism have similar effects in relation to different immigrant groups that differ in their perceived cultural distance.

Future researches can also take into account the preferences for other integration models like colorblindness or assimilation, when examining the effects of multiculturalism construals. Colorblindness has been defined by Guimond et al. (2014) as an integration model which underlines the national category regardless to the individuals' color or ethnicity. Assimilation defends the primacy of national culture and considers that immigrants must adopt it and give up theirs in the same time. A lot of researches showed that the endorsement of assimilation among majority group members lead to express more prejudice than the endorsement of multiculturalism, while results concerning the effects of colorblindness endorsement on prejudice are more ambivalent (e.g., Badea, 2012). It is possible that activation of concrete multiculturalism increases immigration threat and prejudice especially among majority group members who endorse the assimilation.

Furthermore, future research might examine the generalizability of our findings to other European countries that possess different citizenship regimes and that differ in multicultural policies (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). For example, countries such as Sweden and Finland have a much stronger multicultural policy orientation than Austria and Germany, and this could be reflected in the national norms for how to evaluate cultural diversity and thereby to the intergroup impact of different construals of multiculturalism (Guimond et al., 2014).

In the European context, politicians and policy makers have declared that multiculturalism has failed as an approach for dealing with cultural diversity (Verkuyten, 2014). Despite this political rhetoric, there is in most European countries evidence of stability or even expansion, rather than retreat, of multicultural policies (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). Debates about how best to balance cultural diversity and intergroup harmony in society are taking place in almost all European countries. Cross-cultural differences should not be reduced; on the contrary, they should be encouraged because the practical implementation of multiculturalism is compatible with the recognition of these differences. Multiculturalism can not only contribute to harmonious intergroup relations but can also hinder the development of a cohesive society. Realizing the possible societal benefits of multiculturalism requires a very clear and convincing explanation of *why* it is necessary and what it is trying to achieve, and *how* exactly it will affect people's lives. A clear explanation of the broad goals of multiculturalism is important and useful but not enough. The concrete multicultural measures and programs should reassure majority group members that their own perspective also is included and that their own interests, needs, and concerns are taken into account (Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011; Reynolds, Batalha, & Subasic, 2015). It should be made very clear that the various policies are not asymmetrical (for minorities only) but also include the majority group and that these try to promote intergroup harmony in society as a whole.

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