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Being different or being better? National stereotypes and identifications of Polish and Dutch students

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Abstract

This paper investigates two theoretical statements that are central to Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory: (1) when people identify as members of a social group, they are motivated to distinguish this group in a positive sense from relevant comparison groups, and: (2) in an hierarchically organized system of possible social identities, people may define their identity at various levels, but two levels cannot be salient in the same situation. Four studies investigate whether these hypothesized processes can be traced in natural social categories. Study 1 (N = 150) found that Polish subjects had a more negative national stereotype than Dutch subjects. Study 2 (N = 160) investigated whether these national stereotypes were related to the perceived distinctiveness of national traits, and to differential levels of national and European identification for Polish and Dutch subjects. Contrary to the expectations, it was found that Polish subjects identified more strongly with their national group than Dutch subjects. Both positive and negative national traits were considered more distinctive by Polish subjects than by Dutch subjects. Moreover, Polish subjects expressed a stronger European identity than Dutch subjects. Study 3 (N = 161) replicated the findings of Study 2 under more controlled conditions. The Polish national stereotype was found to be largely based on negatively

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Both authors contributed equally to this paper. Therefore, the order of their names was determined by the toss of a coin.

evaluated traits, and Polish subjects were more motivated to accentuate the distinctiveness of their national traits than Dutch subjects. Again, Polish subjects displayed stronger national and European identities. Furthermore, no support was found for the expectation that Polish subjects would employ some self-protective strategy when such an opportunity was offered in this study. Similarly, in Study 4 (N = 40) we found no evidence that Polish subjects utilized an alternative self-protective mechanism, namely 'group-serving' attributions, by means of which negative national traits could be ascribed to external circumstances. The results of these four studies are discussed in relation to Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorization Theory and political/historical developments in Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The key assumption of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and the more recent Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1985, 1987) is that in many situations people act as members of social categories instead of as individuals. This implies that social categories help people to define their own place and that of others in a social structure, and that people derive their self-definition to some extent from the awareness that they belong to particular meaningful social categories. This theoretical framework has inspired a large body of research, both in laboratory and in field settings (for overviews see Messick & Mackie, 1989; Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992). Nevertheless, some important propositions remain to be systematically investigated. In this paper we will investigate two theoretical issues in natural groups: (1) how identification with a group is related to perception of this group as positively distinct from salient comparison groups, and (2) how people deal with possible identifications at different levels of inclusiveness. These questions are investigated in the European context, that is, we attempt to establish a relation between identification with one's national group and the ascription of more positive traits to this group than to another European nation. In addition, it will be assessed how people express their identity at the national and the (more inclusive) European level.

An important assumption of Social Identity Theory that will be addressed in this study, is that people who identify strongly with a social group are motivated to distinguish this group in a positive sense from other groups. As a result, they are expected to evaluate their ingroup more positively than relevant comparison groups. Presumably, then, there should be a positive relation between people's identification with a group and their need to differentiate their group from other groups in a positive way. So far, only a limited number of studies have explicitly tried to establish the relation between the strength of ingroup identification and the extent to which group members display ingroup biases in group evaluations or outcome distributions. These studies, which are reviewed by Hinkle and Brown (1990), do not offer clear support for this fundamental assumption of Social Identity Theory.

This failure to unequivocally establish a relation between ingroup identification and outgroup discrimination may have to do with the consensually defined social reality, which is likely to restrict the extent to which group members are at liberty to give biased judgements. In natural intergroup settings, which usually involve multiple comparison groups and multiple comparison dimensions, ingroup biases are probably expressed in quite subtle ways. For example, Mummendey and Schreiber (1984) observed ingroup

favouritism on ingroup specific dimensions, and *outgroup favouritism* on outgroup specific dimensions. At the same time, subjects considered ingroup specific dimensions more important. Thus, the need for social validation may lead to perceived intergroup complementarity or *social co-operation* defined as 'a process in which groups (or individuals) co-exist with consensual appreciation of each other's qualities' (Van Knippenberg, 1984, p. 575). Indeed, in multidimensional intergroup comparisons (*cf.* Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983; Mummendey & Simon, 1989; Spears & Manstead, 1989; Van Knippenberg & Van Oers, 1984; Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1979), it may be the case that members of different groups acknowledge existing status differences, or at least mutually agree about the relative superiority or inferiority of their own group on specific comparison dimensions in relation to other groups (Van Knippenberg, 1984; Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1990). Nevertheless, group members may still be convinced that their own group is superior on the whole, for instance because they evaluate typical ingroup dimensions more positively than they do typical outgroup attributes (Van Knippenberg, 1978), or because they try to introduce new dimensions into the intergroup comparison on which their own group would compare positively (*cf.* Lemaine, 1974).

Thus, when specific attributes are involved, ingroup identification should be related to the extent to which positive attributes are ascribed to the ingroup, and/or to a positive evaluation of typical ingroup characteristics. In this paper we address this issue explicitly, and try to assess whether people who differ in the extent to which they identify with their national group, also evaluate their national stereotype differently.¹ On the basis of Social Identity Theory, we expect that national groups that show a more positive national stereotype will be characterized by a stronger national identification than national groups that have a less positive national stereotype.

The second issue we want to address in this study is the relation between social identifications at different levels of inclusiveness. In early formulations of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Brown, 1978), interpersonal behaviour and intergroup behaviour are defined as opposite extremes of a behavioural continuum. Accordingly, personal identity can be established by enhancing differences between self and other ingroup members, while social identification lowers the perceived importance of interpersonal differences between ingroup members. As a result, it is maintained that, in a given social situation, personal identity and social identity cannot both be salient. More recent theoretical statements, made in the context of Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1985, 1987) elaborate more specifically on the question of how people may define their self-concept at different levels of inclusiveness (e.g. at the personal, social or human level). Following the work of Campbell (1958), Turner (1987) introduced the concept of a *meta contrast ratio*. The meta contrast ratio is defined as a 'ratio of perceived intergroup differences to perceived intragroup differences' (Turner, 1987, p. 52). It follows that the greater the perceived variability between groups and the smaller the perceived variability within one's social group, the higher the meta contrast ratio. The higher the meta contrast ratio, the more this category will be cognized as an entity, and consequently, the more dominant this self-categorization will be. On the basis of these principles Turner assumes that: '... there is a *functional antagonism* between one level

¹ It should be stressed that our research does not allow us to determine the direction of the relationship between ingroup identification and the positivity of the group stereotype. Therefore, we will be writing about the association between the two phenomena and *not* about their causal relation.

of self-categorization and other levels' (Turner, 1987, p.49). To our knowledge, however, this theoretically postulated relation has so far not been investigated systematically.

If we take Europe and the European countries as an example, we could apply Turner's reasoning as follows: a salient self-categorization as a European implies accentuation of similarities among different European nations (low variability within the category 'Europe'); salience of one's national category would imply accentuation of differences between this nation and other European nations (high variability within the category 'Europe'). The postulated antagonism consists in the observation that the perceived variability within a given category (Europe in our example) cannot simultaneously be both low and high.

Although it seems difficult to accentuate similarities and differences at the same time, under some circumstances (e.g. in the case of highly regarded members of high status groups), identifications at different levels of inclusiveness may occur simultaneously. In other words, people may want to express that they belong to a highly desirable group, *and* that they have a top position within that group as well (*cf.* Doise, 1988; Ellemers & Mlicki, 1991). Turner (1988), claims that, retrospectively, such data can still be accounted for by Self-Categorization Theory, because it may be argued that people who make sharp distinctions between their own and other groups (and have a strong social identity) increase the comparability of members within the same group (i.e. they can more easily assess their personal identity *vis-à-vis* other ingroup members).

Thus, there are some indications that, in some comparison contexts, people do express their identity at different levels of inclusiveness. Therefore, it is uncertain whether presence of a certain identification can be inferred from absence of another kind of identification (or *vice versa*), as is often presumed in Social Identity Theory (e.g. Brown & Turner, 1981; Turner, 1985). In the present investigation, we attempt to gain more insight into this issue by independently measuring the strength of identification at different levels of inclusiveness.

We have already mentioned different European countries as offering the opportunity to study social identifications at different levels of inclusiveness. Within the European context, the Netherlands and Poland are two countries with different historical backgrounds, political aspirations, and viewpoints on being part of (Western) Europe. These differences are likely to play a role in the way national and social identities are expressed, and may elicit differential identification processes. The Netherlands is an 'original' member of the European Community. It is a politically stable and economically prosperous European country, with a colonial history. The status of Poland as an independent nation has been threatened in the (recent) past. Its political and economic status is insecure; possible membership of the European Community is not expected to be realized before the year 2000. When we apply our theoretical reasoning to this research context, we may expect that Polish and Dutch subjects will have evaluatively different national stereotypes (with the Poles having a less positive national self-image than the Dutch), and that this difference will be reflected in their national and European identifications.

STUDY 1²

Study 1 was designed to obtain information about characteristics that Polish and Dutch students consider to be typical of their own nation. This study was conducted in Spring 1991, in Warsaw, Poland and in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. In both countries the procedure was identical and all materials used were analogous.

Method*Subjects*

In total, 75 Polish and 75 Dutch (male and female) students of social sciences participated as subjects in this study.

Procedure and questionnaires

One third of the subjects (25 Polish and 25 Dutch students) was asked to generate a list of traits they considered typical of their own nationality. 'Typical' was further defined as 'being more characteristic of the Poles/Dutch than of other nationalities'. They were also asked to indicate roughly the valence of the generated traits (negative, neutral or positive). From the traits that were generated by this first group of subjects, a set of traits with high frequencies was selected, so that approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the resulting set was negative, $\frac{1}{3}$ was neutral and $\frac{1}{3}$ was positive. This set of traits was presented to a second group of 25 Polish and 25 Dutch students, who were asked to rate how typical they considered these traits to be of their own national group. The scales ran from 1: 'not at all typical' to 7: 'very typical'. The same set of selected traits was also presented to a third group of 25 Polish and 25 Dutch students, who were asked to evaluate these traits on rating scales that ran from 1: 'very negative' to 7: 'very positive'.

Results

It turned out that when asked to generate distinctive national traits, Dutch students mentioned slightly more positive (52.2 per cent) than negative traits (47.8 per cent) out of a total of 134 traits. The Polish students, however, generated substantially more negative (63.5 per cent) than positive national characteristics (36.5 per cent) out of a total of 115 traits. The ratio of negative traits to positive traits was significantly higher for Polish subjects than for Dutch subjects ($z = 2.54, p < 0.01$; cf. Blalock, 1960, ch. 13.1).

The set of traits that was rated for their typicality and evaluation by the second and third groups of students, revealed a similar pattern. The five traits that received the highest typicality ratings from the second group of Polish and Dutch students, turned out to be positive traits in the case of the Dutch students, and negative traits in the case of the Polish students (see Table 1).

The mean typicality ratings of both sets of five traits were significantly higher than the scale mean (Dutch subjects: $F(1,18) = 63.15, p < 0.001$; Polish subjects: $F(1,22) =$

² Study 1 and Study 2 are part of a larger research project designed and conducted by Lucy Johnston and Karen Long (United Kingdom), Monica Rubini (Italy), Bernd Simon (Germany), and the authors. Here only a small fraction of the results will be presented, and accordingly, only those elements of the method will be described that are directly relevant to these results.

Table 1. Five most typical Polish and five most typical Dutch traits with their respective typicality and evaluative ratings

	Typicality	Evaluation
Dutch typical traits		
Sober	6.1	5.2
Frugal	5.8	4.1
Achievement-oriented	5.4	4.6
Well-educated	5.4	5.7
Serious	5.1	5.3
Polish typical traits		
Dipsomaniacal/boozy	6.7	2.2
Quarrelsome	6.2	2.4
Disorderly	6.2	2.8
Vulgar	5.9	2.0
Intolerant	5.7	2.2

294.02, $p < 0.001$); the mean evaluation of the five most typical Dutch traits was significantly higher ($F(1,18) = 171.82, p < 0.001$), whereas the mean evaluation of the five most typical Polish traits was significantly lower than the scale mean ($F(1,24) = 35.98, p < 0.001$). To summarize the results of Study 1, it appears that the Polish students have a more negative national stereotype than the Dutch students.

STUDY 2

In Study 2 we investigate how these national stereotypes are related to differential levels of national and European identification for Polish and Dutch subjects. We predict that the Poles, who seem to have a more negative national stereotype than the Dutch, will identify less strongly with their national group than the Dutch. Instead the Poles may prefer to identify at a higher level of inclusiveness, that is, they may show strong European identification compared to the Dutch.

A second prediction that may be derived from Social Identity Theory, is that people who show stronger group identification, will be more motivated to perceive positive distinctiveness of their own group. This would imply that the group that identifies most strongly at the national level, would consider positive national traits to be more distinctive and negative national traits to be less distinctive of their own national group than the group whose national identity seems less prominent.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and sixty students participated as subjects in this study (80 Polish and 80 Dutch students of social sciences). Sixty-nine per cent of the subjects were females, 31 per cent were males. The mean age of the subjects was 26 years (22 years among the Dutch students and 31 years in the Polish sample³).

³ All the analyses for Study 2 were repeated with age of subjects as a covariate. This did not change any of the results.

Procedure and questionnaires

The traits for this study were selected on the basis of the ratings provided by the second and third groups of Polish and Dutch subjects in Study 1. For each national group, four positive and four negative traits with similar typicality ratings were selected. Since the most typical traits of the two nations were evaluated differently (see Table 1), we selected traits that were rated clearly above the mean in typicality but not at the maximum. For the Poles, the positive traits were: hospitable, patriotic, heroic, proud. The negative Polish traits were: intolerant, hypocritical, rude, egoistic. The positive Dutch traits were: orderly, tolerant, sociable, serious; the negative traits were: stiff, cramped ('kneuterig'), petty, didactical.

The study was introduced as an international investigation dealing with how people of different nationalities perceive each other. After some introductory remarks indicating that mutual perceptions of a random selection of nationalities would be measured, subjects were given a set of questionnaires to fill in. The nationalities involved were: Britons, Germans, Italians and either Poles (for Polish subjects) or the Dutch (for Dutch subjects). In order to determine the perceived distinctiveness of national traits, we asked subjects to rate the typicality of their eight national traits for each of the four nationalities. Furthermore, subjects had to complete a five-item national identification questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.84$), and a five-item European identification questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.91$; see Appendix).

Results*National identification*

We predicted that people whose national stereotype is more positive (the Dutch) would identify more strongly with their national group than people whose national stereotype is less positive (the Polish subjects).

To test this prediction, we performed an analysis of variance with one between-subjects factor (subject nationality) for the mean national identification score. Polish subjects reported stronger national identification ($M = 5.03$) than Dutch subjects ($M = 3.95$; $F(1,158) = 32.15$, $p < 0.001$). The direction of this substantial difference in national identifications is contrary to what we expected on the basis of the results of Study 1, namely that the Poles have a more negative national stereotype than the Dutch.

Thus, when we combine the findings of Study 1 with those of Study 2, it seems that Polish subjects have a more negative image of their national group, and identify more strongly with their national group than the Dutch.

Distinctiveness of national traits

In this context an interesting question can be raised whether this strong national identification of the Poles is also reflected in the perceived distinctiveness of their national traits. Because the traits that were used were different for the two national samples, we had to look at the distinctiveness data at an aggregate level. For each of the eight traits we first calculated the difference between the extent to which it applied to one's own nation and the mean extent to which it applied to the other three nations. Subsequently, two composite discrimination scores were calculated; one for the four positive traits, and one for the four negative traits. One-way analysis of variance on

these two discrimination scores revealed a significant effect of subject nationality for the positive discrimination score and a marginally significant effect for the negative discrimination score. With respect to the positive traits, they were perceived as more distinctive by Polish ($M = 1.47$) than Dutch subjects ($M = 0.69$; $F(1,151) = 34.49$, $p < 0.001$). This is consistent with the relatively strong national identification displayed by Polish subjects. However, contrary to what we expected, a marginally significant effect was found for the negative traits (M Polish = 0.88; M Dutch = 0.56; $F(1,154) = 3.07$, $p < 0.09$) indicating that Polish subjects also perceived greater distinctiveness with respect to negative traits. These results (a) show that for Polish subjects distinctiveness is more important than for Dutch subjects, and (b) suggest that for Polish subjects distinctiveness might be more important than positive evaluation of their national self-stereotype.

European identification

Regarding the relation between subjects' national and European identities we predicted that, because of their negative national stereotype, the Poles would identify less strongly with their national group than the Dutch, and instead they might show relatively strong European identification compared to the Dutch. Although the first prediction was not supported by our results, it is still interesting to see whether the two national groups differ with respect to their level of European identification.

Analysis of variance performed on the mean European identification score indeed revealed a significant effect of subject nationality. Interestingly, Polish subjects showed stronger European identification ($M = 5.00$) than Dutch subjects ($M = 3.93$, $F(1,156) = 23.11$, $p < 0.001$). When we compare this result with the one concerning national identity, it turns out that Polish subjects displayed strong identifications at both the national level and the European level.

Discussion

In Study 1 it was found that, when generating typical national traits, Polish subjects came up with a larger proportion of negative traits than Dutch subjects. Moreover, the five Polish traits that received the highest typicality ratings were all negative. This suggests that in the national self-stereotype of Polish subjects, negatively evaluated traits play an important role. Therefore, we expected in Study 2 that Polish subjects would show less strong national identification than Dutch subjects. The reverse proved to be the case. Polish subjects identified more strongly with their national group than did Dutch subjects. Accordingly, Polish subjects considered positive national traits to be more distinctive than did Dutch subjects. Contrary to what we expected, however, Polish subjects displayed a tendency to accentuate their national distinctiveness with respect to negative traits as well.

Although we may be able to find *post-hoc* explanations for these data, we still have to interpret them with some caution. The identification measures (in Study 2) were taken from a different group of subjects than the group that generated typical national attributes (in Study 1). Therefore, it may be that those Polish subjects who generated predominantly negative national traits were people who did *not* have strong feelings of national identity. The reverse may also be true, namely that the group of subjects who displayed a strong national identity would have attributed mainly positive traits to

their national group. Thus, in order to further investigate the validity of our reasoning, identification measures and the ascription of positive and negative national characteristics should be taken from the same sample.

When we look at identifications at different levels of inclusiveness, it turns out that Polish subjects, who expressed stronger national identity than Dutch subjects, also displayed stronger feelings of European identity. From this finding we may conclude that these feelings of identity do not merely reflect the *status quo* and the way people define their identity in the context of the *status quo*. When we look at the historical and political developments, it becomes understandable that an explicit acknowledgement of the fact that the Dutch form an independent nation, or that the Netherlands is part of Europe, is unnecessary. These are objective facts, which are supported by official legislation, are acknowledged in various institutions, and are reflected in the national consciousness of the Dutch. For the Poles, however, since the first partition in 1773, it has been necessary to accentuate the fact that they belong to a distinct nation (Davies, 1986). On the other hand, the way the Polish society is presently being restructured is modelled after EC countries (like the Netherlands). The strong sense of European identity should therefore perhaps not be seen as stemming from the conviction that the Poles at present constitute an integral part of Western Europe, but may predominantly be an expression of the *aspiration* to belong to, or participate in, the European Community. Indeed, recent public opinion surveys indicate that the vast majority of Poles express this aspiration (see for example *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 164, 13 July 1993). This interpretation is consistent with the assumption that not only cognitive/perceptual but also motivational factors (e.g. aspirations) determine social identification processes (cf. Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1993).

STUDY 3

A third study was conducted to examine the validity of these *post-hoc* explanations, by trying to replicate the findings of Study 2 under more controlled conditions. To be able to investigate more closely the relation between ingroup identification and the ascription of different attributes, in Study 3 both were measured with the same group of subjects. Furthermore, in Study 3 we wanted to give subjects the opportunity to ascribe the *same* attributes to Poles and to the Dutch.

From a social identity perspective it seems problematic that the same people who show a strong sense of national identity (Polish subjects) mainly attribute negative characteristics to their own national group (or rate these national characteristics extremely negatively). It seems plausible that they would associate different, positively evaluated traits with their national group as well (or bias their evaluation of national characteristics, rating them less negatively). Thus, as far as the Poles are concerned (i.e. when the existing national stereotype mainly comprises negative traits), our initial expectation may have to be redefined. If people identify strongly with a group and perceive the distinctive characteristics of this group negatively, then this threat to positive identity may be resolved by also ascribing non-typical but positively evaluated traits to one's own group (social creativity, cf. Lemaire, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), or by rating typical national traits less negatively. To be able to investigate this issue, we added five positive non-typical traits (i.e. traits that were not mentioned as typical of either the Dutch or the Poles in Study 1) to the traits that were used in Study 2.

If we replicate the findings of Study 2 that Polish subjects have a stronger national identity and a more negative national self-stereotype than the Dutch, we can predict that Polish subjects will be more inclined to utilize one or both of the following two self-protecting mechanisms:

- (1) Polish subjects will evaluate typical Polish traits less negatively, and evaluate typical Dutch traits less positively than the Dutch will evaluate these traits.
- (2) Polish subjects will tend to ascribe non-typical, positive attributes to their national group to a greater extent than the Dutch will claim these non-typical traits. If this is the case, they will also evaluate these traits more positively than the Dutch.

If our speculations regarding the importance of consolidating the status of Poland as an independent nation, and the aspiration of being like 'western' European countries, are valid, we also expect to replicate our finding that Poles display stronger national identification *and* stronger European identification than the Dutch.

Method

Subjects

In this study 79 Polish and 82 Dutch undergraduate students of social sciences participated as subjects. Twenty-seven per cent of the subjects were males, 73 per cent were females. Their mean age was 22 years.

Overview

The design of this study had subject nationality (Polish or Dutch) as a between-subjects factor and target nationality (Polish versus Dutch) as a within-subjects factor. National identification and European identification were measured for all subjects. Additionally, half of the subjects rated the typicality of 15 characteristics for the Dutch and for Poles, and evaluated these 15 traits⁴.

Procedure and questionnaires

The study was introduced as dealing with the perception of nations. After some introductory remarks indicating that mutual perceptions of Polish and Dutch subjects would be measured, subjects were given a questionnaire asking five questions about their national identification ($\alpha = 0.87$) and five questions about their European identification ($\alpha = 0.90$; see Appendix). Additionally, they were asked to what extent they considered themselves similar to a typical representative of the *other* nation, and how important it seemed to them that others knew what their nationality was. All questions were answered on 7-point scales with extremes described as 'not at all' and 'very much'.

Half of the subjects from each national group ($N = 82$) received some additional questions. For this part of the questionnaire, five most typical Dutch and five most typical Polish traits were chosen on the basis of typicality ratings from Study 1 (see

⁴ The other subjects received different additional questions. These data, however, will not be discussed in the present paper. Statistical analyses confirmed that these subjects did not respond differently to the questions that were identical for all subjects.

Table 1). These 10 traits were supplemented with five non-typical, desirable traits (active, likeable, practical, just, independent). The latter traits were characteristics that were not mentioned either by the Polish or by Dutch subjects in Study 1 as typical of their nation. The subjects who received these additional questions first rated the typicality of these 15 traits for their own and the other nation (1: 'not at all typical'; 7: 'very typical'). Subsequently, they were asked to evaluate each of the traits (1: 'very negative'; 7: 'very positive').

Results

Evaluations

From subjects' evaluations of the 15 traits, three mean evaluation scores were computed: one for the 'Dutch' traits, one for the 'Polish' traits, and one for the 'non-typical' traits. Subsequently, these three composite scores were analysed by means of 2 (subject nationality) by 2 (target nationality) ANOVAs.

For the 'Dutch' and 'Polish' traits, there were main effects of subject nationality ($F(1,81) = 14.92, p < 0.001$ and $F(1,81) = 15.71, p < 0.001$, respectively). Contrary to what we expected, Polish subjects evaluated the 'Dutch' traits more positively (5.61) than did Dutch subjects (5.09), and evaluated the 'Polish' traits more negatively than Dutch subjects (1.47 versus 2.01). The 'non-typical' traits were generally considered to be highly positive (6.17); the two subject groups did not evaluate these traits differently.

Perceived typicality

We calculated mean scores for the perceived typicality of the five 'Dutch' characteristics; similarly, mean typicality ratings of the five 'Polish' and five 'non-typical' characteristics were computed. For the three typicality scores we performed analysis of variance with one between-subjects factor (subject nationality) and one within-subjects factor (target nationality).

With respect to the 'Dutch' characteristics, two main effects were found: irrespective of the target nation, Dutch subjects considered the 'Dutch' traits more typical (4.87) than Polish subjects (4.53; $F(1,78) = 5.94, p < 0.02$). Furthermore, both national groups considered 'Dutch' characteristics to be more typical of the Dutch (5.20) than of Poles (4.13; $F(1,78) = 159.59, p < 0.001$). The interaction was not significant ($F < 1$).

For the 'Polish' characteristics, a main effect of target nationality was found ($F(1,79) = 111.38, p < 0.001$). This effect was qualified by the interaction of subject nationality with target nationality ($F(1,79) = 106.01, p < 0.001$). The relevant cell means reveal that the main effect was caused by the Polish subjects, who considered 'Polish' characteristics much more typical of Poles (5.18) than of the Dutch (2.92). Dutch subjects did not consider the typicality of these traits to be different for the Polish (3.82) and Dutch (3.85) target groups.

As for the 'non-typical' characteristics, only the main effect of target nationality was significant: both national groups considered these traits to be more typical of the Dutch (4.92) than of Poles (4.34; $F(1,79) = 35.53, p < 0.001$). Thus, contrary to what we expected, Polish subjects did not display a stronger tendency to 'claim' these positive traits as typical of their own nation than the Dutch.

National and European identification

Analysis of variance on the mean national and European identification scores revealed significant effects of subject nationality for both measures. We replicated the findings of Study 2, namely that Polish subjects showed significantly stronger national identification (5.43; $F(1,159) = 38.35, p < 0.001$) and European identification (5.25; $F(1,158) = 32.86, p < 0.001$) than Dutch subjects (4.32 and 4.21, respectively).

Discussion

In this study the same subjects answered the identification questionnaires, rated the typicality of the same traits for each national group, and evaluated these traits. The target nationality main effects for the typicality measures confirm that the traits selected as typical Polish and Dutch traits were indeed perceived as such. These results confirm our previous conclusion that the Polish national stereotype is largely based on negatively evaluated traits. Nevertheless, our expectation that Polish subjects might employ one or more of various possible self-protective strategies, received no support in this study. We predicted that Polish subjects would evaluate typical Polish traits less negatively, and evaluate typical Dutch traits less positively than the Dutch would evaluate these traits. Instead, Polish subjects evaluated their typical national traits more negatively, and the Dutch positive traits more positively than did Dutch subjects. Moreover, the prediction that Polish subjects would claim positive 'non-typical' traits to a greater extent than Dutch subjects, and would accordingly evaluate these traits more positively, was not supported either. Instead, both national groups considered these traits to be more typical of the Dutch, and evaluated them similarly positively.

In fact, Polish subjects considered negative traits far more typical of them than of the Dutch, while Dutch subjects did not differentiate between the two national groups on these traits. Thus, again it appears that Polish subjects are more prone to accentuate the distinctiveness of their national traits. Our assumption that Polish subjects are more motivated to enhance their national distinctiveness than the Dutch, is further supported by an additional question. It turns out that Polish subjects considered it more important (4.27) than Dutch subjects (3.57) that others knew whether the subjects were Dutch or Polish ($F(1,158) = 4.89, p < 0.05$).

In this study, as in Study 2, Polish subjects again showed stronger national and European identifications than Dutch subjects. We argued in the discussion of Study 2 that this may be the case because the national and European identifications of Poles have different sources and serve different functions than those of the Dutch. More specifically, we hypothesized that the occurrence of strong European identification on the part of Polish subjects may actually reflect their desire to be perceived as belonging to Europe. The latter interpretation is also consistent with the result of another additional question, revealing that Polish subjects claimed greater similarity to a typical Dutchman (3.31) than Dutch subjects considered themselves similar to a typical Pole (2.67; $F(1,158) = 6.20, p < 0.05$).

STUDY 4

In spite of the consistency of the results presented so far, some of our conclusions must still be regarded with some caution. In the first place, although it seems as if Polish

subjects did not take advantage of the opportunity to protect their national self-stereotype by evaluating their national traits less negatively, or by claiming positive 'non-typical' traits, a different mechanism may have served this purpose.

As has been pointed out by Hewstone (1990), insofar as groups have to acknowledge that they have negative traits, they may cope with this predicament by making so-called 'group-serving' attributions, that is, they may ascribe these traits to external circumstances beyond their control. Indeed, in the case of the Polish subjects, they may have argued that the traits they consider typical of their nation (e.g. dipsomania, disorderliness) are the consequence of their history of subjugation by hostile neighbouring countries, and expect that their national characteristics may become more positive when political circumstances change (see also Maass, Salvi, Arcuri & Semin, 1989).

Secondly, on the basis of media reports about public opinions in Poland, we inferred that the Poles have the aspiration to be considered more as a European country than they are at present. Still, we have no direct measure to confirm that this desire is greater for Polish than for Dutch students.

In Study 4 we attempted to address both issues by providing subjects with the opportunity to make external attributions of traits they consider most typical of their nation, and by directly asking them about desired future changes in the extent to which their country belongs to Europe.

Method

Subjects

In this study, 22 Polish and 18 Dutch students (64 per cent male, 36 per cent female) participated as subjects. Their mean age was 21 years.

Procedure

The same 15 traits that were used in Study 3, that is, five 'Polish' traits, five 'Dutch' traits and five 'non-typical' traits, were also used for this study. Subjects were first given a general instruction that introduced the comparison context of different European nations and their national self-images. It was explained that the present study was concerned with how people perceive their *own* nation.

Then subjects were given the list with 15 traits, and were asked to indicate which *five* traits they considered most typical of their nation, that is, more typical of their own nation than of other European nations. After they had finished this assignment, they were given a sheet with 15 adhesive labels, and the rest of the questionnaire. The 15 traits were printed each on one label. Subjects were asked to select the five labels with the traits that they had previously indicated as typical of their nation, and stick these labels in the five frames that were left open in the questions on the first page of the questionnaire. Then they were asked to complete the questionnaire.

Dependent variables

The first five questions asked for internal/external attributions of five typical national traits. For each of the five selected traits, subjects were asked to what extent they thought this was a typical national trait because of the people themselves (internal

attribution), or because of various circumstances (external attribution). Subjects had to give their answers on seven-point scales, with 1 indicating a fully internal attribution, and 7 a fully external attribution.

On the next page of the questionnaire, all 15 traits were listed again. This time subjects had to indicate how they evaluated each of these traits (1: 'very negative'; 7: 'very positive'). Subsequently five questions were asked to measure the strength of their national identification ($\alpha = 0.74$; see Appendix). Finally subjects were asked to what extent they thought their country belonged to Europe (1: 'not at all'; 7: 'very much'), and whether they would like this to change in the future (1: 'would like my country to belong less to Europe'; 7: 'would like my country to belong more to Europe').

Results

Selection of national traits

The mean frequencies of the traits freely chosen from the list of 15 traits replicate the findings from Study 3. The five 'Dutch' traits were more frequently chosen by Dutch subjects (0.51) than by Polish subjects (0.15; $F(1,38) = 49.19, p < 0.001$). Polish subjects more frequently selected the five 'Polish' traits as typical national traits (0.56) than Dutch subjects (0.03; $F(1,38) = 84.15, p < 0.001$). Finally, the 'non-typical' traits were more frequently considered typical national traits by Dutch subjects (0.46) than by Polish subjects (0.26; $F(1,38) = 13.13, p < 0.001$).

Attributions

Because each subject made their own selection of typical national traits for which they answered the attribution questions, we could only compare aggregate scores. The mean attribution scores indicate to what extent subjects attribute those traits that they see as characteristic of their own nation to the people themselves (internally) or to various circumstances (externally). There was no significant difference in mean attributions made by Polish (3.81) and Dutch (4.06) subjects ($F(1,37) < 1, n.s.$), indicating that Polish subjects have no greater tendency than the Dutch to attribute their (negative) national traits to external circumstances).

Trait evaluations

As we did for the attribution scores, we calculated mean evaluation scores for those five traits that were selected by the subjects. When we compare the mean evaluation of traits that are considered most typical of one's own nation, there is a substantial difference between the two subject groups. Polish subjects evaluate the traits they consider typical of their own nation less favourably (3.78) than do Dutch subjects (5.81; $F(1,37) = 34.05, p < 0.001$).

National identification

The mean scores on the national identification measure replicate our findings from Study 2 and Study 3. Polish subjects show stronger national identification (5.25) than

the Dutch (4.60; $F(1,37) = 5.13, p < 0.05$). Thus, although the Polish subjects evaluate their national traits rather unfavourably, and do not attribute these traits to external circumstances, they nevertheless report relatively strong feelings of national identity.

European aspirations

The questions inquiring about subjects' European aspirations revealed an interesting pattern. There was no difference in the extent to which Polish (5.82), and Dutch (5.77) subjects considered their nation to be part of Europe at present ($F(1,37) < 1, n.s.$). However, Polish subjects strongly desired that their country would belong more to Europe in the future (6.00), whereas Dutch subjects seemed more indifferent about future changes in this respect (4.59; $F(1,37) = 16.03, p < 0.001$).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of these studies consistently point out that, contrary to Dutch subjects, Polish subjects have a negative national stereotype. Nevertheless, Polish subjects display a strong sense of national identity, accentuate national distinctiveness, and seem to decline various opportunities to protect their national self-image. At the same time, Polish subjects not only feel strongly involved with Europe at present, they also would like Poland to become more of a European country in the future.

Apparently, for Polish subjects, having a distinct national identity is more important than creating a positive national image. In all likelihood, this tendency stems from a necessity to protect Polish cultural heritage that has permanently been endangered in more than 200 years of recent history (Davies, 1986). In order to survive as a distinct nation, being different was essential. Thus, for Poles it was imperative to accentuate differences (even if it led them to compare negatively with other nations), rather than to point out positive characteristics, which they might share with others. This would mean, however, that the need for *positive* group distinctiveness is not a universal phenomenon, as postulated in Social Identity Theory. Our data suggest that, under some circumstances, people prefer negative distinctiveness to a lack of a distinct identity.

Another consistent finding was the joint occurrence of strong national and European identities in Polish subjects. This indicates that the 'functional antagonism between one level of self-categorization and other levels' postulated by Turner (1987), is not a necessary phenomenon. As we argued above, people may, under some circumstances, be motivated to express their identity at different levels of inclusiveness (Ellemers & Mlicki, 1991). In other words, two adjacent levels of self-categorization do not necessarily work as connected vessels. Thus, it may well be that the strong national identification of Polish subjects, and their identification with Europe, stem from their desire to dispose of their forced membership in communist Europe. In other words, for the Poles, accentuation of their national identification as Polish does not seem to hinder their identification as Europeans. Instead, it may facilitate fulfilment of their aspiration to belong to a *different part* of Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

From this series of studies in the European context, some general conclusions may be drawn. First, it appears that when group distinctiveness is challenged, strong ingroup identification is associated with the desire to be *distinct* as a group. This need for distinctiveness may take precedence over the desire to be more positive than relevant comparison groups. A second conclusion is that adjacent levels of identification do not seem to be antagonistic by definition, as self-categorization theory proposes. Apparently, in addition to cognitive accentuation effects, motivational considerations play a role. As a result, some people may not identify strongly at *either* level of inclusiveness, whereas others do not seem to have difficulty expressing their feelings of identity simultaneously at two adjacent levels.

In this series of studies, we investigated national stereotypes and identifications in a natural comparison context. The comparison of different European nations seems to offer a fairly rich social environment, in which various motivational considerations come into play (*cf.* Hagendoorn, 1993). As a result, our subjects' responses consistently differ from the behaviour that is often observed in minimal groups. To our conviction therefore, our results point out that, in order to gain more insight into processes of social identification and self-categorization, laboratory research has to be supplemented with investigations of natural groups.

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APPENDIX

Component loadings, eigenvalues and internal consistency measures (α) of the National and European Identity items in three studies*

National Identity Questionnaire	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
I see myself as a Dutchman**/Pole	0.77	0.85	0.75
I am glad that I am Dutch/Polish	0.71	0.82	0.72
I feel strong ties with the Dutch/Poles	0.84	0.86	0.77
I am like other Dutchmen/Poles	0.74	0.68	0.59
I identify with the Dutch/Poles	0.85	0.85	0.68
Eigenvalue	3.06	3.33	2.50
α	0.84	0.87	0.74
European Identity Questionnaire	Study 2	Study 3	
I see myself as a European	0.87	0.85	
I am glad that I am a European	0.77	0.83	
I feel strong ties with the Europeans	0.91	0.89	
I am like other Europeans	0.83	0.75	
I identify with the Europeans	0.92	0.88	
Eigenvalue	3.70	3.54	
α	0.91	0.90	

*The European Identity Questionnaire was not utilized in Study 4.

**In all the questionnaires utilized in this research, the statements that are gender specific were formulated in a form adequate for both female and male subjects.

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