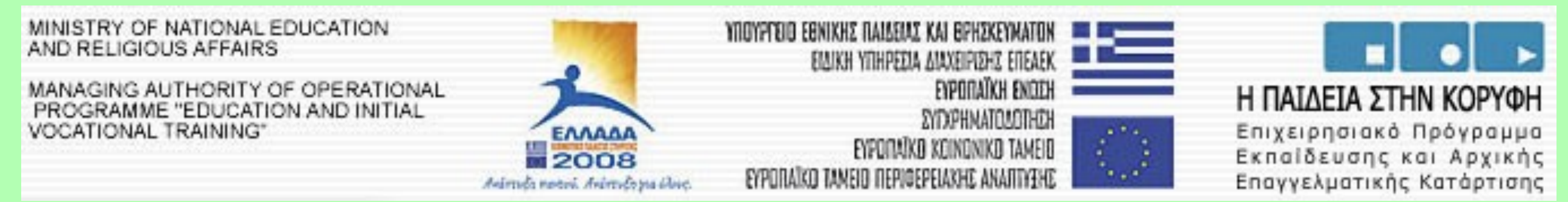


Perceived discrimination, acculturation processes and social competence: A study of Albanian immigrant adolescents in Greece

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Introduction

Perceived discrimination reflects an important psychological reality with substantial implications over the lives of the individuals who belong to disadvantaged social groups (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). More specifically, it is assumed to be a risk factor in the adaptation of immigrant youth (Berry et al., 2006; Verkuyten, 2002).

In the present study, the protective role of the acculturation processes in moderating the negative effect of perceived discrimination on the social competence of immigrant adolescents is explored. The theoretical and methodological background of the project lies in the psychology of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006) and within the resilience framework (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001). Valuable analytical considerations were drawn from the moderator-mediator variable distinction in Social Psychology, elaborated by Barron and Kenny (1987).

The study focuses on social competence of Albanian adolescents. Albanians are by far the largest immigrant group in Greece (about 50% of immigrants). Discrimination against this group has been reported in previous studies (e.g., Triandafyllidou, 2000).

Social competence of Albanian adolescents is viewed as a multi-faceted concept. It involves acculturation processes as well as developmental ones. Moreover, it can be studied from the point of view of the adolescents and of significant others, i.e. school teachers and peers.

Research questions and hypotheses

- Is perceived discrimination related to social competence of Albanian immigrant adolescents? In general, high levels of discrimination are expected to predict low levels of adaptation (Coll et al., 1996; Verkuyten, 2002). However, the size and direction of the relationship of personal vs. group discrimination with the dependent variables may vary according to the perceived discrimination discrepancy hypothesis (Ruggiero, 1999).
- Are there mediating and/or moderating effects of the acculturation processes in the relationship between perceived discrimination and social competence? In line with the bidimensional models of acculturation, both ethnic and host-national involvement may have a promotive/protective role on various domains of adolescent competence (Berry et al., 2006).

Method

Participants

Ethnicity	263 Albanian adolescents were recruited from 9 High Schools of the inner city (Athens metropolitan area)		
Generation Status	211 (80%) first generation 52 (20%) second generation		
Gender	146 (56%) male 117 (45%) female		
Age	Mean: 14.0 years	Minimum: 13.0 years	Maximum: 16.3 years
	St.Dev: 0.9 years		

Measures

Perceived discrimination (Verkuyten, 2002, adapted)	▪ Personal discrimination (4 items; $\alpha=.80$) ▪ Group discrimination (3 items; $\alpha=.66$)
Acculturation (Nguyen & Von Eye, 2002)	▪ Ethnic involvement (11 items; $\alpha=.89$) ▪ Host-national involvement (11 items; $\alpha=.89$)
Social competence (Coie et al., 1982; Goodman, 1997)	▪ Teachers' ratings on sociability (6 items; $\alpha=.84$) ▪ Social preference (sociometric measure) ▪ SDQ Peer relationships problems (5 items; $\alpha=.61$)

Results

Research Question 1: Is perceived discrimination negatively related to social competence of Albanian immigrant adolescents?

Table 1. Hierarchical regressions for the prediction of social competence indices from gender, percent of life in Greece, and perceived discrimination

Predictors at Step 3	Sociability	Social Preference	Peer Problems
	β	β	β
1) gender	.09	.05	-.02
2) percent of life in Greece	.03	.15*	-.15*
3) Personal discrimination	-.20**	-.21**	.21**
Group discrimination	.18*	.03	.08
R ²	.05	.07	.09

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

Research Question 2: Are there mediating/moderating effects of the acculturation processes in the relationship between perceived discrimination and social competence?

- In the next series of hierarchical regressions, host-national involvement positively predicted social preference. The two acculturation variables negatively predicted peer relationships problems. Acculturation was not related to teachers' ratings of sociability (Table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchical regressions for the prediction of social competence indices from gender, percent of life in Greece, and perceived discrimination

Predictors at Step 3	Sociability	Social Preference	Peer Problems
	β	β	β
1) gender	.08	.03	-.02
2) percent of life in Greece	.00	.10	-.15*
3) Ethnic involvement	.02	-.01	-.17**
Host-national involvement	.09	.15*	-.16*
4) Personal discrimination	-.16*	-.13	.16*
Group discrimination	.15*	.00	.14*
5) Ethnic inv. X Personal discr.	.13	.10	-.22**
Host-national inv. X Personal discr.	.05	.14*	-.07
Ethnic inv. X Group discr.	-.07	-.08	-.01
Host-national inv. X Group discr.	-.00	-.04	.03
R ²	.07	.11	.17

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

- A series of hierarchical regressions were conducted for the prediction of social competence indices from perceived discrimination of Albanian adolescents. In these analyses, gender and percent of life in Greece were treated as covariates (entered in the first steps).

- It was found that, after controlling for gender and percent of life in the host country, perceived personal discrimination significantly contributed to the prediction of all three social competence indices: higher level of personal discrimination was related to lower sociability, lower social preference and more peer relationships problems. In addition, perceived group discrimination was positively related to teachers' ratings of sociability (Table 1).

- In subsequent analyses, significant relationships of personal discrimination with ethnic involvement ($\beta=.16$, $p<.05$) and with host-national involvement ($\beta=-.36$, $p<.001$) as well as of group discrimination with host-national involvement ($\beta=.14$, $p<.05$) were established.

- After accounting for acculturation, at step 4 perceived personal and group discrimination were related to sociability and peer problems but not to social preference (Table 2).

- In the last step of these analyses, two significant interactions of acculturation by perceived personal discrimination emerged (Table 2), as follows:

- Host-national involvement had a protective stabilizing effect on social preference under conditions of high personal discrimination (Figure 1, left).

- Ethnic involvement contributed in retaining low level of peer relationships problems under conditions of high personal discrimination (Figure 1, right).

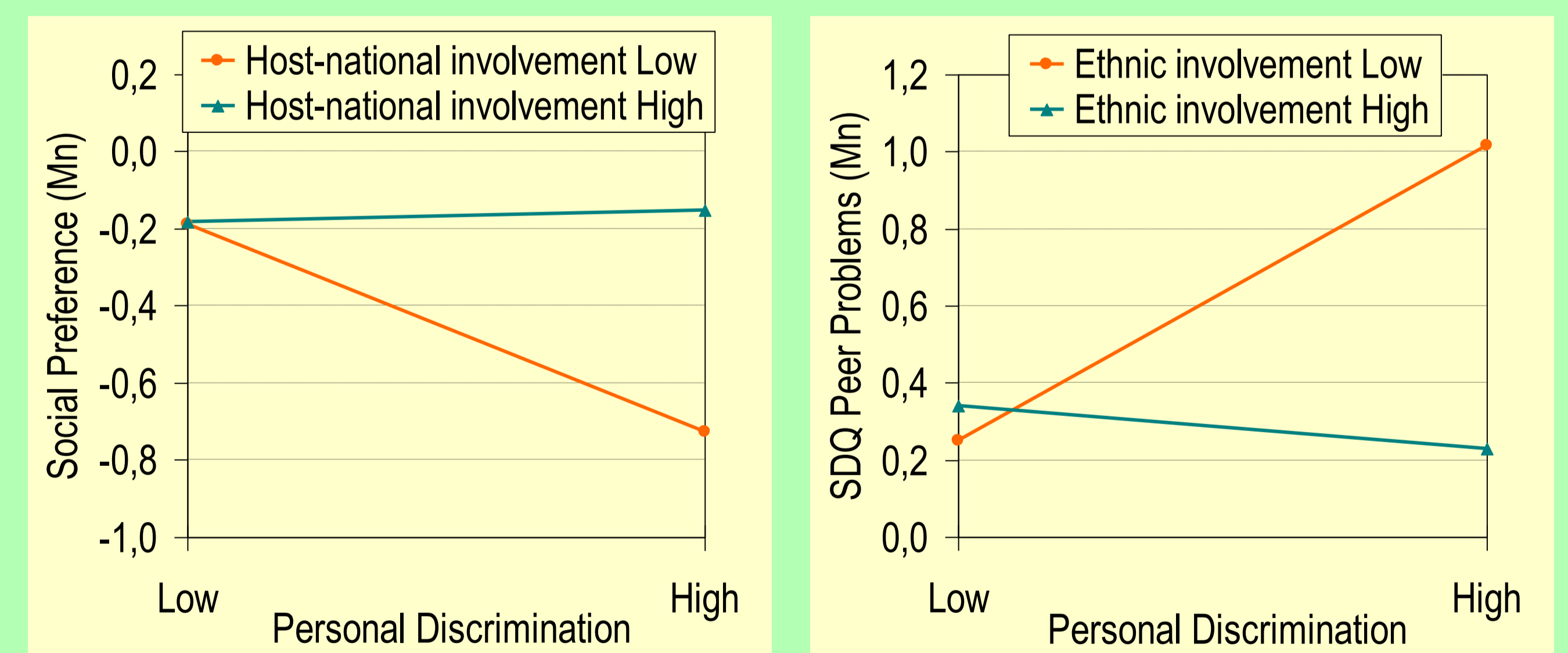


Figure 1. Interaction of personal discrimination by acculturation variables in the prediction of social competence indices.

Conclusions

- The role of perceived discrimination as a risk factor for social competence of Albanian adolescents was established, even after controlling for acculturation processes (with the exception of social preference). This suggests an additive (rather than mediating) effect of acculturation and perceived discrimination on social competence.

- Both ethnic and host-national involvement acted as protective factors for at least one domain of social competence. This finding is in support of integration as the most successful acculturation strategy since it combines resources from the ingroup as well as from the larger society in a flexible and adaptive manner (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006).

- Host-national involvement was found to be protective for the "social" aspect of social competence (peer nominations) while ethnic involvement was protective for its "psychological" aspect (self-reports on peer problems). These results extend the well-known distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation (e.g. Berry, 1997).

- The discrepancy of personal vs. group discrimination is evident in their opposite effect on sociability. The interaction of acculturation with personal (but not with group) discrimination indicates that personal discrimination is built upon the immediate experience of the individual while group discrimination may reflect ethnic stereotypes (Ruggiero, 1999).

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