

--	--	--

NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

by

THOMAS IACOBELLIS

Submitted to the Psychology Department

School of Natural and Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

12/2022

Sponsor: Dr. Krystal M. Perkins, Ph.D.

Second Reader: Dr. Paul Siegel, Ph. D.

		1
--	--	---

--	--	--

Abstract

Collective memory is the dominant representation of a nation's history. Contemporary research has explored the implications of collective memory on constructions of national identity, beliefs about minority rights, and erasure of minoritized groups in history. In extending this work, this study evaluated the extent to which manipulating particular constructions of national identity (ethnic vs. civic) will impact collective memories about minority groups in the US and support for minority rights. Participants read a short, falsified report written by the U.S. Census Bureau. These reports focused on different perspectives of "what it means to be a U.S. citizen." For the civic national identity report, participants read about how paying taxes, working to become a citizen, and following laws are important to the U.S. American identity. In contrast, those presented with the ethnic national identity report read about how being a member of the majority race, being fluent in English, and having ancestors from the U.S. are important aspects of the American identity. After reading the report, participants answered a series of questions regarding the contributions of specific ethnic/racial groups in the U.S. and policy related to minority groups. It was found that those exposed to a civic national identity prime were more in favor of minority group rights than those exposed to an ethnic national identity prime. However, no statistically significant differences were observed regarding the contributions of ethnic/racial groups among those exposed to a civic national identity prime and an ethnic national identity prime.

		2
--	--	---

--	--	--

Collective memory has been a topic of research in social psychology for a long time. Collective memory is the dominant representation of a nation's history and culture and has been shown to have an impact on people's conception of national identity (Banjeglav, 2021; Kurtis, 2017). Contemporary research has largely explored the implications of collective memory on constructions of national identity, beliefs about minority rights, and erasure of minoritized groups in history (see Rotella & Richeson, 2013; Sahdra & Ross, 2007 for exceptions). In extending this work, this study evaluated the extent to which manipulating particular constructions of national identity (ethnic vs. civic) will impact collective memories about minority groups and support for minority rights in the US. The next section reviews the literature on collective memory and then introduces the specifics of the current research.

Collective Memory, National Identity and Minority Rights Attitudes

Recent research suggests a relationship between collective memory, national identity, and views on minority rights. For example, across two studies Kurtis, et al., (2017) examined the relationship between representations of history, national identity, and beliefs about policy relating to minorities. This research was conducted in Turkey, an area rife with historical censorship and minority suppression. The first study was an analysis of the history portion of Turkish college entry exams over the course of four years. These researchers coded for glorifying themes, critical themes, and references to identity using a scale of 0-4 to determine how strongly each theme was emphasized. It was hypothesized that Turkish collective memory would emphasize nation-glorifying themes and de-emphasize negative aspects of their collective past. The results of this study confirmed that official Turkish history did, in fact, emphasize nation-glorifying themes, but rarely mentioned minorities contributions, and if they did, it tended to be in a

		3
--	--	---

--	--	--

negative manner. The results also showed that the state focused heavily on depictions of itself in keeping with traditional Turkish values and ethno-cultural concepts of citizenship.

The second study examined how Turkish participants understanding of Turkish history impacted their conceptions of citizenship and their support for various policies including freedom of expression and minority rights. A conception of citizenship is a framework that a given person holds to assess whether somebody is considered a part of their in-group or not. Ethno-cultural conceptions have to do with nationality and family bloodline, whereas civic conceptions focus more on following particular behaviors such as rule following that are associated with belongingness to a group. Participants completed a history quiz, which included items from study 1, as well as silenced history items. Participants also reported their opinions of policies regarding minority rights and freedom of speech, and measures of ethno-cultural and civic conception of citizenship. The data showed that denial of silenced history was negatively correlated with support for minority rights and freedom of expression. It was also found, using a regression analysis, that ethno-cultural identity constructions were a significant predictor of denial of silenced history. This study and its results are important to ongoing research into identity, particularly about how an individual describes themselves and others as members of a nation effects what they are willing to believe about the interactions between groups in that nation.

Kurtis and colleagues (2010) have also examined the silencing of minoritized groups in official representation of history in a different context. In their first study, they content analyzed for silencing in sixteen Thanksgiving commemorations from two different presidents from the years 1993-2000. In particular, they categorized the content of the speech and if, to what extent,

		4
--	--	---

--	--	--

there was mention of Indigenous people, genocide, and wrongdoing. The results showed that all sixteen commemorations did not include discussions of Indigenous genocide and harm.

Furthermore, while speeches did mention Indigenous Peoples, they did so alongside themes of generosity, diversity, and friendship. In line with these ideas, their second study also found that participants rated anti-silence speeches (e.g., Indigenous genocide) as the least relevant to the American Thanksgiving celebration, especially among those primed to feel strong national pride. In a final study, the researchers manipulated exposure to different types of Thanksgiving commemorations silences and assessed the impact on national glorification, identity, and policy related-beliefs. It was found that participants exposed to an anti-silence commemoration speech (e.g., genocide mentioning) scored lower on national identity and expressed greater support for Indigenous rights in comparison to participants exposed to genocide-silencing commemorations.

Other research has examined how differing conceptions of identity impact collective memories. For example, Rotella and Richeson (2013) conducted a series of studies showing that experimentally manipulating strength of identity could affect factors of collective memory and collective guilt. The studies were framed in the context of the wrongdoings committed against Native Americans. For both studies, the participants were primed either in-group or out-group of their national identities based on an adapted measure from a previous study which utilized the principle for need for assimilation or differentiation. That is, the researchers primed the participants' identities as Americans by either arousing their assimilation needs, priming these participants to experience a stronger American identity, or their differentiation needs, causing participants to experience a lower sense of American identity. Secondly, participants were given a historical prime. This prime consisted of a brief passage describing the treatment of Native Americans by colonists. The colonists were either described as "early Americans", framing them

		5
--	--	---

--	--	--

as part of the participants' in-group, or as "European settlers", framing them as the out-group. Participants were then given a memory task where they were asked to recreate the passage to the best of their ability. Participants were also asked to respond to several true or false statements, as well as measures of collective guilt. The results of this study showed that those who were historically primed to understand the colonists as their in-group, or whose passages framed the colonists as "early Americans", displayed poorer memory regarding the content of the passage. It was also shown that those whose assimilation needs were aroused, thus priming them to experience a stronger ethnic American identity, experienced less collective guilt.

The second study was designed to build on the first. The researchers removed the settler and colonist labels in the identity manipulation and added a series of two dozen statements in the memory task. For the memory measure, participants read the same passage, but then be asked if any of the statements had appeared in the passage, only half of them did. The results of the second study were very similar to those of the first. It showed that those in the in-group condition had worse memory recall and those in the in-group who were primed to be higher in national identity salience showed less collective guilt. This provides evidence that participant forms of identity may motivate people to forget and downplay guilt of collective memory of transgressions by in-group members.

Sahdra and Ross (2007) also explored the relationship between group affiliation and collective memory. The researchers were interested in whether the degree to which people identify with their in-groups affects their ability to remember misdeeds that their in-groups have committed, as opposed to events in which their in-groups were victimized. Sahdra and Ross (2007) conducted two studies, the first consisting of a hundred Hindu and Sikh participants, and

--	--	--

the second with fifty-nine Euro-Canadian undergraduates. In the first study participants were asked to describe three events in which their group committed acts of violence against the other, and three events in which their group experienced acts of violence committed against them by the other group. These participants then read short passages about four historical events, two of which were about Hindu groups committing acts of hate or violence against Sikhs, and the other two being acts of violence committed by Sikhs against Hindus. After reading these articles participants were asked to report how often they had thought about these events in the last few years, as well as how much they agreed that the victim groups should forget about and move on from these events. Next participants reported the degree to which they experienced emotions while reading about these events, fourteen of these emotions being negative and four being positive. The last measure was that of in-group identification strength. This study concluded that those who identified highly with their in-group recalled fewer events of their in-group committing acts of aggression against others.

In the second study, Euro-Canadian undergraduates were exposed to an identity manipulation before being prompted to recall acts of in-group acts of kindness and evil. The identity manipulation for this study used the assimilation or differentiation forms of identity, as described above. The participants were then asked to give five examples of Canadians committing negative acts against non-Canadians, and five instances of acts that benefited non-Canadians. The researchers recorded response times, and also told participants that their responses would be compared to a list of historical incidents to pressure them for accuracy. The findings from this study build on the last, in that those in the low-identity group recalled more negative acts than other groups, and those in the high-identity group recalled more positive acts

		7
--	--	---

--	--	--

than those in the control group. The effect of ingroup identity on conceptions of in-group history is not limited to the majority groups.

More recently, Ulug and Uysal (2021) examined the role of ethnic identification on the endorsement of a particular type of collective memory, conflict narratives and support for minority rights beliefs among both minority and majority members in the context of Turkey. The participants for this study were two-hundred self-identifying Kurdish people, an ethnic minority group which partially resides in Turkey. The participants used a five-point scale to report ethnic identification, support for a narrative and support for minority rights. The ethnic identity measure was adapted from a previous study and was based on an individual's pride and strength of association with their ethnic identity. The narrative support measure was also based on previous studies and gauged agreement with highly specific, socially shared perspectives about conflicts between the Kurdish people and the Turkish majority group. The support for minority rights measure was also adapted from other studies and focused on the preservation of the Kurdish language, values, and culture. The results from the study showed that minority group members with high ethnic identification were correlated with endorsement of the minority groups conflict narrative which in turn is correlated with support for minority group rights. There was also an effect of ethnic identification, such that those who identified more with the ethnicity endorsed the narrative and minority rights policy more. The second study used almost identical measures, just changed so that the ethnic identification was not that of the minority group but the majority group. The second study found similar results to most other studies in that stronger ethnic constructions were correlated to less support for the narrative and minority rights. However, this study found the direct effect of ethnic constructions on minority rights beliefs. These studies

		8
--	--	---

--	--	--

show that identity construction may influence minority rights policy beliefs among minority and majority members.

In extending this area of research, this study evaluated the extent to which manipulating particular constructions of national identity (ethnic vs. civic) will impact collective memories about minority groups and support for minority rights in the U.S. Previous research has found that adopting a civic national identity fosters more inclusive collective memories and is associated with more support for minority rights policy, relative to more ethnic constructions (Kurtis, et al., 2010, 2017; Pehrson, et al., 2011). Thus, it is hypothesized that individuals who are exposed to a civic national identity prime will be more supportive of minority rights policies. It is also hypothesized that those exposed to a civic identity prime will more readily recall contributions made by minority groups to the United States collective memory in comparison to those exposed to an ethnic identity prime.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-five participants were recruited for this study, 16 of which were female and 9 were male. Participants were given class credit, or extra credit as compensation for their contribution to the study. Participants reported ethnicity, 44% were Caucasian, 20% were Black, 20% were Hispanic 4% were Asian, 4% were Native American, and 4% identified as more than one of these. Forty percent identified as having citizenship status that was not native-born citizen. The participants' ages ranged from 18-33 years old (mean = 20, SD = 3.8). All participants, except one, identified themselves on the liberal side of a Likert scale on political affiliation.

		9
--	--	---

--	--	--

Materials and Procedures

The survey for this study was constructed and conducted using Qualtrics, an online survey software. After informed consent, participants completed a demographics questionnaire which inquired about age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and political affiliation.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two types of national identity primes: civic or national. Specifically, participants read a short, falsified report claiming to have been made by the U.S. Census Bureau. These reports focused on different perspectives of “what it means to be a U.S. citizen.” For the civic identity report, participants read about how paying taxes, working to become a citizen, and following laws are important to the U.S. American identity. In contrast, those presented with the ethnic identity report read about how being a member of the majority race, being fluent in English and having ancestors from the U.S. are important aspects of the American identity. After reading the report, participants answered a series of comprehension questions based on the article to ensure they fully read and comprehend the report.

Collective memories about specific ethnic/racial groups were measured through a series of questions adapted from Kurtiş and colleagues (2010). Participants were first asked to indicate how much 5 different ethnic/racial group's (Black, Asian, White, Native American, Latinx/Hispanic) contributed to the “United States” and “what it means to be an American” using a 7-point Likert scale. An example item would be similar to “How agreeable do you think it is to say that X group have made significant contributions to American History”. Participants also completed a measure of beliefs about minority rights taken from Kurtiş (2010). An sample item is: “To what extent do you believe minority groups should/does deserve rights based on their

--	--	--

mistreatment/contributions in/to our country.” These items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. These measures were counterbalanced to limit order effects.

Results

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in contributions of 5 different ethnic/racial groups to the United States collective memories after exposure to a civic national identity prime and an ethnic national identity prime. The independent samples t-test indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions of contributions of the 5 different ethnic/racial groups between primes, a second independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in beliefs about minority rights among those exposed to a civic national identity prime and an ethnic national identity prime. This test closely approached a significant difference between the national identity primes. Those exposed to a civic identity prime ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 6.03$) were more in favor of minority group rights than those exposed to an ethnic identity prime ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 7.41$), $t(288) = -1.868$, $p = .074$, (Cohen’s $d = -0.753$).

Discussion

Collective memory is the dominant representation of a nation’s history and culture. Previous research has explored the implications of collective memory on constructions of national identity, beliefs about minority rights, and erasure of minoritized groups in history (see Rotella & Richeson, 2013; Sahdra & Ross, 2007 for exceptions). In extending this work, this study evaluated the extent to which manipulating particular constructions of national identity (ethnic vs. civic) will impact collective memories about minority groups and support for minority rights in the US.

--	--	--

This study was designed and conducted to measure the extent to which national identity constructions impact minority rights policy beliefs. This study also had a second goal to measure the extent to which national identity constructions impact collective memory beliefs. While neither of these relationships revealed statistically significant results differences between the groups the results for all hypothesized relationships trended in the predicted direction. Thus, this study gives some support for the hypothesis that national identity constructions have a direct effect on minority rights policy beliefs.

There were a number of limitations that may have affected the outcome of this study. The first limitation was that the study only had twenty-five participants and the majority of them were female. With such a small sample size, which was mostly female, it is difficult to claim that these results are representative of society as a whole and may have also prevented the results from reaching statistical significance. Another major limitation was that all of the participants were college students, who self-identified as being liberal in their political affiliation. Because the participants were college students, they were also all relatively young, below the age of 35. These limitations also make it challenging to claim these results portray an accurate representation of society. Perhaps the most important limitation is that, without a no-prime group, there is no evidence to determine if the results seen here are owing to a positive effect of the civic prime, or a negative effect of ethnic prime. It is highly recommended that future studies include a control group that is not exposed to any primes. Another important limitation that should be noted was that almost half of the participants identified themselves as not being native-born citizens. This may very well have influenced the strength of the prime shown, and is also not representative of the U.S. demographics.

--	--	--

References

- Banjeglav, T. (2021) The alphabet war: Language, collective memory and national identity in contemporary debates over national minority rights in Croatia. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23:5, 695-708, DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2021.1935075
- Kurtis, T., Adams, G., Yellow Bird, M. (2010). Generosity or genocide? Identity implications of silence in American Thanksgiving commemorations, *Memory*, 18:2, 208-224, DOI: 10.1080/09658210903176478
- Kurtis, T., Yalcinkaya, N, S., Adams, G. (2017). Silence in official representations of history: Implications for national identity and intergroup relations. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 5(2), 608-629, doi:10.5964/jspp.v5i2.714
- Pehrson, S., Gonzalez, R., Brown, R. (2011). Indigenous rights in Chile: National identity and majority group support for multicultural policies. *Political Psychology*, 32(4), doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00827.x
- Rhodes, M. (1995). National identity and minority rights in the constitutions of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. *East European Quarterly*, 29(3), 347-358
- Rotella, K. N., & Richeson, J. A. (2013). Motivated to “forget”: The effects of in-group wrongdoing on memory and collective guilt. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(6), 730–737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613482986>

--	--	--

Sahdra, B., & Ross, M. (2007). Group identification and historical memory. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(3), 384-395.

Sokolić, I. (2017). My neighbour, the criminal: How memories of the 1991–1995 conflict in Croatia affect attitudes towards the Serb minority. *Nations and Nationalism*, 23(4), 790-814, DOI: 10.1111/nana.12311

Uluğ, Ö. M., & Uysal, M. S. (2021). The role of ethnic identification, allyship, and conflict narratives in supporting pro-Minority policies among Majority and Minority groups. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000388>