Acculturation Attitudes of the Dutch and the Germans towards the European Union:
The importance of national and European identification

Arnd Florack and Ursula Piontkowski

University of Muenster, Germany

Correspondence address:

Arnd Florack
Psychologisches Institut IV
Westfaelische Wilhelms-Universitaet Muenster
Fliednerstr. 21
48149 Muenster
Germany
E-mail: florack@psy.uni-muenster.de
Fax: 49 251 83-3 13 35
Phone: 49 251 83-3 4788

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between social identifications and attitudes towards collective acculturation is studied within the context of the European Union. Berry's (1980) acculturation model is linked to the social identity theory and applied to the instance of European nations (here: the Netherlands and Germany) acculturating into the 'superordinate-group' Europe. Results show that the nation's participation in the European Union is supported to a higher degree by respondents with high than with low European identification. The maintenance of national culture is more strongly preferred by respondents with high than with low national identification. A cross-national comparison indicates that this impact of social identification can be shown only for the Germans. This finding is discussed as resulting from a different construction of national identity in Germany and the Netherlands.

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Introduction

In the last few decades, a process of progressing unification and integration has emerged in Europe. An essential sign of that process is the „Maastricht Treaty" which was signed by the European Community member states in December 1991 and came into force on November 1st, 1993. In addition to its political and economical agreements the contract also embraces social and cultural aspects. The treaty's important political and economical agreements are to achieve a common currency as well as a common economic policy with its goal of guaranteeing a continuous, balanced economical and social progress (cf. article 109 of the Treaty on European Union). Additionally, it is striving to establish a common policy in other fields such as ecological and traffic policy (cf. article 3 of the Treaty on European Union). On the international stage, as well, the European Union has to appear with its common foreign and security politics (Euro-Guide, 1992). The cultural component of the Maastricht Treaty is formulated in article 128 which states that the European Union should contribute to the development of the member states' cultures and to the preservation of regional variety, however, it also emphasizes the common heritage culture

and the spreading of knowledge pertaining to the culture and history of the European peoples. Indisputably, the integration of national economies will remain the most important point of the unification efforts, however, cultural integration also will be an essential part of it. Both components can contribute to a closer relationship between the European nations.

The unification process in Europe has triggered a discourse in sociology and political science about the frame of the future Europe and the role of 'the nation' (e.g. Ferraris, 1989; Hrbek, 1989; Schaffner, 1993; Mommsen, 1992; Dahrendorf, 1990; Smith 1992). Beside this general discourse, the European citizens' needs and opinions should not be disregarded. Eurobarometer surveys indicate divergent opinions within the European Union member states. Although there is a lot of support or at least approval for the European Union (77 percent in the 15 member states; Eurobarometer, 48/1998), member states citizens often express concrete fears. For instance, 34 percent of the respondents, asked in 1997, stated to be afraid of loosing their national identity and culture (Eurobarometer, 47/1997). Moreover, there are member states, for example Sweden, where only 31 percent of the respondents thought about the European Union membership as a good thing (Eurobarometer, 48/1998).

Only a few studies were addressed to examine these concerns from a social psychological perspective (e.g. Hewstone, 1986; Breakwell & Lyons, 1996; Cinnerella, 1997; Huici *et al.*, 1997), although the importance of social identification in the European unification process is obvious. Eurobarometer

studies show that in all member states citizens have a strong attachment to their own nation (91 percent; Eurobarometer, 47/1997), but only (or should we say at least) half of them are attached to Europe (51 percent; Eurobarometer, 47/1997).

The present study focuses on attitudes towards the participation and engagement of the citizens' nations in the European unification and the relationship of these attitudes to the citizens' attachment to or identification with Europe and their own country. The Dutch and the Germans were chosen for a cross-national comparison because they differ in power and vitality concerning their political, economical, and demographical potentials. Considering objective criteria as well as subjective perceptions, the Germans are regarded to be the national group with the higher vitality (Florack & Piontkowski, 1997).

Theory

Europe or the European Union, respectively, can be regarded as a plural society which consists of different national and cultural groups. In cross-cultural psychology social change resulting from the contact between different cultural groups is called acculturation (Berry, 1986). On an individual level, acculturation refers to changes in behavior, attitudes, personal identities and in the state of mental health. On a group level, acculturation refers to political,

economical and cultural changes, including alteration of language and habits within the groups. In this article, we focus on the group level of acculturation and on the attitudes group members hold towards the acculturation of their group.

Based on the work of Gordon (1964) and on numerous empirical studies, Berry (1980) developed a conceptual framework for the description of groups (and individuals) in the acculturation process (for a review, see Berry, 1997). This framework consists of two central issues: Contact between the groups and the maintenance of the groups' culture. Although the model has been mainly applied to minority groups, Bourhis *et al.* (1993; 1997a; 1997b) and Piontkowski *et al.* (1999) showed that this framework is relevant for dominant groups, as well. Concerning the contact issue, in the case of national groups taking part in a cross-national acculturation process, structural relations concerning trade, traffic, customs duty, and justice are of greater importance than direct first hand contact. Thus, the contact issue of Berry's framework could be defined as the degree of social-structural participation. The culture dimension could be abstracted from the individual to the group level, as well. It could be taken as the degree to which the group as a collective entity gives up its heritage culture and adopts a different group's culture or is engaged in the development of a common culture with the other group. In the following, the first dimension is called *social-structural participation* and the second dimension *maintenance of cultural distinctiveness* or its opposite, cultural assimilation.

In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) or the self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987), individuals when acting as members of a group do prefer a collective strategy, which in turn secures an advantage for the group they identify with. They do that because of an inherent need for positive self-esteem or positive social identity. If comparisons between the in-group and a relevant out-group can be made which lead to a positive outcome in favor of the in-group, this will contribute to an enhanced self-evaluation and therefore to a positive social identity of the individuals. A prerequisite for social comparison consists of each group perceiving the other as a distinct collective entity. The importance of the perceived distinctiveness of groups was proved by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). They stated that it is the vitality of a group that makes a group more likely to behave as a distinct and active collective entity in intergroup situations. Following the social identity theory and the concept of vitality, it can be assumed that if contact with out-groups threatens the distinctiveness or the vitality of the in-group, this should lead to separation from the other groups and to rejection of intergroup contact (for recent developments of vitality theory, see Harwood, Giles, & Bourhis, 1994). Realistic conflict theory will also assume a similar conclusion under certain conditions (Sherif, 1966; Frank, 1967; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1986). Therefore, group members who perceive their group as vital and powerful should hold more positive attitudes towards intergroup contact and social-structural participation than group members who perceive their group as less vital.

Such an impact of a group membership on our working self-concept depends on the social context and on past experience (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987). As a consequence, the way we perceive ourselves and other individuals varies as a function of the salience of the group membership or in other words, social identity. Arguing from the perspective of self-categorization theory, individuals may not only define themselves as members of different social groups, the level of abstraction of their self-definition may also differ. They may categorize themselves as distinct individuals on the lowest level of abstraction or as members of a social group on an intermediate level. The most inclusive category is that of members of the human race in contrast to the non-human (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). Less attention has been paid to the situation in which two categorizations on two different levels of abstraction are available at the same time. At this point it is important to look not only at the mere categorization but also at the degree to which people see the possible categorizations as relevant to their self-image. Using an experimental manipulation of the group identification, Ellemers *et al.* (1997) showed the influence of the degree of identification on group commitment. They found that individuals with a low group identification had a stronger desire for individual mobility to a higher status group, and were less committed to their group than individuals with a high group identification. If we assume that there is a context where a categorization on an intermediate as well as on a superordinate level is meaningful, the degree of identification with the possible categories should influence the degree to

which individuals behave in accordance with their (subordinate or superordinate) group membership.

Linking these considerations to the collective acculturation strategies, the following assumptions about attitudes towards social-structural participation and cultural assimilation can be made for the different patterns of subordinate-group and superordinate-group identifications: Individuals who show a high level of superordinate-group identification should gain a positive self-evaluation from social-structural participation, as the vitality of the common superordinate-group will increase due to their participation. Hence, individuals with a high superordinate-group identification should hold more positive attitudes towards social-structural participation than individuals with a lower level of a superordinate-group identification. For the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness the following assumptions can be made. If there is high subordinate-group identification and low superordinate-group identification, cultural assimilation should be a threat to social identity. Therefore, under those circumstances cultural assimilation is not expected to take place and maintenance of cultural distinctiveness would be favored. If individuals feel strongly attached to the subordinate-group as well as to the superordinate-group, a particular state of identity will emerge. This state could be seen as an indicator of something like a bicultural identity (cf. LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Maybe, for such individuals their subjective definition of the superordinate-group includes the existence of distinct subordinate-groups. Therefore, if an individual identifies to a strong

degree with a subordinate-group as well as with a superordinate-group, the distinctiveness of one's own group from other subordinate-groups as well as the increased importance of the superordinate-group should contribute to the individual's self-concept. Consequently, cultural assimilation, although not social-structural participation, is likely to be rejected. The only condition under which cultural assimilation should be favored is the case of individuals who feel a low attachment to the subordinate-group and a high attachment to the superordinate-group.

When considering the case of the Dutch and Germans within the European Union, these two national groups can be regarded as subordinate-groups whereas the European Union itself can be regarded as the superordinate-group. To examine the relationship between national (subordinate-group) and European (superordinate-group) identification and the attitudes towards collective acculturation strategies of both national groups we formulated the following hypotheses:

1.) Respondents with a high level of European identification are expected to support the social-structural participation to a higher degree than respondents with a low level of European identification.

2.) Respondents with a high level of national identification are expected to support the maintenance of their national culture to a higher degree than respondents with a low level of national identification.

3.) Respondents with a low level of national identification are expected to support the maintenance of their national culture to a lesser degree if their European identification is high than if there European identification is low. For respondents with high national identification, no difference depending on European identification is expected.

4.) German respondents as members of the more vital national group are expected to support social-structural participation to a higher degree than Dutch respondents.

In addition to these hypotheses, it was of interest to examine whether there are national differences in the degree of national and European identification and whether a national and a European identification are positively or negatively related.

Method

Respondents

A questionnaire focusing on national and European identification and attitudes towards acculturation in the European Union was administered to a sample of 89 Dutch and 104 Germans. The study was introduced as a part of a survey which investigates the attitudes of the Dutch and the Germans towards the European Union. Most of the subjects were recruited by asking

Chambers of Commerce and Trade to distribute questionnaires among course or meeting participants. Additionally, questionnaires were handed out to employees of businesses selected at random. 28 percent of the distributed questionnaires were completed (25 percent in the Netherlands, 30 percent in Germany). Due to the recruiting procedure, the sample only consisted of people in active employment. More than 80 percent of the subjects in both subsamples had positions in industry, trade, commerce or administration. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 71, the mean age being 34 years (*SD* = 10.73) for the Dutch subsample and 37 years (*SD* = 12.47) for the German subsample. In both subsamples, there was a higher proportion of males than females (Dutch subsample: 60 % males and 40 % females; German subsample: 75 % men and 25 % women).

The current discussion focuses mainly on data concerning national and European identification and acculturation attitudes. That part of the present data set which focuses mainly on data concerning the measure of vitality is published otherwise (cf. Florack & Piontkowski, 1997).

Questionnaire

To measure national identification respondents rated on bipolar seven-point scales which were marked with opposite labels (e.g. 'not at all' vs. 'very much') the importance of their national identity, the degree to which they liked being Dutch/German, and the degree to which they felt Dutch. The items

were summed up into a national identification scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the national identification scale was .90 (alpha = .87 for the Dutch respondents; alpha = .91 for the German respondents). To measure European identification respondents rated on similar scales as for national identification the importance of their European identity, the degree to which they liked being European, and the degree to which they felt European. The items were summed up into a single European identification scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the European identification scale was .88 (alpha = .80 for the Dutch respondents; alpha = .93 for the German respondents).

Concerning the attitudes towards the collective acculturation strategies, respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with eight statements regarding the acculturation orientation of their group towards the European Union. As for the identification items, bipolar seven-point scales were used. Two principal component analyses, conducted separately for the Dutch and the German subsamples, showed different factorial structures for the subsamples. Thus, for a cross-group comparison the items could not be summed up into equivalent scales. Therefore, we decided to measure the acculturation issues derived from the Berry model with two items which are directed to social-structural participation and maintenance of cultural distinctiveness. The selected item concerning *social-structural participation* was: "I support that the Dutch/Germans participate in the European Union." The item stressing the *maintenance of cultural distinctiveness* issue was: "My opinion is that the Dutch/Germans should maintain their own national

culture." Piontkowski *et al.* (1999) show the usefulness of such a reduced measurement of general acculturation attitudes for a cross-cultural comparison, even though a measurement including a number of subscales might have the advantage of a higher reliability. In the Piontkowski et al. (1999) study, across different cultures acculturation strategies built on single items were successfully predicted by several intergroup variables. In addition to the theoretical bases of the distinction between the attitudes towards social-structural participation and maintenance of cultural distinctiveness, the low correlation between the two items justifies to keep them separately instead of summing them up into a single scale (whole sample: $r = .15$, $p <$ .05; Dutch respondents: $r = .08$, *ns*; German respondents: $r = .31$, $p < .01$).

The questionnaire was developed in German and then translated into Dutch. To ensure the equivalence of the two versions, the Dutch version was checked by back-translation into German.

Results

National and European identification

In order to determine whether the Dutch and the German participants differ in regard to the level of identification a 2x2 ANOVA with one group

factor (Dutch / German) and one repeated measure factor (national / European identification) was calculated. The analysis yielded an interaction between the group factor and the repeated measure factor ($F(1,183) = 4.38$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .02$). National and European identification do not differ for the German respondents (national identification: $M = 4.77$; European identification: $M = 4.84$), while the Dutch respondents show a significantly stronger national than European identification (national identification: $M = 5.31$; European identification: $M = 4.78$; Bonferroni t-test: $p < 0.05$). Moreover, there is no significant difference between the national groups with regard to the European identification. The national identification is significantly higher for the Dutch sample (Bonferroni t-test: $p < 0.05$).

To explore the relationship between both kinds of identification the national and European identification measures were correlated, separately for the Dutch and the German subsamples. Results show significant positive correlations for both groups (Dutch sample ($N = 85$): $r = .32$, $p < 0.01$; German sample ($N = 100$): $r = .25$, $p < 0.05$).

Acculturation Attitudes towards the European Union

Participants were divided into groups of high and low identification by median split. The median was 5.3 (Dutch respondents: $MD = 5.6$; German respondents: $MD = 5.0$) for national identification and 5.0 for European identification (Dutch respondents: $MD = 5.0$; German respondents $MD = 5.3$).

There was a nearly equal distribution of German and Dutch respondents as regards the high and low identification groups.

To analyse the responses to the acculturation attitude items 2x2x2 ANOVAs with the between-subjects factors national group (Dutch/German), national identification (high/low) and European identification (high/low) were computed.

There were significant main effects on the social-structural participation item for European identification ($F(1,177) = 21.60$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = .11$) and for national group ($F(1,177) = 5.66$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .03$), the main effect for European identification being tempered by the European identification by national group interaction ($F(1,177) = 7.69$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Taking the mean values into consideration, this indicates that the respondents support the participation of their country in the European Union to a higher degree, if they feel a high attachment to Europe (low European identification: $M = 4.98$; high European identification: $M = 6.10$) (see table 1). However, there is an interaction effect between national group and European identification. Bonferroni corrected t-tests showed that low and high European identification differed significantly for the Germans ($p < 0.05$) but not for the Dutch (see figure 1).

insert table 1 about here

insert figure 1 about here

Besides this, the main effect for national group on social-structural participation indicates that there is a difference in the attitudes toward the social-structural participation between the two groups. Although the degree of support for the European Union in both countries is on a high level, we found a significant higher preference of participation in the European Union for the Dutch (Dutch sample: $M = 5.83$; German sample: $M = 5.25$).

On the cultural distinctiveness item, a significant main effect was found only for national identification ($F(1,177) = 6.24$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .03$) which was qualified by the national identification by national group interaction ($F(1,177) = 8.81$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .05$) as well as by the national identification by European identification interaction ($F(1,177) = 5.49$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Results indicate that respondents prefer the maintenance of their group's cultural distinctiveness to a higher degree if they show a high national identification (low national identification: $M = 4.78$; high national identification: $M = 5.42$). However, when the Dutch and German groups were analysed separately, it appears that the means concerning cultural distinctiveness between the high and low identified individuals do only differ significantly for the German group (Bonferroni t-test: $p < 0.05$) (see figure 2). This result is similar to that shown before for social-structural participation. Furthermore, when comparing low and high European identification, national identification has an impact on the maintenance of the cultural distinctiveness only in the case of low European identification (Bonferroni t-test: $p < 0.05$) (see figure 3).

insert figure 2 about here

insert figure 3 about here

Discussion

The reported study focused on the comparison of the Dutch and Germans with regard to social identification and its impact on attitudes towards collective acculturation strategies. The results indicate that on the basis of the social identity theory predictions can be made concerning the relationship between national and European identifications and acculturation attitudes. However, there are national differences in the intensity of these effects implying a different concept of identification in Germany and the Netherlands. Moreover, it was shown for both groups that national and European identifications are not necessarily incompatible but in the contrary can be positively related.

In line with principles of the social identity theory we argued that because of the importance of group membership to self-concept, individuals prefer collective acculturation strategies which increase the probability that when comparing the in-group with relevant out-groups, the in-group will be seen as a distinct and positive evaluated collective entity. Indeed, considering the whole sample this assumption specified in the first two hypotheses seems to be widely confirmed. Respondents who felt a high attachment to Europe

favored the participation of their group in the European Union to a higher degree than respondents with a low European identification. Similarly, respondents who showed high identification with their nation supported the maintenance of national culture more than respondents with a low national identification. Considering the results separately for both groups, it is astonishing that the effects of identification could not be found for the Dutch participants. A similar finding is reported by Blank and Wiengarn (1994) who conducted an extensive representative survey in the Dutch-German border area. They found a closer relationship between national consciousness and political attitudes in the German sample than in the Dutch sample. To explain these results they propose a differential concept of identity for the Dutch and the Germans. They see the Germans as having a polarizing relationship between the perceived attachment to the in-group, the cultural and historical pride as well as the evaluations of the in-group and, on the other side, left-right political opinions, the attitudes towards foreigners and also age and education. The Dutch, they see as having a more independent, natural national identity. If we assume such a difference in national identity or in the concept of one's own nation and if this leads to different effects of identification, this could be a hint for a helpful extension of the social identity theory. The theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1984) offers an explanation of such differences in identity. On the basis of Moscovici's theory, Billig (1995) argues that an individual might have a certain idea or representation of what his/her own nation is or what national identity means.

This representation may be broadly shared within the nation. It may be mediated through discourses, through the media and through direct communication with in-group members (Hopkins & Reicher, 1996). The results of the present study can be taken as a hint of the existence of different social representations of one's own nation and one's own national identity in Germany and in the Netherlands. They do not reach to confirm this assumption. However, they let us assume that it is important to consider the content of the national self-category. This is supported by studies of Reicher and Hopkins (1996) and Reicher (1996), where discourse analyses were performed to investigate the relation between the discoursive construction of self-categories and collective group behavior.

A further hypothesis was that participants who show a low national and a high European identification will support the maintenance of national culture less than other constellations of national and European identification. This hypothesis could not be confirmed. Results indicate that an impact of national identification on the attitudes towards the maintenance of national culture can be shown only for participants with a low European identification. This could be due to the fact that European and national identification are positively correlated. In addition, the variance of the national identification measures is greater in the case of low than of high European identification.

According to our last hypothesis, it was predicted that the Germans as members of the more vital and powerful group would support a participation of their nation in the European Union to a higher degree, because they are

less threatened to lose their distinctiveness. Indeed, although both groups showed a high preference for the participation in the European Union, the opposite tendency was found. Thus, the perceived degree of vitality could not be considered as an explanation of differences in attitudes examined. It should be taken into account that both groups perceive their group to have high and certain vitality (Florack & Piontkowski, 1997). Maybe, gradual differences in perceived vitality are not sufficient to cause different attitudes toward acculturation in the European Union. It is the perceived threat to group vitality that could lead to separation from the Union. Further, it could not be argued that the self-concept of the Dutch includes a higher attachment to Europe. We did not find significant differences between the Dutch and the Germans concerning European identification, but a significantly higher national identification for the Dutch. It could be that here again qualitative differences of identification are involved. Following this assumption, even for Dutch respondents with a high national identification the participation in the European Union is not a threat to the Dutch vitality, but part of the way the Dutch see themselves.

Analyses of the relationship between the two kinds of identification show that for both groups national and European identification are compatible. Thus, the nation and Europe are not exclusive or alternative categories for the Dutch and the Germans. In contrast to our results, Cinnirella (1997) found an incompatibility of European and national identification for British university students. However, for Italian students he reported results which are similar

to our findings regarding the Dutch and the Germans. The differences between the nations reflect so to say the differences in the way a common Europe is discussed in these countries in public. Compared to the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy, in Britain politicians more often emphasize that a common Europe might be a threat to the nation.

Finally, we found a higher national than European identification for the Dutch whereas for the German participants both identifications were on the same level. It is likely that this is an effect of the negative evaluation of a too strong national identification in Germany because of the consciousness of Germany's history. This could also be a reason for the genesis of a different representation of identity in Germany and the Netherlands, as mentioned above.

The example of the Germans and the Dutch in the context of the European Union shows that the process of European unification can be regarded as an acculturation process towards which the European citizens hold attitudes which are closely related to the way they feel attached to their own nation and to Europe, respectively. Further research will be needed to prove whether the relationship between acculturation attitudes and the degree of attachment differs from nation to nation as our study has shown with the Netherlands and Germany. Additionally, qualitative analysis of the contents of identifications in different European countries, as Cinnirella (1997) has already shown, could be helpful in explaining different effects of social identification. Cross-national studies can be worthwhile for the

detection and understanding of different conditions which may be obstacles in the process of the European unification.

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Table 1: Means of acculturation attitudes for groups of high and low national and European identification (presented separately for the national subsamples)

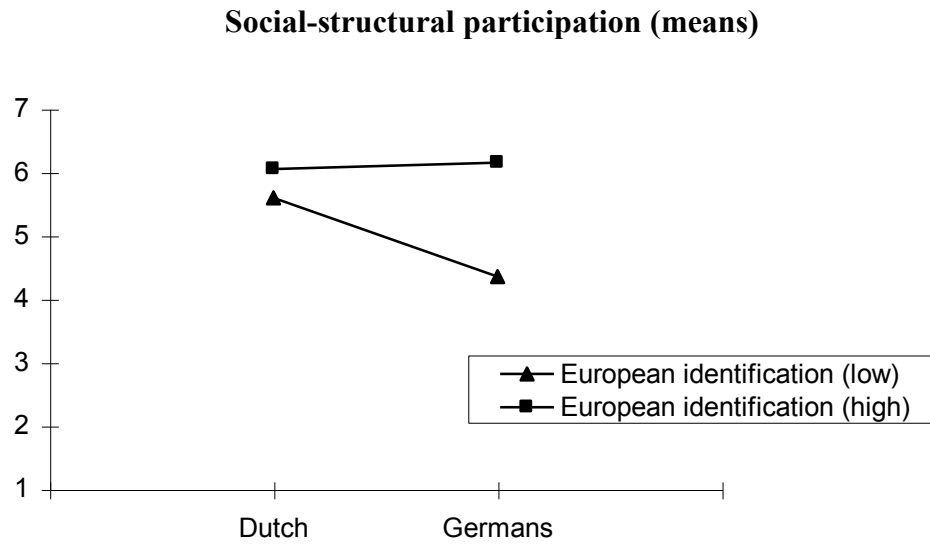|	Dutch mean		Germans mean	
	low national identification	high national identification	low national identification	high national identification
	social-structural participation			
low European identification	5.48	5.72	4.50	4.21
high European identification	6.17	5.94	6.36	5.94
	maintenance of cultural distinctiveness			
low European identification	4.39	5.06	4.36	6.21
high European identification	5.50	4.59	4.86	5.85

Social-structural participation (means)

Figure 1: Interaction between European identification and national group for attitudes towards social structural-participation
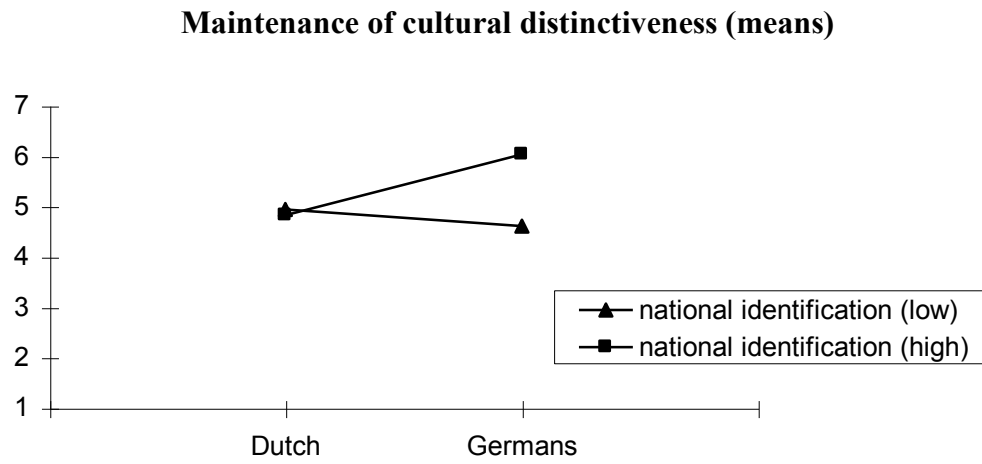
Maintenance of cultural distinctiveness (means)

Figure 2: Interaction between national identification and national group for attitudes towards the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness

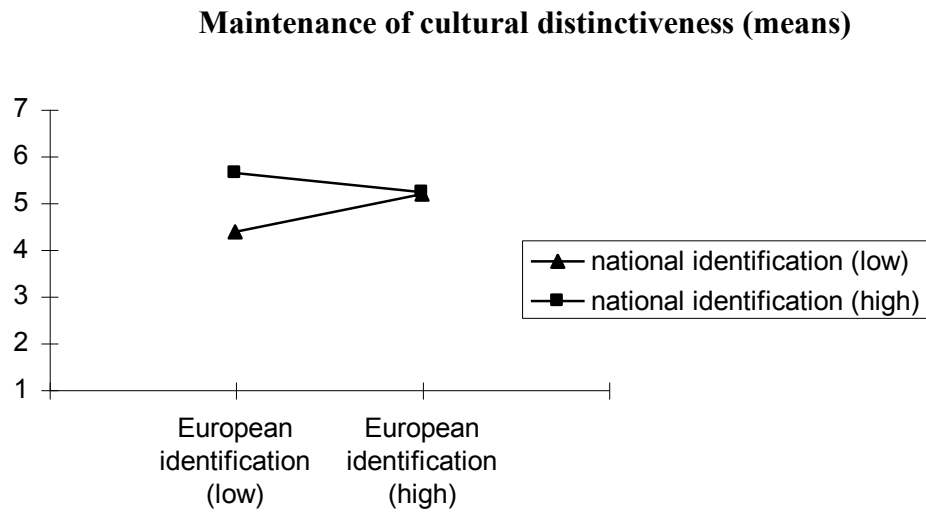**Maintenance of cultural distinctiveness (means)**

Figure 3: Interaction between national identification and European identification for attitudes towards the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness