

NATIONAL IDENTITY OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS OF CZECH AND BULGARIAN ORIGIN

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to examine the structure of national identity among young adolescents of Bulgarian and Czech origin. University students ($N=161$) completed the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R)* (Phinney & Ong, 2007), four measures of psychological well-being and a measure of salience of ethnicity. Factor analyses of data for the two national groups yielded a two-factor structure that corresponded to two theoretical approaches to ethnic identity, as hypothesised. Similar patterns in magnitude of loadings were observed across groups, indicating that the MEIM-R could be used as a global composite index of national identity. National identity was related positively to measures of psychological well-being such as mastery, self-esteem and optimism, and negatively to measure of loneliness. MEIM-R scores were also moderately correlated with salience (the importance of a person's own national background in his or her life), across national groups.

Keywords: national identity, adolescents, Czechs, Bulgarians

Introduction

On the old continent of Europe, the multitude of various cultures forms a variegated mosaic. Each human being, besides his/her personal identity, possesses a number of social identities that ensue from his/her belonging simultaneously to a different group – national, gender, age, religious, occupational, ethnic, political, etc. They are internalised and represent a considerable part of the individual's self-image. For a person to be a part of a given nation and to belong to it, means to share its values, customs, traditions, rites, language and territory, to hand them down from generation to generation and as if in this way to touch the eternity. What is the structure of national identity of students from the Czech Republic and Bulgaria? Which are the more important elements that form it in their opinion? Do differences in countries, gender and age with respect to their point of view of national identity exist? It is the answers to those questions that the present article is dedicated to.

Two distinct theoretical approaches have been used in most research on national identity: the *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the *developmental theory* of Erikson (1968).

The social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that individuals belong to different social groups (sex, age, ethnic group, nation, etc.). If the belonging to a social group is internalised as a part of the self-concept, individuals try to enhance the self-esteem of their social identity. Social identity was defined by Tajfel (1981) as

[t]hat part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his (her) knowledge of his (her) membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. (p. 255).

The positive characteristics ascribed to the in-group lead to a positive self-evaluation. If the identification with the group is weak or absent, this phenomenon will not appear. For example, if somebody belongs to a group of low social status, he or she will have difficulties in acquiring a positive evaluation of the in-group. According to the SIT, there are some cognitive processes thanks to which the differences between the members of the in-group disappear while the differences with the members of out-groups are underlined. Thus, the SIT considers that the in-group favouritism is a psychological consequence of the internalised belonging to the in-group. According to Tajfel (1978), it can be said that each social group provides to children a concrete social identity based on a determinate representation of the world as well as a set of values, attitudes, beliefs and actions, which corresponds to the social representation.

On the basis of the social identity theory, it would be expected that national identity would include national attitudes and a sense of group belonging. In the MEIM, the strength and valence of national identity, termed affirmation and belonging, are represented by five items that assess attachment, pride and good feelings about the person's nationality.

A second approach to the study of national identity has been based on the Erikson (1968) theory of *identity development*. To Erikson, identity refers to a subjective feeling of sameness and continuity, which provides individuals with a stable sense of self and serves as a guide to choices in key areas of one's life. Identity is not something that individuals automatically have. Rather, an identity develops over time, beginning in childhood, through a process of "reflection and observation" (Erikson, 1968), which is particularly salient during adolescence and young adulthood, but may continue through adulthood and is expected to lead to a resolution or an achieved identity. Not all individuals achieve a stable identity, however, and the failure to do so results in role confusion and the inability to make progress toward meaningful commit-

ments. According to Erikson, identity formation takes place through a process of exploration and commitment, which typically occurs during adolescence and which leads eventually to a commitment or decision in important identity domains. This developmental approach posits that national identity will vary with age; younger adolescents would be expected to have a less clear and committed sense of their nationality than older adolescents would.

The empirical study of personal identity was advanced by Marcia (1980) who conceptualised identity formation as involving two processes: exploration of identity issues and commitment in relevant identity domains. These two processes can be assessed independently, and they can be used together to define four identity statuses. Individuals may show evidence of having engaged in neither process, indicating identity diffusion. If they have made a commitment without having explored, they are in identity foreclosure. Those in the process of exploring without having made a commitment are in a moratorium period. Individuals who have explored key identity issues and made commitments are said to have an achieved identity. The statuses of national identity among young people from Bulgaria have been investigated by Байчинска & Савова (2005).

Social and national identities are perceived by many researchers as multidimensional, many-faceted and dynamic (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Zografova, 2010, 2011; Андреева & Карабельова, 2011; Петрова, 2012). Although there is wide agreement that national identity is crucial to the psychological well-being of members of a national group, there has been little consensus on exactly what national identity is or how it should be measured (Phinney, 1990).

When certain methodology has been developed in order to study a specific ethnic or national group (Felix-Ortiz et al., 1994), it usually includes study of behavioural aspects, such as use of language, consumption of traditional dishes, or turns to considering the intensity of relations between the in-group

members. Some researchers consider the knowledge and use of the own language as a key component of national identity. The behaviour includes actions through which the own identity is expressed. Nevertheless, however, national identity is an internal psychological structure that may exist without being expressed in a specific type of behaviour or action. The behaviour that is related to the own culture, ethnic or national group has been studied as an aspect of the process of acculturation and it is a term different from identity (Berry et al., 2006). In order to clarify the scientific notion of identity, it is necessary to differentiate it from definition and measurement of behavioural aspects. Few of the studies performed include behavioural practices in analysing the national identity. It is more precise to study both variables separately, irrespective of each other in order to avoid their mutual influence.

Early empirical studies of national and ethnic identity were directed to a specific ethnic or national group and that is why the instruments that were applied were specific for the respective group (Felix-Ortiz et al., 1994). The *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) developed and tested by Jean Phinney from the USA (MEIM)* (Phinney, 1992) is a result of the reverse tendency. It has been developed in order to satisfy the need of general methodology that is to measure both ethnic and national identity of the members of different minority groups and of the majority. That is why questions about cultural values and beliefs typical of a certain group are not included in it.

In a literature review that covered research on identity, Phinney (1990) identified a number of components that have been considered to be central to the construct of ethnic and national identity and that have been used in studies with a wide variety of ethnic and national groups. Those components served as the basis of a measure for ethnic identity, the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*, developed to provide a way to assess ethnic identity across diverse samples (Phinney, 1992). The measure assesses overall ethnic identity on the basis of three components: affirmation and belonging (sense of group

membership and attitudes toward the individual's group); ethnic identity achievement (the extent to which a person has achieved a secure and confident sense of his or her ethnicity); and ethnic behaviours (activities associated with group membership). The measure also includes items to determine ethnic identification (or self-label). The initial validation study of the scale (Phinney, 1992) indicated a single factor of ethnic identity.

The original version of *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)* (Phinney, 1992) includes questions about participation in practices characteristic of the ethnic or national group of belonging and of the social interaction of their members. It consists of 14 questions that comprise the main components of the ethnic and national identity, which are assumed to be common for all ethnoses and nations: *sense of belonging and dedication to the in-group* (according to the Social Identity Theory) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the term *secure identity* from the Child Development Theory (based on the empirical work of Marcia (1980)), also taking into account the degree of *involvement in the activities characteristic of the ethnic or national group*. The values and beliefs are not included because they are strictly characteristic of each group. Included also are 6 questions that measure the *attitudes towards other groups* different from the in-group. Their aim is that they are clearly differentiated and independent of the questions about identity. The results of the exploratory factor analysis performed (Phinney, 1992; Ponterotto et al., 2003) show that 14 questions of the scale form a common factor for ethnic or national *identity*, which is different from the scale for measuring the *attitudes towards other groups*.

The scale called *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MEIM-R)* (Phinney & Ong, 2007) comprises a total of 6 questions and is applied in the study presented.

In summary, the aims of this study were to determine the structure and validity of national identity as measured by the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity*

Measure – Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007), in a sample of early adolescents of Czech and Bulgarian origin, living in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, to examine the variability of national identity across national groups, to establish the degree reached by the processes of exploration and commitment to the own nation and the differences by countries, gender and age in the formation of their national identity. It was hypothesised that the MEIM-R would show two factors that would reflect the theoretical approaches, that the MEIM-R would be correlated positively with psychological well-being, and that national groups would differ in national identity.

Method

Participants

The participants were 182 young people (96 boys and 86 girls; average age 23.7 years). In terms of self-chosen national label, the sample consisted of two national groups: Bulgarians, n=96; 57 boys and 54 girls; average age 24.0 and Czech n=86; 39 boys and 32 girls; average age 23.2 years.

Measures

National identity (MEIM-R). National identity was assessed using the 6-item self-reported questionnaire *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R)* (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It was designed to assess two components of national identity: exploration (three items) and commitment (three items). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means “*strongly disagree*”, 3 “*neutral*”, and 5 means “*strongly agree*”. The scores for National Identity total scale and Exploration and Commitment subscales are calculated as the mean of items in each subscale, or of the scale as a whole. Higher mean score on scale and subscales indicates strong national identity.

National salience was assessed using a single item that inquires how important the persons’ national background was to them. Responses were on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 “*not at all important*” to 4 “*very important*”.

Loneliness was a 10-item scale, the Russell revision of the University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996) and was responded to on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 “I never feel this way” to 4 “I often feel this way”. This scale has demonstrated good reliability and construct validity (Higbee & Roberts, 1994). Alpha for this sample was 0.86, with a range of 0.87 to 0.86 across national groups. An example of the item on this scale is: “How often do you feel completely alone?”

The following three measures of psychological well-being were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 “*disagree*” to 5 “*agree*”. In each case, higher scores indicate stronger presence of the variable.

Self-esteem was measured by a 10-item version of the Rosenberg (1986) scale. This scale had a reliability of 0.81 in this sample. The range was 0.80 for Bulgarians and 0.82 for the Czech national group. Typical items were: “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure” (reverse coded).

Optimism was measured using a 6-item, revised version of the Life Orientation Test (*LOT-R*) (Scheier et al., 1994). Typical items are: “Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad” and “If something can go wrong for me, it will” (reverse coded). Coefficient alpha in this sample was 0.72, ranging from 0.68 to 0.79 across national groups.

Mastery was a 7-item scale from the works of Pearlin & Schooler (1978) and Pearlin et al. (1981). This scale had acceptable reliability levels ($\alpha=0.79$) in this sample, with a range of 0.72 to 0.84 across national groups. Examples of the items on this scale are: “I have little or no control over the things that happen to me” and “What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me” (reverse coded).

In addition, participants reported demographic data, including age and gender.

Results

Reliability and validity

To assess whether the 6 items of *National identity (MEIM-R)* and its two subscales formed reliable scales, Cronbach's alpha was computed. Overall reliability of the 6-item *National identity scale* was 0.80 for the whole sample; for Bulgarians and Czechs, reliabilities were 0.78 and 0.82, respectively. For the 3-item *commitment* subscale reliability was 0.76 for the whole sample and for Bulgarian and Czech groups: 0.71 and 0.84, respectively. For the 3-item *exploration* subscale reliability was 0.76 for the whole sample and for Bulgarian and Czech groups: 0.75 and 0.76, respectively.

To check the *construct validity* of the scale, confirmatory factor analysis of the 6 items was performed for the sample, with two factors being set according to the number of subscales in the methodology. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy value for the whole sample was 0.74, and for Bulgarian and Czech nationality groups: 0.71 and 0.76. The Bartlett's test of sphericity in all cases reached statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. After rotation, the total explained variance from the two factors is 57.3%. Four items with factor loadings between 0.50 and 0.84 relate to factor 1 that explains 29.5% of the total variance and it is associated with *Exploration subscale*. Four items with factor loadings between 0.41 and 0.91 also relate to factor 2 that explains 27.8% of the total variance and it is associated with *Commitment subscale*. The eigenvalues for the two factors are respectively 1.77 and 1.67.

Correlation of national identity with psychological well-being

Social identity theory and development theory both indicate that national identity would be associated positively with psychological well-being (Roberst et al., 1993). That is why it was hypothesised that national identity scale would show: a positive relation to indicators of psychological well-being

(*self-esteem, optimism, mastery*) and a negative relation to indicator of *loneliness* across diverse ethnic groups (Roberts et al, 1993). The correlation of the 6-item *MEIM-R* with each of the psychological well-being measures across the two ethnic groups and for the overall sample was examined. In general, overall and across groups (Bulgarian and Czechs), *MEIM-R* scores were associated positively with *sense of mastery* ($r=0.21$; $r=0.18$), *self-esteem* ($r=0.25$; $r=0.16$) and *optimism* ($r=0.20$; $r=0.01$). Furthermore, *loneliness* was generally related negatively to *MEIM-R* scores ($r=-0.17$; $r=-0.12$), although the correlations did not reach statistical significance in some cases. As an additional indicator of validity, the correlation of *national salience* ($r=0.70$; $r=0.41$) with the *MEIM-R* was calculated. Salience, or the importance of a person's own national background in his or her life (Alba, 1990), should be associated with *MEIM-R* scores, which reflect national identity exploration and commitment.

Pearson correlations between *commitment* subscale and *exploration* subscale were significant ($p<0.001$) for the whole sample $r=0.49$ and for the two groups as well: $r=0.47$ for Bulgarians and $r=0.46$ for Czechs.

The results obtained from Cronbach's α and from the confirmatory factor analysis show that the methodology applied to measure the *national identity* (Phinney & Ong, 2007) is satisfactorily reliable and valid for the given sample, which allows performing further statistical analysis.

National group differences

An independent sample *t*-tests were performed to examine differences among nationality in national identity using the Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure (*MEIM-R*). The subjects were divided into two groups according to the number of national groups, Czechs and Bulgarians. The results indicated that a statistically significant difference existed for Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure scale ($M_{\text{Bulg.}}=3.44$, $M_{\text{Czechs}}=3.14$, $p=0.01$, $d=0.51$) and for the two subscales: *Commitment* subscale, ($M_{\text{Bulg.}}=3.21$, $M_{\text{Czechs}}=3.89$, $p=0.01$, $d=0.55$)

$p=0.01$ and *Exploration* subscale ($M_{\text{Bulg.}}=3.67$, $M_{\text{Czechs}}=3.39$, $p=0.03$, $d=0.22$). These results indicated that significant differences existed between national groups, Czechs and Bulgarians. As a whole, the Bulgarians have higher values for the whole scale and feel more committed to their national identity in comparison with the group of Czechs. The Czechs, however, are more involved in the process of exploration of their nationality in comparison with Bulgarians.

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore the impact of *gender* and *nationality* on levels of national identity. The interaction effect between *gender* and *nationality* was not statistically significant, $F(1,178)=0.03$, $p=0.87$.

Several independent sample *t*-tests were performed to examine differences among gender in ethnic identity using the *Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure (MEIM-R)*. The results of the analyses are summarised in Table 1.

When examining ethnic identity, statistically significant differences for the groups of Czechs and Bulgarians were found. For boys of both groups, ethnic identity is more important than for girls. In the *Exploration* subscale, no statistically significant differences by gender in the two groups examined, Czechs and Bulgarians, are observed. Boys, both of Bulgarian and Czech origin, attach greater importance to *Commitment* than girls do.

Table 1. The mean of *Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure (MEIM-R)*, broken down by gender

<i>Ethnic Identity Measure</i>	<i>National Group</i>		<i>significance by nationality</i>	<i>effect size d=</i>
	<i>Bulgarian</i>	<i>Czech</i>		
Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure				
male	3.52	3.21	*	0.45,S
female	3.36	3.04	*	0.50,T
<i>significance by gender</i>	*	*		
<i>effect size d=</i>	0.22,S	0.27,S		
<i>Exploration subscale</i>				
male	3.29	2.93	*	0.50,T

female	3.13	2.81	*	0.51,T
<i>significance by gender</i>	-	-		
<i>effect size d=</i>	-	-		
Commitment subscale				
male	3.76	3.50	-	-
female	3.58	3.27	-	-
<i>significance by gender</i>	*	*		
<i>effect size d=</i>	0.23,S	0.31,S		

Notes: Low scores represent low relevant importance, and high score represent high relevant importance (1 – minimum, 5 – maximum); where there is a statistically significant effect at $p < 0.05$ by nationality, an asterisk (*) appears in the last column; where there is a statistically significant effect at $p < 0.05$ by gender, an asterisk (*) appears beneath the relevant column of two figures; data analyses using independent-samples *t*-test; effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* and was interpreted as: >1.0 much larger than typical ($>L$), $0.8-1.0$ larger than typical (L), $0.5-0.8$ medium or typical (T), $0.2-0.5$ smaller than typical (S) according to Cohen (1988).

Age group differences

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore the impact of *age group* and *nationality* on levels of national identity. The interaction effect between *age group* and *nationality* was statistically significant, $F(1,178)=6.11$, $p=0.01$, $\eta^2=0.18$, which according to Cohen (1988) is a small effect size.

Several *t*-tests were performed to examine differences among age groups in national identity using the *Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure (MEIM-R)*. The subjects were divided into two groups according to the number of age groups (younger, older). The results of the analyses are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. The mean of *Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure (MEIM-R)*, broken down by age

<i>Ethnic Identity Measure</i>	<i>National Group</i>		<i>significance by nationality</i>	<i>effect size d=</i>
	<i>Bulgarian</i>	<i>Czech</i>		
Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure				
younger	3.52	3.21	-	-
older	3.36	3.04	*	0.53,T

<i>Statistical significance by age groups</i>	*	-		
<i>effect size d=</i>	0.47,S	-		
Exploration subscale				
younger	3.29	2.93	-	-
older	3.13	2.81	*	0.65,T
<i>Statistical significance by age groups</i>	*	*		
<i>effect size d=</i>	0.65,T	0.35,S		
Commitment subscale				
younger	3.76	3.50	-	-
older	3.58	3.27	*	0.24,S
<i>Statistical significance by age groups</i>	-	-		
<i>effect size d=</i>				

Notes: See notes under Table 1.

With the increase of age, the significance attached to national identity decreases for the group of Bulgarians. The same trend is observed in the *exploration* process for the representatives of both national groups. There is no statistically significant difference by age for the process of *commitment* both for Bulgarians and Czechs.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the factor structure, construct validity and national differences in national identity, using the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R)* with a nationally diverse sample of adolescents of Czech and Bulgarian origin. The results add to the existing literature on national identity by providing evidence that national identity: (a) is a valid construct with young adolescents; (b) has an identifiable structure that emerges in early adolescence; (c) can be measured reliably across groups, and (d) differentiates among adolescents from differing national groups, Czechs and Bulgarians.

The two theoretical approaches proposed for understanding national identity are reflected in the two factors, commitment and exploration. The first component of national identity consists of commitment and a sense of belong-

ing to a national group, together with pride and positive feelings about the group. This aspect of national identity can be understood in terms of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which proposes that social identity, as a general construct, involves feelings of attachment and belonging to a group and to the attitudes associated with that sense of belonging. In addition, items originally conceptualised to assess commitment to a national group, and thus as part of national identity achievement (Phinney, 1992), were found to be associated with affirmation/belonging. It appears that the commitment that is part of national identity achievement is closely associated with affirmation of a group and is perhaps indistinguishable from such affirmation; i.e., a commitment to a group necessarily carries with it a sense of belonging and positive feelings.

The second main component involves the process through which individuals explore, learn about and become involved in their national group. Behaviours that indicate involvement with a national group appear to be part of the exploration process rather than either a separate component or part of the subjective sense of belonging that is associated with social identity theory. This result is consistent with descriptions by Cross (1991), Phinney (1993), Ganeva & Phinney (2009), Phinney & Ganeva (2011), indicating that exploration often includes active involvement in the person's group.

In addition to considering the structure of ethnic identity, the construct validity of national identity based on the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* was examined. The validity of the measure was supported by the expected positive correlations with measures of psychological well-being (mastery, self-esteem and optimism) and negative correlations with loneliness. In addition, there was a positive association between the MEIM-R scale and a single item that assessed the salience of nationality to these adolescents. These relations were replicated within each of the two national groups, Czechs and Bulgarians. However, the correlations with psychological outcomes, although

consistent across all the two groups examined, were relatively modest. National identity is clearly only one of many factors that contribute to well-being (Phinney et al., 1997). However, for purposes of evaluating the construct validity issue, it is believed that the pattern the correlations provide does support the conclusion that the MEIM-R is valid in the context of this study. That is, the direction of the associations is in general as predicted and most are statistically significant. More important, as noted in the Results, the correlation between MEIM-R scores and the item on salience of ethnicity averaged 0.61 across the whole sample. This provides the clearest and strongest evidence for the validity of the MEIM-R scale.

It is an indisputable fact that each human being perceives and experiences in a different way his/her national identity. Nevertheless, the study presented is an attempt at investigating the collective answer of two national groups, in this case Czechs and Bulgarians. The results obtained from the study conducted show that, as a whole, national identity is more weakly expressed and less significant with students from the Czech Republic in comparison with students from Bulgaria. This probably finds its explanation in the historical factors and the factors of the social environment, in the fact that the Czech Republic is a state that has emerged more recently, on January, 1st, 1993, and it is a typical example of a nation-state. After the political changes of 1989, Czechoslovakia disintegrated and since then the Czech Republic has been a sovereign state. Striking is the fact that the *exploration* process is of greater importance for the adolescents of Czech origin, and the group of Bulgarians feels more *committed* to its national in-group. As a whole, the boys from both nations have more clearly expressed national identity and feel committed to a higher degree to their national in-group in comparison with the girls. Logically, the process of *exploration* of the own nation is more significant for the lower age group both for the group of Czechs and the group of Bulgarians.

According to Barrett (2007), referring to the studies of many years' duration, which he has conducted on national identity development, internal *cognitive structures and factors of the social environment* participate in children and adolescents. He argues that the child per se and the social context it develops in must be analysed.

The researchers who analyse national identity and some of its components, such as patriotism, for example, understood as positive emotional devotion to the own country, are unanimous that these are *many-sided and multi-dimensional phenomena*. Out of them, however, few produce empiric evidence of this in their studies and examine their development in childhood. There is a necessity of studying the process of national identity formation during childhood and the effect of the social context, of the state and society the child socialises in, of the information it obtains and uses and how it is handed down to generations, the age cognitive changes that take place, the role of the school, the knowledge taught and the mass media, the gender differences.

The process of development of the own national identity, its study and later its relation to membership of a certain nation is a part of more comprehensive process of realisation of the national diversity on international scale (Ganeva, 2009; 2010; Stoyanova, 2013). The well developed and firm national identity is expressed in taking a position of clarity, openness, acceptance and tolerance towards the members of different national groups. By reducing the feeling of fear and threat, the national identity achievement allows the natural aspiration of the individual, that his/her interest in the new and unknown is an incentive for establishing initial contact with representatives of different nations.

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