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Prejudice towards Muslims in The Netherlands: Testing integrated threat theory

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This study uses integrated threat theory to examine Dutch adolescents' ($N = 1,187$) prejudice towards Muslim minorities. One out of two participants was found to have negative feelings towards Muslims. Perceived symbolic and realistic threat and negative stereotypes were examined as mediators between antecedent factors (in-group identification, intergroup contact, and the endorsement of multiculturalism) and prejudice. Based on structural equation modelling, it was found that stereotypes and symbolic threats, but not realistic threats, predicted prejudice towards Muslims. Further, it was found that the effect of in-group identification on prejudice was fully mediated by symbolic threat, the effect of contact was partially mediated by stereotypes, and the effect of the endorsement of multiculturalism was mediated by both symbolic threat and stereotypes. In addition, contact and multiculturalism were directly associated with prejudice towards Muslims. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

After September 11, 2001, Muslim communities became the targets of increased hostility across many countries in Europe (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). The Netherlands was no exception. In 3 weeks after 9/11, the European Centre on Racism and Xenophobia reported 42 incidents of hostile treatment and violence against Muslims in The Netherlands (EUMC, 2001). According to some commentators there is an ongoing 'Dutch-Muslim' cultural war and a related culture of fear (Scroggins, 2005). Leading politicians have taken a fiercely negative position on Islam which is defined as a backward religion that seriously threatens Dutch society, and national identity and culture (Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). In 2005, the Pew Global Project found that 51% of the Dutch participants had unfavourable opinions about Muslims. This was the highest percentage of all the countries examined. In France, for example, the percentage was 36% and in great Britain it was 14%. Further, the Dutch majority considers particular practices of Muslims morally wrong and a recent nationwide survey showed that 50%

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of the Dutch consider the Western and Muslim way of life as opposites that do not go together (Gijssberts, 2005).

Understanding the factors that are associated with negative attitudes towards Muslims is important for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, such an understanding is crucial for preventing the negative consequences of intergroup conflicts and discrimination. Theoretically, the strong anti-Muslim feelings allow for an appropriate test of integrated threat theory (ITT; Stephan & Stephan, 1993, 1996). In public debates, Islam and Muslims are typically presented and perceived as threatening national identity, culture, and security (Scroggins, 2005). Stephan and colleagues have tested ITT in a number of studies and their results show that perceived intergroup threats are good predictors of gender attitudes, attitudes towards immigrants, towards racial out-groups, and towards patients with cancer and AIDS (e.g. Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). However, as far as we know, the theory has not been used to predict attitudes towards a religious out-group. In addition, studies testing ITT have not been concerned with relatively strong negative attitudes. Rather, and in agreement with the great majority of social psychological research (see Billig, 2002; Brown, 2000), the focus is on explaining neutral or low positive out-group attitudes (e.g. Curseu, Stoop, & Schalk, 2007; but see Shimoni & Schwarzwald, 2003). Furthermore, in this research we examine the relative contributions of different types of intergroup threat as possible mediators for anti-Muslim attitudes. Symbolic threat, realistic threat, and stereotypes are investigated as mediators of the relationships between, on the one hand, the endorsement of multicultural ideology, intergroup contact quantity, and in-group identification, and, on the other hand, prejudice towards Muslims. Although contact and group identification have been examined as antecedents of threat in previous studies (e.g. Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran, 2000) these studies did not formally test for mediation of contact and identification effects by the different types of threat (but see Tausch, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown that the endorsement of multiculturalism is related to out-group attitudes (e.g. Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2006) but it has not been examined whether this relationship is mediated by intergroup threat (but see Ward & Masgoret, 2006). We will present the results of a survey among ethnic Dutch adolescents ($N = 1,187$). The relatively large sample allows for a reliable test using structural equation modelling and the age group is important for examining developmental aspects of intergroup threat theory.

Perceived threats as predictors of prejudice

Prejudice is interpreted and explained in various ways (see Brown, 1995; Duckitt, 1992). It is considered to result, for example, from personality factors, from categorization processes, and from membership in social groups. Other approaches have focused on the mixture of negative out-group feelings and the adherence to cherished moral values such as hard work and individualism (McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, 1988). It has also been argued and shown that the defence of traditional values and the exaggeration of cultural differences is part of subtle forms of prejudice (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). In these latter approaches value differences and value conflicts are considered to drive prejudicial reactions. The focus is on beliefs that groups violate cherished values and these beliefs can differ from perceptions of intergroup threats.

A variety of theories suggest that fear and perceptions of threat can play an important role in generating prejudice towards out-groups in general, and towards immigrant

groups in particular (Coser, 1956; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Barker (1981), for example, showed that already in the 1970s the fear that foreign cultures will swarm over England and override the British way of life was a main argument to oppose immigration and immigrants. ITT draws from different sorts of research on prejudice and stereotypes and incorporates several theoretical perspectives. The theory suggests that there are four basic types of threat that can lead to prejudice: realistic threats; symbolic threats; negative stereotyping; and intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1993, 1996). The perception of these forms of 'threats' can lead to prejudice, regardless of whether or not the threat is real (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Stephan and Renfro (2002) use Tajfel's distinction between individual- and group-level processes to argue that a distinction can be made between threats that are primarily directed at the individual or at the in-group. Intergroup anxiety refers to the experience of being personally threatened while interacting with out-group members, whereas negative stereotypes and symbolic and realistic threats are primarily directed at the in-group. The relevance of this distinction in individual- versus group-level threats is supported empirically (Bizman & Yinon, 2001; Tausch *et al.*, 2007). In this study, we are concerned with the intergroup level and therefore we focus on stereotypes and symbolic and realistic threats and we do not consider the role of anxiety.

Realistic threats can be conceptualized in economic, physical, and political terms. In this study, we focus on realistic threat that corresponds with realistic conflict theories (e.g. Olzak, 1989; Sherif, 1966) and refers to competition over material, economic group interests. Conflicts between groups and negative group reactions are often rooted in a clash of interests. The core issue here is (perceived) competition over scarce resources, such as houses and jobs, and the perception that these resources are threatened by outsiders. The desire to protect the in-group interests is considered the underlying motivation responsible for negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviour.

Second, symbolic threats are based on perceived group differences in values, norms, and beliefs. Out-groups that have a different worldview can be seen as threatening the cultural identity of the in-group. New norms, beliefs, and symbols can be considered as opposite to what one values leading to the fear that other cultures will override the in-group's way of life. Multiple studies have shown that perceived threats to in-group values by immigrants and minorities are related to more negative attitudes towards these groups (e.g. Esses, Hodson, & Dovidio, 2003; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

Third, the literature on stereotypes is extensive and many different conceptualizations have been proposed (see Schneider, 2004). Stephan *et al.* (1998) recognize that stereotypes are not usually conceptualized as threats, but they argue that stereotypes serve as a basis for expectations about out-groups and that those expectations often lead to prejudice. When people hold negative stereotypes about an out-group (e.g. as being violent, hostile, and arrogant) they will expect out-group members to have negative and threatening characteristics. Research has shown that negative out-group stereotypes are associated with feelings of threat and fear (Verkuyten, 1997), whereas positive stereotypes ('warmth') are associated with reduced feelings of fear and anger (e.g. Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). However, because the conceptualization of stereotypes as threats is controversial we will examine stereotypes not only as an independent threat but will also test a model in which stereotypes mediates the effects of realistic and symbolic threats on prejudice, and a model in which stereotypes is an antecedent of the other types of threat (Curşeu, Stoop, & Schalk, 2007; Stephan *et al.*, 2002).

The three threats can be expected to be associated with more prejudice towards Muslims. However, ITT argues that the role of the different forms of threat depends

on circumstances and the type of out-group (Shimoni & Schwarzwald, 2003). In their research in Israel, Bizman and Yinon (2001) found that realistic threat, but not symbolic threat, strongly predicted out-group attitudes. However, in Northern Ireland, Tausch and colleagues (2007) found symbolic threats to be a much better predictor of out-group attitudes than realistic threats. While studying 17 European countries, McLaren (2003) also found that beliefs that immigrants challenge or undermine national values were a stronger predictor of negative attitudes towards immigrants than perceptions of realistic threat. The same was found in the context of The Netherlands (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). In relation to Muslim minorities, it can be expected that symbolic threats and negative stereotypes have stronger associations with Muslim prejudice than realistic threats. Public discourse in The Netherlands focuses on the 'Dutch-Muslim' cultural war and the presumed lack of sociocultural integration of Muslims, and not on competition over scarce resources, such as houses and jobs.

Antecedents of intergroup threats

Stephan and colleagues have identified a number of antecedents of intergroup threat, such as intergroup contact, in-group identification, and status inequalities (e.g. Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan *et al.*, 2000, 2002). These factors are thought to affect the level of perceived intergroup threat and, via threat, the out-group attitudes. Thus, the different types of threats are taken to mediate the relationship between these more distal variables and minority group attitudes. For example, it has been found that realistic and symbolic threats mediate the relationship between intergroup contact with attitudes towards out-groups (Stephan *et al.*, 2000, 2002; Tausch *et al.*, 2007). Further, Ward and Masgoret (2006) found that symbolic and realistic threats mediate the association between multicultural ideologies and immigrant attitudes. The current study examines intergroup contact, in-group identification, and the endorsement of multiculturalism as antecedents of the three forms of intergroup threat. What is novel about our research is that we examine these three antecedents as antecedents of perceived threats. Thus, we formally tested for mediation of contact, identification, and multiculturalism effects by the three different types of intergroup threat.

In-group identification

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) argues that people are motivated to develop and maintain a positive sense of their social self. Establishing favourable evaluative distinctiveness of one's group *vis-à-vis* other groups helps to achieve a positive group identity. However, negative out-group evaluation is by no means an automatic product of group distinctions, but a function, for example, of the intensity of group identification, normative beliefs about group differences, and ideological features of the social world (Turner, 1999).

There is considerable empirical evidence that, in an intergroup situation, those with high in-group identification are more likely to show a variety of group-level responses relative to the responses of low identifiers (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). The more people identify with their in-group, the more likely they are to be concerned about their group interests and to consider it important to preserve their own culture. Group identity functions as a group lens that makes people sensitive to anything that could harm their group. Among White and African-American college students, Stephan *et al.* (2002) found that in-group identification was positively related to racial attitudes and

that this association was mediated by symbolic and realistic threats. In their meta-review, Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006) found that in-group identification had a significant impact on realistic and symbolic threat but the impact was stronger for the latter than the former type of threat. In The Netherlands, Van Oudenhoven and colleagues (1998) showed that individuals who identify strongly with the Dutch in-group were more likely to perceive the presence of ethnic minorities as a threat to Dutch culture and society. Further, in a study on exclusionary reactions to ethnic minorities in a representative sample of ethnic Dutch people, Sniderman *et al.* (2004) found that considerations of national identity overshadowed those of economic concerns. In The Netherlands, economic conditions are relatively favourable, whereas in recent years cultural and religious differences and conflicts have become the core issues in public and political debates. The current emphasis is on Islam and leading politicians, and intellectuals have argued that this religion is a serious threat to the national identity and Dutch culture (Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). In agreement with these results and the public debate, we expected higher in-group identification to be associated with higher perceived symbolic threat. In-group identification was not expected to be related to realistic threat and stereotypes.

Intergroup contact

In examining the contact hypothesis, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) reviewed more than 200 empirical studies. Their meta-analysis showed that the quantity of intergroup contact has a positive effect on prejudice. Furthermore, the positive effect of contact on prejudice appears to be larger than that of prejudice on contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In the context of ethnic minorities, there is some evidence that realistic and symbolic threat mediate the relationship between the quantity of intergroup contact and attitudes towards minority groups (e.g. Stephan *et al.*, 2002; Tausch *et al.*, 2007). However, there is more evidence for intergroup anxiety as a mediating factor, particularly for quality of contact. This was found, for example, by Tausch and colleagues in their study on out-group attitudes in Northern Ireland and by Voci and Hewstone (2003) in their study on Italians' attitudes towards immigrants (see also Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan *et al.*, 2000; Ward & Masgoret, 2006). The current study focuses on quantity of contact. Having frequent contact with out-group members may increase liking and positive affect via mere exposure (Bornstein, 1989). This suggests a direct, or non-mediated, effect of contact quantity on prejudice which indeed was found by Tausch and colleagues. Frequency of contact might also lead to a decategorization of group members and thereby to the reduction of stereotypical thinking. Through frequent contact people can acquire out-group knowledge and can learn to correct negative stereotypes. Many studies have found that intergroup contact does indeed reduce (negative) stereotyping (see Schneider, 2004). Thus, we expected quantity of intergroup contact to be related to less prejudice towards Muslims via two routes. Directly due to mere exposure and indirectly, via its association with reduced stereotyping.

Multicultural ideologies

In their unified instrumental model of group conflict, Esses and colleagues (Esses, Jackson, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2005) argue for the importance of ideological factors that can heighten sensitivity to situational circumstances. The endorsement of a

multicultural ideology, such as the general view that cultural diversity is good for society, is a key ideological aspect in the context of immigrants and minority cultures (Verkuyten, 2006). According to Berry (2006), multicultural policies try to create a feeling of confidence among everyone living in a plural society. This confidence involves a sense of trust and security in 'the other' and in one's own identity. Such a sense is seen as a precondition for the acceptance of cultural others. In contrast, a lack of confidence implies feelings of threat and increased rejection of out-groups.

The multiculturalism hypothesis proposes that endorsement of cultural diversity leads to higher levels of acceptance towards ethnic out-groups. In a study conducted in The Netherlands, Verkuyten (2005) found that the more Dutch participants endorsed the multicultural ideology the more likely they were to evaluate the Muslim Turkish out-group positively. Some experimental studies have further shown a causal positive effect of multiculturalism on automatic and explicit forms of racial attitudes (e.g. Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Furthermore, in the context of New Zealand, Ward and Masgoret (2006) found that the endorsement of multicultural ideologies was associated with decreased perceptions of group threat, which in-turn led to more positive attitudes towards immigrants. Based on the multiculturalism hypothesis and these findings, we expected that Dutch adolescents who endorse multiculturalism more strongly will be less likely to have negative stereotypes about Muslims and be less likely to perceive symbolic and realistic threat. In addition to the indirect effects of multiculturalism on prejudice via its associations with the three types of threat, we also expected a direct or non-mediated effect. The reason is that multiculturalism is not only about creating feelings of confidence and security in 'others', and addressing threats and anxieties. It also encompasses the ideological view that stresses the value of cultural diversity, the recognition of cultural rights, and the maintenance of different group identities within the same political and institutional framework (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Verkuyten, 2006).

In summary, this research examined the relationships between perceptions of threat and prejudice towards Muslims. In the model tested, stereotypes, and symbolic and realistic threats were assumed to mediate the associations between, on the one hand, quantity of intergroup contact (via stereotypes), in-group identification (via symbolic threat), and multicultural ideologies (via all three types of threats), and, on the other hand, prejudice towards Muslims. In addition, contact and multiculturalism were expected to have also a direct effect on prejudice. The proposed relationships were tested using structural equation modelling. We also considered recent discussions about the place of stereotypes in the IIT and tested two alternative models. In testing the models, we controlled for level of education because numerous studies have shown that less educated people tend to be more prejudiced towards out-groups (see Vogt, 1997).

Method

Participants

In 2006/2007, a questionnaire in Dutch was distributed at six secondary schools located in the cities of Enschede, Eindhoven, Zutphen, and Veenendaal. The students were asked to participate in a research on 'The Dutch society: a study among students in The Netherlands'. All students were willing to participate. It took about 25 minutes to complete the anonymous questionnaire in Dutch. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 17 years ($M = 14.95$, $SD = 0.91$). Based on their self-report and the country

of origin of their parents, there was a large sample of 1,203 ethnic Dutch adolescents. There were also 94 non-ethnic Dutch participants and these were not considered in the current analysis.

Measures

The questionnaire included a section on demographics and measurements of the endorsement of multicultural ideologies, frequency of contact with Muslims, in-group identification, realistic threats, symbolic threats, stereotypes, and the attitude towards Muslims. In the questionnaire, and following the model that is tested, the first three constructs were measured first, followed by realistic and symbolic threat and stereotypes. The dependent variable of prejudice towards Muslims was measured last.

The endorsement of multiculturalism was measured with 10 items taken from Berry and Kalin's (1995) multicultural ideology scale. These items have been used in previous research in The Netherlands (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Verkuyten, 2005). Three sample items are: 'The more cultures there are, the better it is for The Netherlands'; 'Immigrants in The Netherlands should forget their cultural background as soon as possible' (reverse scored); and 'Migrants should be supported in their attempts to preserve their own cultural heritage in The Netherlands'. Answers were given on 5-point rating scales: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Cronbach's α is .83 and a higher score indicates a stronger endorsement of multiculturalism.

Intergroup contact was measured with four items: 'How many Muslim friends do you have?'; 'Do you have contact with Muslim students at school?'; 'Do you have contact with Muslims in your neighbourhood?'; and 'Do you have contact with Muslims somewhere else, for example in sport clubs, etc?'. The first item was rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 'none' (1) to 'only Muslim friends' (4). The other three items were rated on 4-point scales, ranging from 'never' (1) to 'often' (4). Cronbach's α for the four-item scale is .70. Higher scores indicate greater levels of intergroup contact.

In-group identification was assessed by asking the participants to respond to six items that were taken from previous Dutch research (Verkuyten, 2005). The items measure the importance attached to one's ethnic background and are similar to the items on the identity and membership subscales of the collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Two sample items are, 'My Dutch identity is an important part of my self' and 'Being Dutch is a very important part of how I see myself'. The items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Cronbach's α for the six-item scale is .89. A higher score indicates stronger in-group identification.

Symbolic threat was measured using items that were similar to the scales used by Stephan and colleagues (1999, 2000, 2002). Participants were presented with the following three statements: 'Dutch identity is being threatened because there are too many Muslims'; 'Dutch norms and values are being threatened because of the presence of Muslims'; and 'Muslims are a threat to the Dutch culture'. The response options ranged from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) on 5-points scale. Higher scores indicate stronger feelings of symbolic threat and Cronbach's α for this scale is .89.

Realistic economic threat was assessed using three items, also adapted from Stephan and colleagues. The items were: 'Because of the presence of Muslims, Dutch people have more difficulties in finding a job'; 'Because of the presence of Muslims, Dutch people have more difficulties in finding a house'; and 'Because of the presence of Muslims, unemployment in The Netherlands will increase'. The response scales were

identical to those used for measuring symbolic threat. A higher score indicates stronger feelings of realistic threat and Cronbach's α is .80.

Stereotypes were measured by using eight trait adjectives: violent; dishonest; unintelligent; friendly (reverse scored); arrogant; kind (reverse scored); avaricious; and inferior. Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought these characteristics described Muslims living in The Netherlands. Each item was rated using a 5-point scale ranging from 'no, absolutely not' (1) to 'yes, certainly' (5). A higher score indicates more negative stereotypes about Muslims. Cronbach's α is .83.

Muslim prejudice was measured by two items that focused on warmth-like feelings. A first social distance item (Bogardus, 1933) assessed how participants would feel about having Muslims as neighbours. The question asked was, 'Imagine that your neighbours are moving and new people come to live next door. How positive or negative would you feel about having Muslims as neighbours?' A 5-point scale was used ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (5). Second, the participants were given the well-known 'feeling thermometer' which is intended as a global measure of out-group feelings. The exact wording of the instructions was: 'Use the "feeling-thermometer" to indicate whether you have positive or negative feelings about Muslims living in The Netherlands. You may mark any degree between 0 and 100. Fifty degrees represents neutral feelings. Markings above 50° indicate positive or warm feelings, and markings below 50° indicate cold or negative feelings'.

Education level was assessed by asking the participants about the type of school they were enrolled in. Considering the Dutch educational system the possible answers ranged from lower general secondary education (1) to the highest level of secondary school (7). A higher score indicates a higher level of education.

Analysis

The percentage of missing values did not exceed 1% for any of the variables. Missing values were imputed for all variables by conditional means assuming multivariate normality except for the two measures of prejudice towards Muslims. The participants that had missing values on these measures were dropped from the sample resulting in a total of 1,187 participants.

The results will be presented in four sections. First, descriptive findings will be given for the additive scales. Second, we will report findings on structural equation models to assess the fit of the observed variables to the latent constructs. Third, the structural part of the model was added to the measurement model to assess the relationships between the different constructs. Fourth, the fit of two alternative models will be examined. All models were fitted by maximum likelihood assuming multivariate normality using Amos (version 7).

Results

Descriptive findings

The mean score for the social distance question was 2.65 ($SD = 1.02$). This score was significantly below the neutral mid-point of the scale, $t(1, 186) = 11.99$, $p < .001$, and indicates negative feelings towards Muslims. In total, 41% of the participants scored at the negative side of the scale, 40% indicated a neutral attitude, and 19% reported positive feelings.

The mean score for the thermometer was 39.79 ($SD = 22.38$) which is also significantly below the neutral mid-point of the scale, $t(1, 186) = 11.77, p < .001$. Of the participants, 54% indicated to have negative feelings towards Muslims, 24% reported neutral feelings, and 21% scored at the positive side of the scale.

Both questions were strongly correlated ($r = .67, p < .001$) and had similar relationships to the other variables. Hence, we recoded the thermometer question into a 5-point scale and reversed the scores for both questions in order to compute an average score in which a higher score indicates higher prejudice or more negative feelings towards Muslims.

As shown in Table 1, the mean scores for the types of threat indicate that the participants did not perceive high levels of threat and that perceived symbolic threat was higher than perceived realistic threat, paired t test $t(1, 186) = 20.58, p < .001$. For the stereotypes, the mean score is at the negative side of the scale, $t(1, 187) = 9.45, p < .001$. The level of contact with Muslims is quite low with 26% of the participants having no contacts with Muslims. The endorsement of multiculturalism and the score for in-group identification are around the mid-point of the scales.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the different independent measures

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. Multiculturalism	–					2.89	0.71
2. Contact quantity	.28**	–				1.95	0.71
3. In-group identification	–.33**	–.14**	–			3.51	0.89
4. Stereotypes	–.46**	–.22**	.25**	–		3.31	0.68
5. Realistic threat	–.41**	–.20**	.23**	.31**	–	2.46	1.01
6. Symbolic threat	–.60**	–.27**	.33**	.48**	.54**	3.06	1.09

** $p < .01$.

All measures are significantly correlated and in the expected directions. The highest (negative) association is between symbolic threat and the endorsement of multiculturalism ($r = -.60, p < .001$). High correlations could lead to problems of multicollinearity. A common method to detect multicollinearity uses variance inflation factors (VIF). According to Myers (1990), a VIF value greater than 10 indicates a serious problem of multicollinearity. The highest VIF statistic with our data was 2.09. Thus, there is no problematic multicollinearity between the variables.

Measurement model

The different constructs as discussed form the measurement part of the model. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for a measurement model including all the latent constructs. In order to attain a satisfactory fit, the errors of some items of the same latent variables were allowed to covary (six parameters in all, one residual covariance for islamophobia, stereotypes, multiculturalism, and contact; two residual covariances for ethnic identification), but not for items measuring different latent variables. For this relatively large sample, the model χ^2 of 1,359.896 indicates a lack of absolute fit ($p < .001$), but all other fit measures show that the model has a good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.55$; CFI = .95; GFI = .93; AGFI = .92; NFI = .92; and RMSEA = .036 and 90%

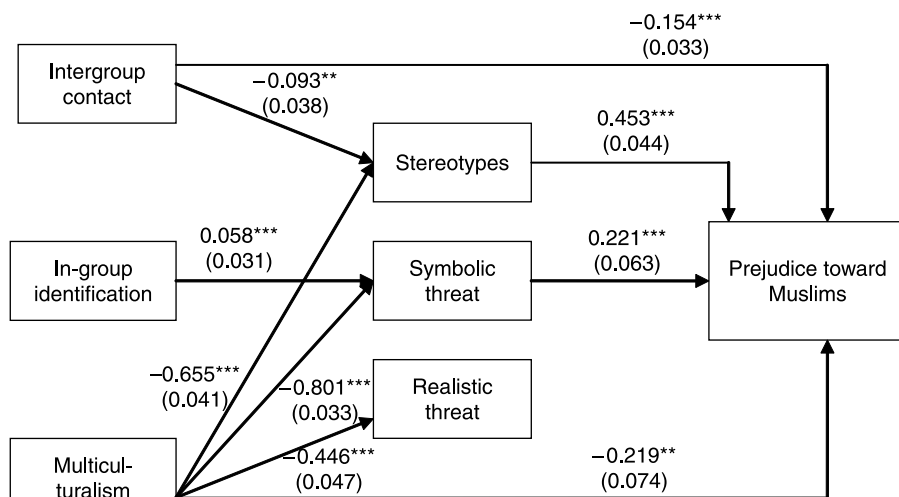
CI = .034-.038. The z -statistics obtained for all the factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and the standardized factor loadings were between .46 and .88.

Structural model

The proposed structural model (Figure 1) has a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1,463.213$; $df = 564$; $\chi^2/df = 2.59$; CFI = .94; GFI = .93; AGFI = .92; NFI = .92; RMSEA = .037 with 90% CI = .034-.039). Thus, the proposed model is appropriate for explaining the relationship between the variables. As shown in Figure 1, the path coefficients from symbolic threat and stereotypes to Muslim prejudice are positive and significant. The path coefficient of realistic threat to Muslim prejudice is not significant. Thus, higher perceived symbolic threat and more negative stereotypes are associated with more negative feelings towards Muslims, whereas the perception of realistic threat is not related to these feelings.

As expected, in-group identification is associated positively only with symbolic threat and not with realistic threat and stereotypes. In addition, no significant direct effect of in-group identification on prejudice towards Muslims was found. A higher level of contact with Muslims is related to less negative stereotypes but not to realistic and symbolic threats. Furthermore, the direct path from contact to Muslim prejudice is negative and significant. The paths from the endorsement of multiculturalism to symbolic threat, realistic threat, and stereotypes are all negative and significant. Thus, stronger endorsement of multiculturalism is associated with lower perceived threats. In addition, the direct path from multiculturalism to prejudice towards Muslims is negative and significant. As expected, education has a significant negative effect on Muslim prejudice (see Table 2).

To examine the mediating role of symbolic threat and stereotypes further, we decomposed the total effects of the three exogenous variables on prejudice into direct



* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note: non-significant paths are not shown

Figure 1. Path diagram model with estimated standardized coefficients with bootstrap standard errors in parentheses.

Table 2. Decomposition of unstandardized and standardized direct and indirect effects on prejudice towards Muslims, with bootstrap standard errors in parentheses

Variables	Total effects		Direct effects		Indirect effects	
	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized
Educational level	-.019 (0.017)	-.032 (0.028)	-.004 (0.015)	-.007 (0.025)	-.015 (0.010)	-.025 (0.018)
In-group identification	-.014 (0.044)	-.012 (0.037)	-.036 (0.036)	-.031 (0.030)	.022 (0.027)	.019 (0.022)
Multiculturalism	-1.020 (0.087)	-.709 (0.040)	-.315 (0.109)	-.219 (0.074)	-.705 (0.100)	-.491 (0.061)
Contact quantity	-.412 (0.082)	-.206 (0.040)	-.306 (0.067)	-.154 (0.032)	-.105 (0.045)	-.053 (0.022)
Symbolic threat	.189 (0.054)	.221 (0.063)	.189 (0.054)	.221 (0.063)		
Realistic threat	.037 (0.034)	.039 (0.035)	.037 (0.034)	.039 (0.035)		
Stereotypes	.695 (0.070)	.453 (0.044)	.695 (0.070)	.453 (0.044)		

and indirect effects. The results are shown in Table 2 and indicate that for multiculturalism the direct paths and indirect paths are significant, indicating partial mediation by symbolic threat and stereotypes. Partial mediation is also found for intergroup contact. However, for in-group identification the results suggest full mediation with symbolic threat as the mediating variable.

The squared multiple correlations (SMC) indicate the explained variance of endogenous variables. The path model of the full model accounts for no less than 78% of the variance in prejudice towards Muslims.

Alternative models

There has been some question about whether negative out-group stereotypes are best conceptualized (A) as an independent threat, (B) as mediating the effects of realistic and symbolic threats on prejudice, or (C) as an antecedent of the other types of threat. The empirical evidence for the role of stereotypes is not clear. For example, Stephan and colleagues (2002) found that among Black and White samples a model using negative stereotypes as an antecedent of perceived threats was the superior model. However, in their study on prejudice towards immigrants in The Netherlands, Curşeu and colleagues (2007) found that stereotypes as a mediator of threats yielded the best fitting model.

We fitted the three competing models A, B, and C. The first model is the one presented in Figure 1 (model A) and was discussed in some detail before. In the second model (model B) negative out-group stereotypes are expected to mediate the effects of symbolic and realistic threat. In the third model (model C) negative out-group stereotypes are an antecedent of symbolic and realistic threat.

The fit indices reported in Table 3 indicate that all three models have a good fit. However, the absolute fit and information indices are the most relevant criteria for the comparison among alternative theoretical models (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Since the models are of comparable complexity, choosing between the models boils down to selecting the model with the smallest model χ^2 -statistic. These indices support the superiority of model A (Figure 1) over models B and C. Thus, the model in which stereotypes and realistic and symbolic threats act as mediators between the antecedents of feelings towards Muslims has a better fit and is significantly different from the other two models.

Table 3. Structural equation fit indices for the three path models

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	90% CI of RMSEA	AIC
A	1,463.213	564	2.594	.948	.037	.034–.037	1,667.213
B	1,535.990	568	2.840	.944	.038	.036–.040	1,731.990
C	1,575.267	563	2.798	.941	.039	.037–.041	1,781.267

Model A: stereotypes as an independent form of threat, Figure 1.

Model B: stereotypes mediating the effects of realistic and symbolic threats.

Model C: stereotypes as an antecedent of realistic and symbolic threat.

Discussion

Using ITT, a path model was specified whereby different forms of intergroup threat are associated with more negative feelings towards Muslims. Further, the effects of three distal variables – endorsement of multiculturalism, in-group identification, and

intergroup contact - were hypothesized to be mediated by the different forms of threat. These predictions were largely confirmed among a relatively large sample of ethnic Dutch adolescent (Figure 1). For this age group, issues of intergroup threat appear to be relevant and important for anti-Muslim feelings. The findings support ITT in different ways.

First, ITT is a general theoretical model for understanding prejudicial and discriminatory reactions to minority out-groups. The theory has been tested for various target groups but not in relation to Muslim minorities. Furthermore, most studies are concerned with neutral or weak positive out-group attitudes and have not examined clear negative attitudes (but see Shimoni & Schwarzwald, 2003). This is generally the case in social psychological research in which, for example, thermometer out-group ratings are typically found to be positive or above 50°. In contrast, in the present study half of the Dutch adolescents indicated to have negative feelings towards Muslims. This is similar to what was found for The Netherlands in the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2005). Thus, around one in two participants indicated to have negative feelings towards Muslims. This indicates that people do express negative views of minority groups and that there is not much subtle about their feelings towards Muslims. In support of the ITT the full model explained a very substantial part of the variance (78%) in prejudice towards Muslims. However, it should be noted that the strength of the results is perhaps somewhat inflated because of the common method variance of the survey technique.

Second, the measurement model confirmed that a distinction between the different constructs could be made. Perceptions of realistic threat posed by Muslims differ from symbolic threats and differ from negative stereotypes as expectations about Muslims being violent, hostile, and arrogant. This finding shows that a distinction in forms of threat is meaningful for adolescents and supports the developmental aspects of intergroup threat theory.

Third, the distinction between the types of threat is also supported by their different impact on prejudice towards Muslims. ITT argues that the forms of threat underlying prejudice differ depending on the intergroup context (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). For example, in the context of Israel, Bizman and Yinon (2001) found that realistic threat, but not symbolic threat, predicted prejudice towards immigrants (see also Shimoni & Schwarzwald, 2003). In contrast, in Northern Ireland it has been found that symbolic and not realistic threat significantly predicts attitudes (Tausch *et al.*, 2007). In the public debate in The Netherlands, Muslims are predominantly presented as a threat to national identity and culture. The Western and Muslim ways of life are supposed to collide, and Muslim minorities are not so much seen as threatening economic assets and employment opportunities. Reflecting this situation, our findings show that the participants perceived significantly higher levels of symbolic threat than realistic threat. Further, perceived symbolic threat and negative stereotypes were associated with Muslim prejudice whereas realistic threat was not. Thus, differences in norms, beliefs, and values that threaten the in-group's worldview as well as characterizations of Muslims as being violent, dishonest, and arrogant seem to fuel negative feelings towards Muslims (see also McLaren, 2003; Sniderman *et al.*, 2004).

Fourth, ITT has suggested that threats mediate the impact of distal variables on attitudes towards immigrants and minority groups (e.g. Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan *et al.*, 2002). Three of these distal variables were examined and partial and full mediation was found. As expected, in-group identification was found to be positively associated with symbolic threat, and this type of threat fully mediated the relationship

between identification and Muslim prejudice. Public debates on Muslim immigrants and minorities focus on the supposed threat to Dutch identity and culture. High Dutch identifiers feel that Dutch norms, beliefs, and values are threatened by Islam and Muslims, and as a result they develop more negative feelings towards Muslims.

More intergroup contact with Muslims was found to be associated with less negative stereotypes, and stereotypes partially mediated the relationship between contact and Muslim prejudice. This is consistent with other research (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and with the idea that contact leads to decategorization and increased knowledge about the out-group, and thereby to less stereotyping (Pettigrew, 1998). Quantity of contact was not associated with perceived symbolic and realistic threat. One reason might be that in the sample the level of contact with Muslims was not very high. Many participants indicated that they did not have any or only few contacts. Another possible reason is that the threat questions focused on Dutch society in general and therefore were relatively abstract. Perceptions of these abstract issues might be less affected by intergroup contacts. It is possible that anxiety or the negative experiences of being personally threatened while interacting with out-group members is more strongly affected by contacts (Tausch *et al.*, 2007). In addition, we focused on the quantity of contact and the quality of contact might be more clearly associated with intergroup threats and prejudicial attitudes (e.g. Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Tausch *et al.*, 2007). It turned out that intergroup contact also had a direct positive association with prejudice towards Muslims. This is in agreement with Tausch and colleagues, who found a direct route from quantity of contact to prejudice in the context of Northern Ireland. Having frequent contact with out-group members may increase acceptance and liking via mere exposure (Bornstein, 1989).

The endorsement of multiculturalism was indirectly associated with prejudice, namely through its associations with symbolic threat and stereotypes. Individuals who endorsed multiculturalism more strongly perceived less symbolic threat and had less negative stereotypes. Multiculturalism was also negatively related to realistic threat. These findings are in line with previous research in The Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2005; see also Ward & Masgoret, 2006) and with Berry's (2006) argument that multiculturalism can provide confidence, trust, and security among everyone living in pluralistic societies. The endorsement of multiculturalism appears to be associated with lower levels of perceived out-group threat. A view that cultural diversity is good for society implies an acceptance and positive evaluation of out-groups. In addition to these indirect effects, the findings show that the endorsement of multiculturalism was also directly related to prejudice towards Muslims. Hence, the association between multiculturalism and prejudice was not only due to a reduced sense of threat and less negative stereotypes. Multiculturalism seems to provide a general ideological view about the importance of cultural diversity that not only reduces a sense of group threat but also emphasizes that people should be recognized and valued in their group identity, and that there should be social equality and equal opportunities.

A difficult and controversial issue in the ITT is the place of negative stereotypes. Stereotypes have been conceptualized as an independent threat that directly predicts prejudice, as an antecedent of the other types of threat, or as a factor that mediates the effect of these threats on prejudice. We tested these three different models and found that the model with negative stereotypes as an independent threat fitted the associations in the data best. Other studies, however, have found a better fit for one of the other two models (e.g. Cursue *et al.*, 2007; Stephan *et al.*, 2002). One important reason for these divergent findings might be the different target groups in the various studies and the

descriptive traits used to measure stereotypes. In our research the focus was on Muslim minorities and on traits such as 'violent, hostile, arrogant, and dishonest'. These negative characteristics will form the basis for threatening expectations about Muslims that lead to feelings of dislike. This interpretation implies that the precise relationship between negative stereotypes and types of threat will depend on circumstances and the measures used and is therefore not easy to generalize.

There are also some limitations to our research. The research is only concerned with the situation in The Netherlands, self-reports were used, the analyses are cross-sectional, and aspects and components of prejudice other than out-group feelings were not examined. It is possible, for example, that a sense of threat does not underlie Muslim prejudice but rather that prejudiced individuals tend to perceive more threats. The same argument can be made for the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice. However, ITT provides good theoretical reasons for testing the current model with anti-Muslim feelings as the dependent variable. Furthermore, in a recent study, Schlueter, Wagner, and Schmidt (in press) tested the causal relationship between threats and prejudice using longitudinal data. They found that group threat is a causal antecedent of out-group prejudice. In addition, Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007) used a 'decoupling' experiment in which they compared the effects of group threats that either were or were not directly linked to ethnic minority groups. In both conditions, symbolic threat turned out to be the strongest predictor of prejudicial attitudes. Also, research, including experimental work, has found that increased contact leads to more positive out-group attitudes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998).

In conclusion, our research shows that ITT offers a useful framework for studying prejudice towards Muslims. The theory and our findings contribute to a better understanding of the processes involved in the development of strong negative attitudes towards this group. To our knowledge, this study represents the first test of ITT in relation to prejudice towards Muslims. Islam has moved to the centre of immigration and diversity debates and politics in Europe (Zolberg & Long, 1999). This is illustrated by the headscarf controversy in France, the debate about the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, and the national debates about Islamic schools and the place of other Islamic institutions, practices and claims within the deeply embedded secularism of most liberal democracies. Religious differences are increasingly being seen as contradictory and insurmountable. As Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007, p. 26) conclude from their large-scale research 'there are parallel barriers of prejudice: a desire of many Western Europeans to hold Muslims at a distance combined with a desire of Muslims to keep their distance'. In this study we focused on the former aspect and the findings indicate that there are clear and strong anti-Muslim feelings among Dutch adolescents.

The findings may also be helpful in trying to develop interventions aimed at reducing anti-Muslim feelings. Increased contact in the form of contact frequency, number of persons involved and indirect or extended contact is an important possibility for intervention. Positive effects are especially likely when there is a supportive social atmosphere surrounding contact. Educational and community relations sectors can try to establish such an atmosphere but these sectors are part of the wider society in which politicians and other epistemic authorities are important sources of information on the nature and position of ethnic and religious minority groups (Bar-Tal, 2004). An anti-Muslim public discourse makes it more difficult for interventions to have positive effects. An emphasis on cultural diversity and multicultural recognition is another promising avenue for improving people's attitudes. Individuals who endorse multiculturalism appear to feel less threatened by minority groups and multicultural

ideology involves the acceptance of diversity and equal opportunities. Multiculturalism can provide and promote positive evaluative contexts (Hogan & Mallott, 2005; Wolsko et al., 2000). However, multicultural interventions should be sensitive to the danger that they can lead to reified and essentialist group distinctions that promote group stereotyping and that endangers social unity and cohesion in particular settings (e.g. Verkuyten, 2006; Vogt, 1997).

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