Does personal identity promote social inclusiveness? 
The role of identity processes on prejudice reduction

Theoretical background
Promotion of social inclusiveness and minorities’ acceptance is a fundamental goal of modern multicultural societies (Fiske, 2015). It is of utmost importance to understand how this can be achieved in the transition from late adolescence to emerging adulthood, a phase in which young people strive to define themselves while enlarging their social horizons, increasing their interactions across multiple social contexts (Arnett, 2004). This research project focuses on how personal identity formation processes can reduce prejudice against stigmatized outgroups (e.g., migrants) in order to promote inclusive societies (Brown, 2010).

Linking identity formation processes and prejudice
Identity formation is a core developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1950). In this period, young people can start rethinking their childhood identifications and making new choices depending on their goals, potentials, and talents (Marcia, 1966). The dynamic by which identity is formed and revised over time can be captured by three processes (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008): commitment, which refers to enduring choices that individuals have made with regard to developmental domains and to the self-confidence deriving from these choices; in-depth exploration, referring to the extent to which individuals actively think about their current commitments (e.g., reflecting on their choices, searching for additional information, talking with others about their commitments); and reconsideration of commitment, which indicates individuals’ comparison of present commitments with possible alternative commitments because the current ones are no longer satisfactory.

On the one hand, there is consistent evidence on the role of identity formation processes in promoting personal well-being, showing that identity consolidation (expressed by high levels of commitment and in-depth exploration, and low levels of reconsideration of commitment), plays a key role in increasing mental health and psychological well-being (e.g., Karaś et al., 2015). On the other hand, less is known on whether identity formation processes also lead to social inclusiveness in terms of reducing prejudice against minority groups. In this respect, social psychology has identified social categorization as at the root of social behavior and prejudice (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), including aggravated forms of discrimination, such as dehumanization (i.e., denial of full humanness to others; Haslam 2006). Theoretically, when individuals increase certainty about themselves, they can improve their capacity to interact with others (Crocetti et al., 2012), especially with outgroup members. In particular, in-depth identity exploration can work as a key socio-cognitive strategy that allows consideration and acceptance of diversity.

Thus, this project aims to connect two distinct theoretical approaches, on personal identity formation (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1966; Meeus, 2011) and on social identity and prejudice (Tajfel & Turner 1979) respectively, in order to develop a more heuristic and parsimonious model that might advance knowledge on psycho-social processes at the basis of positive social development and social inclusion of others.

Aims and Hypotheses
This project aims to analyze whether personal identity processes (commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment) promote over time social inclusiveness in terms of reduced prejudice and dehumanization towards stigmatized outgroups (i.e., migrants). We hypothesize that the way in which individuals develop their personal identity in late adolescence (in terms of initial levels and rates of change in identity processes) will affect the extent to which they show social inclusiveness towards migrants in the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood. In light of the theoretical background, we expect that high initial levels (intercepts) of commitment and in-depth exploration, and low levels of reconsideration of commitment, would increase social inclusiveness. In a similar vein, the more individuals increase in commitment and in-depth exploration and decrease in reconsideration of
commitment (rates of change), the more they would increase in social inclusiveness. In addition to this, we expected that the effect sizes will be stronger for in-depth exploration compared to other identity processes (see Figure 1).

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. The hypothesized model

**Methods**

**Participants**
The sample consists of about 300 adolescents ($M_{age} = 17.49$; females = 62.7%) attending the fourth and fifth year of high school who are participating in an ongoing longitudinal study. So far, participants’ development has been examined intensively within one school year (with three intensive waves conducted with three months between each wave; T1, T2, T3). The current study will consist of a follow-up wave (T4) that will be conducted one year after T3. In this way, it will be possible to test how identity formation in late adolescence influence later levels of prejudice during the transition to emerging adulthood.

**Procedure and tools**
Participants will be asked to fill in an on-line questionnaire including measures of:

- Identity processes (Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale; U-MICS, Crocetti et al., 2008);
- Cognitive and affective prejudice towards migrants (Classical racism and modern racism scale; Akrami et al., 2000; Feelings thermometers; Haddock et al., 1993);
- Dehumanization towards migrants (Attribution of secondary emotions scale; Albarello & Rubini, 2012)

**Statistical analyses**
Longitudinal statistical analyses conducted in Mplus 7.4 will be used to test the hypothesized model. First, longitudinal measurement invariance will be established. Second, Latent Growth Curve analyses will be used to model development of identity processes from T1 to T3. Third, a Structural Equation Model will be used to test whether identity intercepts and slopes (based on T1-T3 data) predict later levels of prejudice and dehumanization (T4).

**Expected results and implications**
We expect that this study could provide empirical support to the theoretical hypothesized model and increase our understanding of the mechanism through which personal identity formation may reduce
prejudice. These expected results can have relevant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, this will contribute to advance knowledge on the role of personal identity formation processes in developing inclusive societies. Furthermore, by examining the relation between identity formation processes and social inclusiveness we aim at (a) relating literature on personal identity formation and social identity and (b) unraveling potential antecedents of reduction of social prejudice and dehumanization. To gain new theoretical knowledge on these topics is fundamental to develop evidence-based interventions for fostering inclusive societies.
References


Plan of activities

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