

## The impact of recognizing dual identifiers on interethnic relations among youth

**Aim:** To understand how perceiving someone to belong to both the national majority and an ethnic minority group promotes (a) positive interethnic relationships and (b) the reduction of prejudices among late adolescents with and without a migration background.

### Theoretical background:

Recent research suggests that being aware of people with dual belonging (e.g., biracial people in the U.S. or Arab citizens of Israel) reduces prejudice and promotes positive behavior toward other groups. This may extend to school-aged children of immigrant descent in European countries who often identify with the ethnic group of their parents and the national majority. Although research has studied how dual identifiers handle their dual belonging and how others react to them, there is surprisingly little systematic theorizing and empirical investigation into the potential of dual identifiers for improving intergroup relations. Recognition of dual identifiers as members of both the majority and a minority group may offer novel ways to tackle the rising tension in increasingly ethnically diverse European societies.

This PhD project will combine sociological social network theories on networks structures and social-psychological theories on intergroup contact to understand how perceiving the ethnic/national belonging of others affects intergroup relations. Dual identifiers can take unique social positions between often segregated ethnic groups because they can be perceived to be members of both groups. Structural balance theory predicts that such “bridging ties” that connect two otherwise separate groups will improve intergroup relations over time by encouraging new links between the groups (“a friend of a friend is a friend”). Yet, dual identifiers may be motivated to keep their social networks ethnically segregated to avoid questioning their group loyalties. Theories on direct and indirect contact predict that bridging ties will reduce prejudice. However, this hinges on the assumption that dual identifiers are recognized as members of two groups or as having ties to the other group. But people make assumptions about others’ ethnic/national/dual belonging and these often do not align with their self-identifications.

This project will improve upon existing work by moving away from the problematic assumptions that people are always fully aware of others’ ethnic/national self-identification and their friendships. Instead, the effects of perceived belonging of others on adolescents’ interethnic attitudes and their willingness to form interethnic friendships will be studied. To better understand the process underlying perceptions of dual belonging, this project will identify important contextual and psychological moderators. For instance, having interactions with dual identifiers in different social networks (e.g., inside and outside of school) may affect the perception of dual belonging and its consequence for intergroup relations depending on the ethnic composition of these networks. Likewise, perceptions of identity incompatibility or group essentialist beliefs may limit the effect of recognizing dual identifiers on interethnic relations.

### Research design:

As member of a larger ERC project with two other PhD students, you will collect unique longitudinal data on perceived social networks and perceived ethnic/national belonging in schools and community colleges. You will learn to apply social network analysis (multilevel stochastic actor-oriented models) to analyze the effect of adolescents’ perception of others’ ethnicity on their attitudes and friendship choices in school. The project also involves collecting information on adolescents’ out-of-school friendships to examine how dual identifiers manage their friendships and how this affects interethnic relations in the school class.

### Literature:

- Boda, Z., Néray, B., & Snijders, T. A. (2020). The dynamics of interethnic friendships and negative ties in secondary school: The role of peer-perceived ethnicity. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 83(4), 342-362.
- Love, A., & Levy, A. (2019). Bridging Group Divides: A Theoretical Overview of the “What” and “How” of Gateway Groups. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(2), 414–435. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12327>

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