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## **ETHNIC IDENTITY, PERSON PERCEPTION AND RACISM: A DECADE OF CHANGES IN CYPRUS**

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**Abstract:** Cyprus has been through many significant changes in the decade of 2000-2010. The purpose of this study was to assess differences in levels of ethnic identity, person perception and racism by comparing archived data of 2000, 2004 and 2010 as well as identify possible significant relationships among these variables. Two hundred ninety eight university-age participants were included across the three years of reference of the study. Concerning ethnic identity, results indicated a significant decrease from 2000 to 2010. Concerning racism, results indicated a small but significant decrease from 2000 to 2010. Concerning person perception, results indicated an inverted 'U' effect with significant increase in perceived similarity in 2004. Concerning the relationships, out-group perceived similarity was related to lower levels of racism. No significant relationship existed between ethnic identity, racism and out-group perceived similarity. Possible explanations for these results as well as implications for multicultural education, diversity teaching and training, educational and government policy development are discussed.

**Key words:** Ethnic identity, Greek-Cypriot, Cyprus, Person perception, Racism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cyprus is an island country, member of the European Union located in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus has gone through several significant changes in the decade 2000-2010. Some of the major ones will be discussed next. First, in April 2003, the Turkish-Cypriot side of the island granted permission for unfettered access across the dividing 'Green Line' to the occupied northern part of Cyprus, which has been inaccessible since the Turkish invasion in July 1974. Even though a number of citizens chose not to 'utilize' this permission, another larger significant number of citizens welcomed the event with great enthusiasm, both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-

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Cypriots. This resulted in a great mobilization, especially from the Greek-Cypriot citizens, who were lining up for months to cross into the occupied northern part and visit their homes after 29 years

Furthermore, in April 2004, a comprehensive United Nations proposal for reunification of the island known as the 'Annan Plan' led to failure after the simultaneous referenda on both sides did not reach a positive majority vote. The then president Papadopoulos, in an 'emotional and polemical plea' (Loizides, 2007, p. 184), urged the Greek-Cypriots to vote 'No' to the referendum. At the end of president Papadopoulos' speech, and while other 'glorious moments' in Greek-Cypriot history were celebrated with Greek flags, many people rushed to the presidential palace and started waving Cypriot flags as a symbol of Greek-Cypriot identity (Loizides, 2007). The different political approaches of the political parties of the country concerning these events created a lot of tension before and after the referendum, which still continues to this day. Alongside the parties, several new 'movements' also emerged and actively campaigned to support or turn down the Plan for the reunification of the island (Atas, 2010). This segregation into the categories of 'For' and 'Against' the Annan Plan, led to several debates dichotomizing the nation's people into two groups. This separation also led to arguments concerning the levels of ethnic identity of each group and the 'Greekness' or 'Cypriotness' of each (see section on ethnic identity).

Second, Cyprus entered the European Union in May 2004 which resulted in significant changes at many levels (political, economic, demographical, educational, etc). In addition, Cyprus, along with other Mediterranean countries, became a center of migration movement towards the European Union. This movement, to some extent, would eventually lead to an alteration of the composition and the size of a country's labor market (Gregoriou, Kontolemis, & Matsi, 2010). Domestic workers are usually faced with increased competition from immigrant workers willing to work for lower wages (Gregoriou, Kontolemis, & Matsi, 2010). The increased competition and the significant changes in wage and income distribution have been found to be present in Cyprus as well (Christofides, Clerides, Hadjiyiannis, & Michael, 2007). Spyrou (2009) notes how in Cyprus, migration of labor started in the 1990s as a result of a sudden economic growth and kept expanding. According to the recent census, Cyprus has a total of 179,547 immigrants (Statistical Service Report, 2011), a number that is very large taking into consideration the approximately 850,000 population of the country. Gregoriou et al. (2010, p. 66) also note the "remarkable levels of net migration during the years of 2003-2007" attributing this rise to Cyprus' entry to the European Union in 2004. According to Trimikliniotis (2009), the issue of growing immigration in Cyprus is complicated even further by the unresolved political issue with Turkey that raises serious security and other concerns.

The significant change in the general population has, of course, also affected the educational system. Zembylas (2010, p. 41) argued that the changing profile of the population “has clearly affected the social landscape and has altered the fairly homogeneous profile of primary and secondary schools”. At the political level, after Cyprus’ accession to the EU, the Union officially requested that Turkey recognizes the Republic of Cyprus both formally (de jure) and de facto (by opening up its ports and airports to Cypriot flagged ships and carriers) by the end of 2006 (Stavridis, 2006).

Third, the Greek-Cypriot citizens elected their first leftist president in 2008 which resulted in many political changes and differences in political approaches to many vital issues of the country. One of this has been a policy of significant attempts towards reconciliation and peaceful coexistence with the Turkish-Cypriot community. Specifically, in August 2008, the new Minister of Education and Culture announced the introduction of a policy initiative to promote ‘peaceful coexistence’ to all primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008). This also resulted in new analytical programs in the educational system and a long debate that occurred concerning the elementary-level history books and the “possible alteration of the scientific truth or facts or actions” (Academy of Athens, 2007, p.1). This election also resulted in the policies and procedures of the government to shift towards a more ‘Cypriotcentric’ discourse (see section on ethnic identity) and whereas many Greek flags were waived by the crowd at previous election-night wining speeches (i.e., elected presidents Papadopoulos and Clerides), this time only the Cyprus flag was waving. Once again, these changes created major conflict and tension within the country separating fans and opponents, questioning each other on their levels of ethnic identification and categorization.

Based on all of the above, it was hypothesized that there have been many significant changes to the country the decade of 2000-2010 that could, in turn, result in a change of ethnic identity, out-group perceived similarity and racism towards immigrants. Therefore, a post-hoc analysis was conducted on data available from summer of 2000, summer of 2004 and spring of 2010 comparing three variables: ethnic identity, out-group perceived similarity and racism.

#### *Aim of the study*

The purpose of this study was to assess for possible differences in levels of ethnic identity, out-group perceived similarity and racism in three different years of reference (2000, 2004, and 2010). The study also aimed to evaluate possible associations between the variables of interest. This investigation is important because it provides information on the above stated variables, which are vital for the healthy functioning

of an increasingly multicultural society. The present study is also significant to the literature because, as Leong and Schneller (1997) supported, attitudes are believed to be crucial in how they form and maintain social, ethnic and cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, as well as their gradual dismantling. Therefore, this study may shed light to how these internal conflicts in the Cypriot society are affecting ethnic identity, out-group perceived similarity and racism. Finally, this study will aid significantly the literature on ethnic identity and its complexity as a construct, as well as the effects of person perception on racism.

### ***Theoretical framework***

The theoretical framework of the study is separated into three parts, each devoted to one of the variables of interest: ethnic identity, person perception and racism.

#### *Ethnic identity*

Ethnic Identity is conceptualized here using Phinney's theory (Phinney, 1989, 1990) on ethnic identity development. Phinney's model of ethnic identity development is a multidimensional model, with theoretical underpinnings from both Erikson and Marcia (Marcia, 1980; Erikson, 1968). Parallel to Erikson's identity formation, Phinney acknowledges significant changes during adolescence, including greater abilities to contemplate on ethnic identity, expose the self outside of one's own community, a greater focus on one's social life, and an increased concern for physical appearance (Phinney, 1990). Phinney developed a three-stage model of ethnic identity development. These stages involve: 1) the Unexamined Ethnic Identity, where the person's identity is still unexamined, having given little thought to it, or assumed to have been derived from others, rather than from engaging in personal examination. 2) Ethnic Identity Search, where there is a questioning of accepted views of ethnicity and a greater understanding of ethnicity in a more abstract sense as characterized by a heightened awareness of ethnicity, exploration and interest in learning more about one's culture and actively involving oneself in several activities, and 3) Ethnic Identity Achievement. This is characterized by clarity about one's ethnic identity that includes a secure, confident, and stable sense of self. According to Phinney, ethnic identity consists of "a feeling of belonging to one's group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one's group membership, positive attitudes towards the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in its practices" (Phinney, DuPont, Espinosa, Revill, & Sanders, 1994 p. 169). Phinney's theory may provide a lens of interpretation on any possible differences in ethnic identity scores.

### *Person perception*

Person perception is conceptualized using Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) in order to understand intergroup relations and group processes. SIT is based on the assumption that individuals have a basic need for positive self-esteem, and that self-esteem is wrapped in both personal and social identities. All people have various social identities, depending on the number of groups to which they belong and identify with. These social identities may include racial and/or ethnic group, nationality, sports club, etc.

According to Tajfel (1981), social identity is "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of membership of a social group, together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (p. 255). Our social identity is a significant factor in how one feels about one's self. An individual will seek positive social identities to maintain and enhance his or her self-esteem. Individuals also have the tendency to split the world into 'us' and 'them' and achieve a positive social identity by comparing their own group (in-group) with other groups (out-groups). This way, an in-group bias or favoritism is developed. The three cognitive processes posited by Social Identity Theory are categorization (categorize individuals and/or groups into 'us' and 'them'); identification (adopt the identity of the group we categorized ourselves in), and comparison (enhance the sense of identity and self-esteem by making comparisons to other groups). Tajfel and Turner's theory may provide a scope of interpretation on any possible differences in out-group perceived similarity scores.

### *Racism*

Racism in this study is approached through the lens of the modern (McConahay, 1986) and symbolic (Kinder & Sears, 1981) racism perspectives. Even though these theories were first developed in the United States to examine racism against Blacks after the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, they have also spawned to other groups as well (i.e., immigrant groups, obese, gays, and others) (Henry, 2010). These theories were considered appropriate for this study since very similar attitudes towards immigrants in the United States during the flooding of immigration in USA after world War II can also be seen in Cyprus, as previous data has shown (see Council of Europe: European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, 2006; The fourth round of the European Social Survey, 2008/2009, Jowell & the Central Co-ordinating Team, 2009). Specifically, indigenous<sup>1</sup> people being concerned about their personal safety

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are certainly different meanings in different contexts for the word 'indigenous', it is used here in reference to how the local population is self-identified as the group that has 'natural rights' over Cyprus (see Trimikiniotis, 2009).

(feeling threatened as indicated in the theory), feeling that immigrants get more economically than they deserve, that some immigrants are lazy to work due to the state support and that others are employed at locations that Cypriots are 'supposed' to have. Furthermore, these negative feelings do seem to exist in combination with traditional conservative values, a blend accounted for by the above theories, and which exists in Cyprus (see Council of Europe: European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, 2006; The fourth round of the European Social Survey, 2008/2009, Jowell & the Central Co-ordinating Team, 2009). One important characteristic of modern racism is the assumption that it is learned through socialization (parents, peers, and media) (Henry, 2010) and therefore easier to maintain throughout life. Furthermore, Biernat and Crandall (1999) conducted a social-psychological review of measures of racial attitudes and found that measures of symbolic racism are the most widely used today. Thus, the aim of the study was to assess these attitudes across time.

### ***Identity, Person Perception and Racism in Cyprus***

Extant literature indicates that ethnic identity, person perception and racism have implications for, may be related, and influence a person's overall self-concept and identity. These variables seem to have a significant impact on most cultures (Triandis, 1990) and have been assessed in several (Argyrides & Downey, 2001; Argyrides, Mikula, & Jones, 2004; Phinney, 1990; Triandis, 1990). For this reason, they were chosen together for the present study.

Concerning ethnic identity in Cyprus, one has to take into consideration that Cyprus is situated at the most eastern part of the European Union at a crossroad where traditionally the 'East' met the 'West' and Islam met Christianity, factors which interacted and opposed each other as characterized in history by extreme nationalisms that have long divided its society (Philippou, 2007). The Greek-Cypriot society, as well as the educational system, was turned into an area of conflict between two major discourses, or ideologies: *Hellenocentrism*, which emphasized the 'Greekness' of Greek-Cypriots and has been supported mainly by the political right, and *Cypriocentrism*, which emphasized the 'Cypriotness', or the Cypriot identity-citizenship, and has been mainly supported by the political left (Spyrou, 2001, 2006). Mavratsas (1999) stated that 'the tension between the two frames of reference appears as the focal point in the social construction of Greek-Cypriot identity' (p. 100). Traditionally, the Hellenocentrism discourse received wider acceptance in Cyprus and has been the dominant political force in modern history. Even though this discourse started losing its power after the coup organized by the dictatorial government of

Greece against the government of Cyprus which consequently led to the Turkish invasion in 1974, by mid 1980s, the Hellenocentric discourse regained its ideological dominance (Mavratsas, 1999). The overwhelming majority of Greek-Cypriot political leaders in the island's modern history have been from the Hellenocentric discourse, something that changed in 2008 when the election of the first leftist president occurred. This election caused a significant political and educational shift towards the *Cypriocentrism* discourse which is a major political conflict between the political right and political left to this day (Mavratsas, 1999; Papadakis, 2008; Spyrou, 2006). Inevitably, these discourses emphasize the importance of evaluation of one's own group positively, promote knowledge supporting their own membership to their specific discourse and be knowledgeable about and committed to the group. It can be assumed, however, that this splitting of discourses may create some confusion to a large number of people that do not embrace in its entirety either discourse but rather see themselves somewhere in the middle, thus affecting their ethnic identity levels.

Concerning out-group perceptions and racist attitudes towards immigrants in Cyprus, the Eurobarometer and European Social Survey 2006 (Jowell & the Central Co-ordinating Team, 2006) sheds some light on this aspect. In a report concerning Cyprus titled "Majorities' Attitudes Towards Minorities", findings indicated that only 36.2% of the respondents agreed that it is a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions or cultures. Furthermore, more than half (52.3%) agreed that there is a limit to how many people of other races, religions or cultures a society can accept and 25.1% agreed that legally established immigrants should be sent back to their country of origin. Simultaneously, though, 50.2% agreed that legally established immigrants from outside the European Union should have the same social rights, bring members of their immediate family and be able to become naturalized easily. Another study by Harakis, Sitas, Sotiriades, Demetriou, et al. (2005) found that 10% of its respondents said that racism was justified and 38% said that stereotypes were justified or usually justified. In addition, the study found that 50% of the respondents stated that foreigners were usually connected with crime incidents.

An additional study by Spyrou (2004) also found that 75% of its respondents stated that they thought there were too many foreigners in Cyprus. Moreover, 46% stated that some or all of the foreigners should go back to their countries and 59% believed that foreigners helped increase crime. It is worth noting that only 14.6% believed that it was good that foreigners lived in Cyprus. In another study of Spyrou (2009), he found that Greek-Cypriot children stated that immigrants 'take our jobs', 'threaten our national identity' and 'they are usually criminals'. Finally, Zembylas, Michaelidou, and Afantintou-Lambrianou (2010) also concluded that "Greek-Cypriot students manifest generally negative attitudes towards immigrants... and prefer separation from



immigrants rather than these groups' assimilation or integration" (p. 23). These authors also found that their participants believe that immigrants were responsible for crime rates but only two out of five admitted that discrimination against immigrants exists.

The above results are indicative of a variety of negative attitudes towards immigrants that exist in Cyprus, as also reflected in surveys of the wider society (see Council of Europe: European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, 2006; The Fourth Round of the European Social Survey, 2008/2009, Jowell & *the Central Co-ordinating Team*, 2009). Furthermore, multicultural education is relatively new to Greek Cypriot schools and society (Zembylas, Michaelidou, & Afantinou-Lambrianou, 2010). Even though policy documents and official curricula do include strong humanistic statements and promotion of human rights, justice and peace, immigrant students are seen as deficient (Panayiotopoulos & Nicolaidou, 2007). The present study aimed to explore if there were any significant changes in these attitudes from the year 2000 to 2010. It is expected that racism scores will not be significantly different across the three years of reference.

Previous research conducted in the USA and Cyprus using the same instruments and dependent variables as the current study (Argyrides & Downey, 2001) and Argyrides et al., 2004) found that perceived similarity among out-group members was significantly related to lower levels of racism and aggression. Furthermore, Argyrides and Downey (2001) proposed that higher levels of out-group perceived similarity would be related to higher levels of ethnic identity, a finding supported by Argyrides (2007). The current study wanted to replicate the positive relationship found in these studies between ethnic identity and perceived out-group similarity as well as the negative relationship between perceived out-group similarity and levels of racism.

### ***The present study***

The aim of this study was to investigate possible differences in levels of ethnic identity, person perception and racism in three different years of reference (2000, 2004, and 2010). As stated in the previous sections, the mobilization of the people concerning access to the occupied part of Cyprus and the accession to the European Union, the emphasis on the two major discourses (Hellenocentrism and Cypriocentrism), the flooding of immigrants and the drastic change in politics after the 2008 election may have impacted ethnic identity, person perception and racism levels. In addition, the study aimed to identify possible significant associations between the three variables of interest. The negative relationship between perceived out-group similarity and lower levels of racism was of particular interest. It was hypothesized that ethnic identity levels would decrease across time, that racism levels will not change significantly and that perceived out-group similarity will differ depending on the year of reference.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

A total of 298 participants were included in the sample. Their distribution by year of reference can be seen in Table 1. For the years 2000 and 2004, the participants were university students and were recruited from private universities in Cyprus. For the year 2010, participants were recruited electronically with the cooperation of the Cyprus Youth Clubs Organization whose members' ages are between 13 - 35. The participants in all three years of reference had similar mean ages (22.94 for 2000, 22.72 for 2004, and 25.40 for 2010). Furthermore, there was a fair representation of both genders in all three year-groups (40-60 per cent of each gender in all groups).

*Table 1. Sample distribution by year of reference of assessment*

Year	<i>n</i>	%
2000	99	33.2
2004	105	35.2
2010	94	31.5
Total	298	100.0

### *Measures*

#### *Ethnic identity*

Ethnic identity was assessed using The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). This is a 15-item, 4-point Likert-type response (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*) measure that assesses ethnic identity as a general person characteristic across different groups. This measure has two components: a) Ethnic Identity Exploration (a process-oriented developmental and cognitive factor) that assesses socializing with one's group members and exploration and participation in cultural traditions; b) Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment (an affective and attitudinal component) that assesses feelings of attachment to one's group, ethnic pride, and attitudes towards one's group. Examples of the items of the scale include "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me" and "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group" for the two components, respectively. According to Phinney (1991), the MEIM focuses on the components that are common across many groups including self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging and attitudes towards one's own group.

Phinney (1991) also noted that the preferred scoring is to use the mean of the 12 items for an overall score (the last three items are demographical). The measure has been used subsequently in dozens of studies and has consistently shown good reliability ( $\alpha > .90$  for college samples). For the current sample, the overall alpha coefficient was .84 and the coefficients of the separate years ranged from .81 to .85.

### *Person perception*

Person Perception was assessed using the People Perspective Questionnaire (Argyrides & Downey, 2001) developed based on Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. This 12-item, 11-point (0 = Totally different in every way, nothing similar at all to 10 = Totally similar in every way, nothing different at all) measure assesses whether a person perceives 'Others' as similar or different from each other on several aspects of personality, future goals, perceptions and needs. This category of 'Others' is defined in the measure as people outside one's own close group residing in the same country (i.e., not close friends and/or family, different sports club supporters, different political party supporters, etc.). Participants were asked about their perceptions concerning these individuals. Examples of items on this scale include: "How similar or different do you think people are regarding their hopes for the future?" or "How similar or different do you think people are regarding their willingness to work to get ahead?" or "How similar or different do you think people are regarding their desire to get along with others?" This scale has reported reliability coefficients ranging from .84 to .86 on a number of samples across different cultures and reliable test-retest psychometric data as well. For the current sample, the alpha coefficient was .79 and the coefficients of the separate years ranged from .75 to .81.

### *Racism*

Racism was assessed using the Modern Racism Scale (MRS; McConahay, 1986). In the original form of the MRS, the word 'African-American' is used. Since the word would not apply to this study (no African-Americans as a minority group in Cyprus), the word was modified to 'minority' to be able to be used in the context of the Cypriot culture. The word minority was chosen as a method of indirectly assessing the group(s) that came to mind when the word 'minority' was used. Thus, at the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked to identify and write down the group of 'minority' that came to their mind and on which they would base their answers. Participants identified immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union region and Eastern Europe (i.e., Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria) as their

group of reference of their answers, groups with very similar social characteristics and statuses within the society. The MRS was considered an appropriate measure to use in this study since its items are very relevant to the current situation in Cyprus concerning immigrants. Example items are: "Over the past few years, minorities have gotten more economically than they deserve" or "If a minority family with about the same income and education as I have moved next to me, I would mind it a great deal". Hodson and Costello (2007) also used the "modified-word" version of the MRS with alpha reliability coefficients of .80. The Likert-type response scale ranged from Strongly Disagree (receiving a score of 1) to Strongly Agree (receiving a score of 5). The MRS has satisfactory reliability, with coefficients ranging from .81 to .86 (McConahay, 1986). For the current sample, the alpha coefficient was .79 and the coefficients of the separate years ranged from .77 to .82.

### ***Procedure***

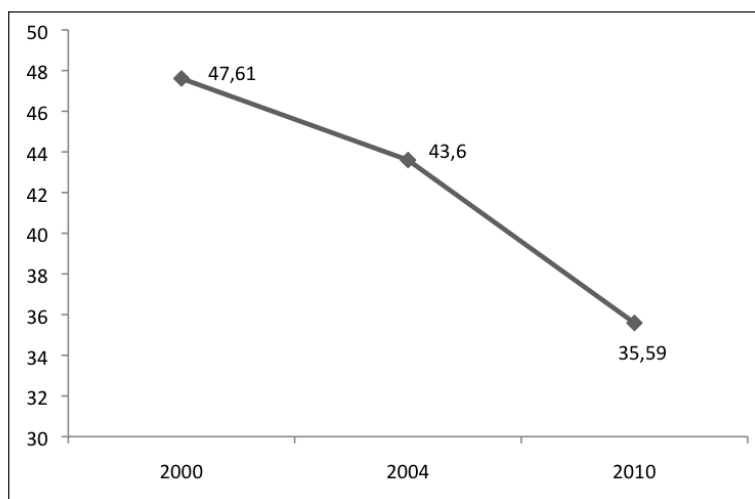
All participants from the 2000 and 2004 sample, upon signing their inform-consent forms, were instructed to answer the questionnaires as honestly as possible. For the year 2010, participants were sent a link with an online access to the questionnaires of the study. Upon clicking the link, participants were directed to the instructions of the questionnaires and then proceeded to answering them. Sending the questionnaires back was considered their consent to taking part in the study. After receiving the electronic data, all participants who were under the age of 18 were excluded from the analyses in order to match the sample in age (university age) to the previous two years of reference (2000 and 2004). Preliminary analyses were conducted in order to identify and possibly remove any outliers that could skew the results. When all data were cleaned, the statistical analyses were applied.

## **RESULTS**

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted in order to assess the first research question addressing year differences (2000, 2004, and 2010) in the dependent variables of ethnic identity, person perception, and racism. Furthermore, and in order to address the second research question, correlational analyses were conducted to investigate possible relationships between the three variables of interest across the three years of reference. Each research question was addressed separately.

### *Effects on ethnic identity*

The ANOVA on Ethnic Identity (Figure 1) revealed that there was a significant main effect of year of reference,  $F(2, 295) = 65.99, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .31$ . A post-hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test revealed that as compared to the ethnic identity levels of the year 2000 ( $M = 47.61, SD = 6.78$ ), the levels of ethnic identity were significantly decreased for the year 2004 ( $M = 43.60, SD = 9.22; p = .001$ ), with a further decrease for the year 2010 ( $M = 35.59, SD = 5.42; p < .001$ ). The same difference was found when comparing the ethnic identity levels of the year 2004 whose levels were significantly higher than the year 2010 ( $p < .001$ ). These results show a continuous and significant decrease in ethnic identity levels across the three years of reference.



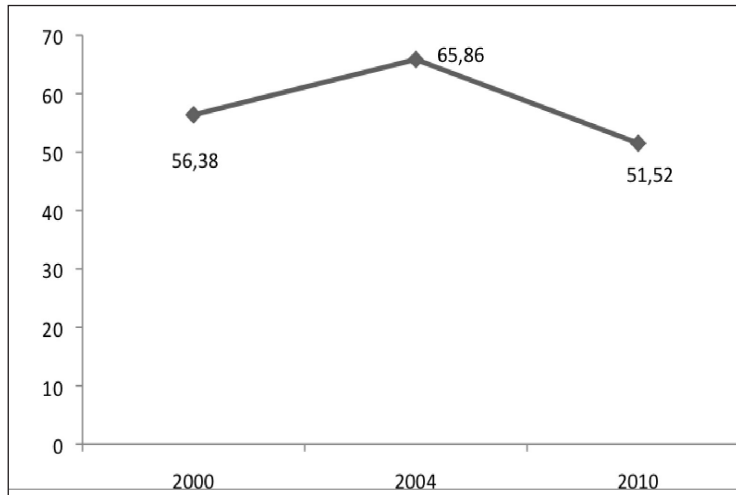
*Figure 1. Scores on Ethnic Identity across the three years of reference.*

### *Effects on person perception*

The ANOVA on person perception (Figure 2) revealed that there was a significant main effect of year of reference,  $F(2, 295) = 16.59, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ . A post-hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test revealed that as compared to year 2000 ( $M = 56.38, SD = 17.28$ ), the out-group perceived similarity levels were significantly increased (indicating more perceived similarity among the out-group members) for the year 2004 ( $M = 65.86, SD = 22.08; p < .001$ ). However, results significantly

decreased again in 2010 resulting in no significant difference when comparing 2000 to 2010 ( $p > .05$ ).

Concerning the year of reference 2004 – which had the highest mean score of all the years of reference indicating the highest levels of perceived similarity of the out-group members – the levels of perceived similarity were significantly higher than the year 2010 ( $p < .001$ ).



*Figure 2. Scores on Person Perception across the three years of reference.*

### *Effects on racism*

The ANOVA on racism scores (Figure 3) revealed that there was a significant main effect of year of reference,  $F(2, 295) = 8.27, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ . A post-hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test revealed that as compared to year 2000 ( $M = 21.44, SD = 5.21$ ), racism levels were significantly decreased in the year 2004 ( $M = 19.29, SD = 6.32; p = .007$ ). No other significant differences were found when comparing the racism levels of the year 2004 to 2010 ( $p > .05$ ).

### *Relations between ethnic identity, person perception and racism by year of reference*

To investigate if there were statistically significant associations between ethnic identity, person perception, and racism, Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted for each year of reference (2000, 2004, and 2010).

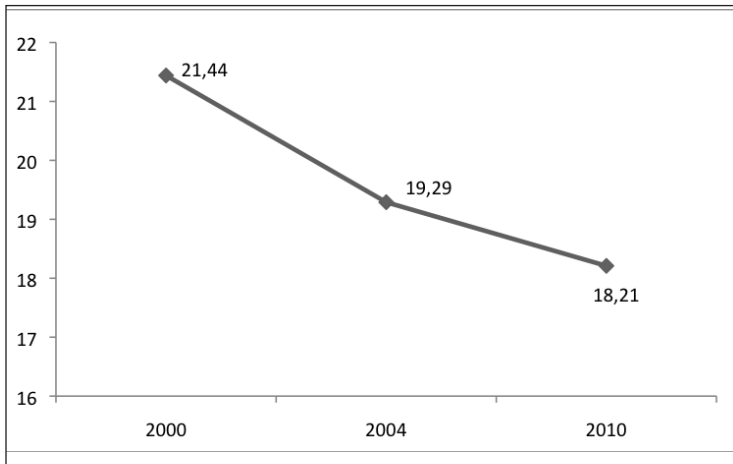


Figure 3. Scores on Racism across the three years of reference.

#### Correlations for year 2000

For the year 2000, a statistically significant relationship was found between person perception and racism (see Table 2). Specifically, out-group perceived similarity was negatively and significantly related to racism ( $r = -.517, p < .001$ ; indicating that higher perceived out-group member similarity was related to lower levels of racism). However, no significant relationship was found between ethnic identity and person perception ( $r = -.005, p > .05$ ) and ethnic identity and racism ( $r = .139, p > .05$ ).

#### Correlations for year 2004

Consistent with the results of 2000, a statistically significant relationship was found as indicated in Table 2. Specifically, out-group perceived similarity was negatively and significantly related to racism ( $r = -.593, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher perceived out-group member similarity was related to lower levels of racism. However, no significant relationship was found between ethnic identity and person perception ( $r = .135, p > .05$ ) and ethnic identity and racism ( $r = .171, p > .05$ ).

#### Correlations for year 2010

For the year 2010, similar findings occurred as indicated in Table 2. Specifically, out-group perceived similarity was negatively and significantly related to racism ( $r = -.441, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher perceived out-group member similarity was

*Table 2. Pearson correlations among ethnic identity, racism, and person perception on all three years of reference*

Year	Ethnic Identity	Racism	Person Perception
Year 2000			
Ethnic identity	----	.139	-.005
Racism		----	-.517**
Person perception			----
Year 2004			
Ethnic identity	----	.171	.135
Racism		----	-.593**
Person perception			----
Year 2010			
Ethnic identity	----	-.001	.022
Racism		----	-.441**
Person perception			----

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

related to lower levels of racism. However, no significant relationship was found between ethnic identity and person perception ( $r = .022, p > .05$ ) and ethnic identity and racism ( $r = -.001, p > .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was twofold: Investigate possible differences in levels of ethnic identity, person perception and racism in Greek-Cypriot samples in three different years of reference (2000, 2004, and 2010). Also, to identify possible relations between the three variables of interest, especially perceived out-group similarity and racism. The findings of the present study show that levels of ethnic identity among the samples of Greek-Cypriot youth have significantly decreased in the last decade. In addition, there was a small but significant decrease in racism scores from the year 2000 to the year 2004. Furthermore, levels of perceived similarity within Greek-Cypriot youth of out-group members seem to have an 'inverted U' effect during the last decade—where scores significantly increased from 2000 to 2004 and significantly decreased again from 2004 to 2010, returning to similar levels of 2000.

Concerning the associations between the variables, consistently throughout the three years of reference, out-group perceived similarity was related to lower levels of racism. However, there were no significant relationships between ethnic identity and racism, and ethnic identity and out-group perceived similarity. The following



discussion summarizes the main findings of the study for the two research questions posed, attempts to interpret the results, examines support of previous literature, and speculates on the societal implications of the results.

Concerning *ethnic identity*, the study indicated a significant decrease through the last decade, which started when comparing 2000 to 2004, and was even more evident when comparing 2004 to 2010. This finding indicates a significant overall decrease of ethnic identity in the last decade. Several possible reasons can explain this significant change in ethnic identity levels.

It has been supported that ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional variable that evolves and changes in response to social, contextual and developmental factors (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). In addition, Phinney (1991) noted that in order to be said that one has a high, strong, secure or an achieved ethnic identity, an individual must self-identify as a group member, evaluate their group positively, prefer or be comfortable with their group membership, is interested in, knowledgeable about and committed to the group, and is involved in ethnic practices. Conversely, “when there is little ethnic interest, knowledge, commitment or involvement, and negative evaluation of the group and of one’s membership in the group, then ethnic identity could be called low, weak, or diffused” (p. 194). Hurtado, Gurin, and Peng (1994), in an attempt to support racial and ethnic identity theory, concluded that social histories influence identity structure and content, and these complexities need to be included in empirical work.

Concerning Cypriots’ ethnic identity, Mavratsas (1999), Papadakis (2008) and Spyrou (2006) pointed out the long-standing conflict within Cyprus between the *Hellenocentric* discourse emphasizing the ‘Greekness’ of Greek-Cypriots and the *Cypriocentric* discourse emphasizing the ‘Cypriotness’ of Greek-Cypriots. The political right has traditionally supported the *Hellenocentric* discourse and the political left, in power from 2008 to 2013, the *Cypriocentric* discourse. The political left has traditionally also led most ‘rapprochement’ efforts between the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot communities, efforts that had marginal support compared to the *Hellenocentric* approach that has been the unmarked norm in the educational and political system (Charalambous, 2009; Papadakis, 2008). Since the political left came to power in 2008, the ‘Cypriotness’ discourse has received significantly more support, as also indicated by the initiative to promote reconciliation and peaceful coexistence which has been implemented in all policy initiatives. Loizides (2007) supported that the referendum decision in 2004 “won a battle of identity framing” more acceptable within Cyprus but accompanied by a lack of trust for the international community (p. 184). As stated above, ethnic identity evolves and changes in response to social, contextual and developmental factors (Phinney et al., 2001). It is possible that this

continuous conflict between the discourses, the conflicting information being presented, as well as the major shift in policies and procedures that started in 2008, affected ethnic identity levels in how one evaluates one's group positively, prefers or is comfortable with one's group membership, as well as one's interest in, knowledge about and commitment to the group. This is supported by previous research as it has been argued that when one is exposed to negative stereotypes and conflicting information about one's own group, a person may hold conflicting or negative feelings about their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989; Phinney et al., 2001).

It has also been argued that the development and maintenance of ethnic identity levels is influenced by messages received from the family and the community (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993) as well as socialization with others (Bernal, Knight, Garza, Ocampo, & Cota, 1990). It is therefore also possible that the influence one has from their family, community and socialization with others towards a certain ethnic identity discourse, can influence the evaluation of one's group positively, being comfortable with group membership and having an interest and commitment to the group.

Conceptualized using Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, these two discourses create a separation between the "Us; Hellenocentric" and "Them; Cypriocentrism". Inevitably, this categorization and debate has multiple effects including the use of ethnic symbols, which in turn, could influence levels of ethnic identity. It can be observed that the use of the Greek versus the Cypriot flag has come to categorize individuals in one of the two discourses. As mentioned in the introduction, the Cyprus flag was waved by many outside the presidential palace after President Papadopoulos' speech concerning the referendum as well as during the winning election speech of Leftist president Christofias, as a form of a different symbolism of both the widely accepted Hellenocentric discourse and the use of the Greek flag. The purpose of a flag is, by default, the collective, one-for-all, ethnic symbol of a country and is used as a method of self-identification in a group and evaluation of the group. As stated earlier, negative stereotypes and conflicting information about one's own group (in this case, the symbolism conveyed by a flag), may lead a person to hold conflicting or negative feelings about their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989; Phinney et al., 2001). It is argued that feelings of ethnic identity and pride that usually accompany the mere sight of the flag of one's own country are not as evident in the case of Cyprus as the flag creates an internal conflict since it seems to be used more of a symbol of ideology than the country as a whole itself. This negative stereotyping of the flag could influence levels of ethnic identity.

The results of the study on ethnic identity provide further support for Hurtado, Gurin, and Peng (1994) and Phinney's (1990) studies that described and supported

ethnic identity as a fluid and complex concept. It seems from the results of the present study that levels of ethnic identity differ depending on the year of reference, the current political situation and other complex variables such as conflict of discourses regarding one's ethnic identity. Therefore, ethnic identity should continue to be assessed as an empirical construct so that we can gain a better understanding of its complexity. This should also be done in a more qualitative manner that will give a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of this variable and how exactly it may be influenced.

Concerning *person perception*, findings indicated an 'inverted U' effect where scores significantly increased for the year 2004 as compared to the year 2000 (indicating higher out-group perceived similarity), and then a significant decrease occurred again in 2010. These results provide support for the hypothesized direction. Even though at first glance this finding is puzzling, when one takes into consideration the year of reference where the scores had a significant increase, the explanation becomes more clear and understandable. In 2004, Cyprus went through two major events which both had a 'collective mobilization' and 'unification' of the majority of the people as a common denominator.

First, there were the simultaneous referenda for both the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot citizens. Even though the period prior to the referenda included significant tensions, with the support and encouragement of the then president Papadopoulos, 76 per cent of Greek-Cypriots voted 'No' to the comprehensive United Nations proposal for reunification of the island. This 'collective mobilization' towards the same goal of rejecting the proposal is believed to have influenced the results, since the instrument used to assess these perceptions included items about working towards the same goals, having similar plans towards the future, and other related items and was administered just a couple of months after the referenda. Michael Hogg (2006) explained how this identification occurs; in the context of the current study and Tajfel's and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1986), individuals who supported the 'No' vote, identified as a larger collective that formed a new social identity, the 'No' group.

Second, within the same year, and prior to the collection of the data, Cyprus also entered the large 'family' of the European Union. Once again, Greek-Cypriots had to embrace the similarities within the European community, accept the country as part of a bigger 'family' and immerse themselves in this new vision of coexistence and sharing of benefits. Using Hogg's (2006) interpretation once again, a new social identity called 'European Citizen' was formed and a new social identity group was developed. It is argued, using the theoretical framework mentioned, that the influence from these two major events in the year 2004 did have an influence on the

perceived similarity scores of the study. It is believed that since people were 'moved' by circumstances towards having more similar goals concerning the two major issues stated above (Reunification Proposal of the UN and entry to the Europe Union), consequently, this led to higher scores on perceived similarity of the in-group but also of the out-group.

This conclusion is supported by several research findings. Cameron (2004) argued that there is a tendency to tie with the in-group because it reflects a sense of attachment and belonging to the part that defines the current state of identity (in this case, the 'No' voters). The interpretation is also supported by Oakes (1987) who argued that people draw on readily accessible social categorizations (in this case, the 'No' group) that are valued and important and are self-evident in the immediate situation (in the context of the current study, this situation was immediate). The current findings also provide support for Bem's (1972) Self-Perception theory stating if perception of in-group similarity is high, one is more likely to notice others' behavior that is similar to their own. For the purposes of this study, since the majority of the population had similar reactions and demands, this led to a 'coiling effect,' where other people's behaviors and perceptions towards the referendum were noticed easier, creating a dynamic where even people who were in an out-group before (i.e., different team or political party) shifted to a more collective attitude and were perceived as in-group (the 'No' group). Simultaneously, the referendum, because it envisaged that Cyprus would become a state structure that was very different from that of other European developed democratic countries, created a search of several commonalities and similarities in other countries and an identification of Cypriots with the people of developed European countries "who are all the same" as regards their rights for a unified and well-organized state. These reactions likely contributed to the increase in out-group similarity scores.

Concerning racism levels, participants answered the respective measure having in mind immigrants from the Ex-Soviet Union and Easter Europe (i.e., Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria). Results indicated a significant decrease in 2004 as compared to 2000 but no significant changes when comparing 2004 to 2010. Even though the change in racism scores is small, it is still significant when comparing 2000 to 2004 (the mean of the year 2000 participants was 21.44 and 19.29 in the 2004 sample; 2.15 points difference of the range of 8-40 on the measure). However, the results between the 2004 sample and the 2010 sample were similar.

As stated in the introduction, census reports of Cyprus indicate that the country has been flooded with immigrants (close to 180,000 of the 850,000 population as of December 2011) (Statistical Service, 2011). Conceptually, the modern and symbolic racism theories when applied to immigrants state that racism is shown through

opposition to targeted policies towards immigrants and the existence of a blend between early-socialized negative feelings about immigrants together with conservative values (Sears & Henry, 2003). Cyprus has had a fairly homogeneous profile until the early 1990s (Zembylas, Michaelidou, & Afantinou-Lambrianou, 2010) and has been characterized by conservative values. Therefore, this sudden flooding of immigrants could develop opposing attitudes towards policies Greek-Cypriots may perceive unfair (i.e., receiving social security support from their tax-paying money).

When looking at Stephan and Stephan's (1984) ignorance hypothesis, the small decrease in these scores from 2000 to 2004 can be explained in light of this hypothesis, since Greek-Cypriots were directly faced with smaller numbers of immigrants at that time and were 'forced' to find out the true facts about members of minority groups which can result in lowering racism scores. Furthermore, and as Cook (1978) proposed, this contact between intergroup members has been supported by local norms and authorities, which could further explain the small decrease in the racism scores.

In the background literature section concerning Cyprus and racism towards immigrants, it was shown that Cyprus has high rates of negative attitudes towards immigrants. The findings of the current study suggest that even though there was a significant decrease from 2000 to 2004 (before the accession to the European Union), there was no further decrease of racism scores from 2004 to 2010. This needs to be taken into consideration concerning possible intervention policies and multicultural exposure.

Finally, and as hypothesized based on previous research, the correlational analyses of the study consistently showed that higher out-group perceived similarity is significantly related to lower levels of racism. This has also been found in previous studies (Argyrides, 2007; Argyrides & Downey, 2001; Argyrides et al., 2004). It seems that as individuals perceive members of the out-group as similar to each other, the less negative attitudes they hold towards them. This relationship should be taken into great consideration in implementing intervention programs that give greater emphasis on similarities rather than differences between 'indigenous' Greek Cypriots and immigrants.

### *Implications, cautions and future directions*

The current study has implications for multicultural education and diversity teaching and training as well as educational and government policy development. At the level of multicultural education and diversity teaching and training, the findings of the present study suggest that further attention needs to be given to the qualitative

exploration of the construct of ethnic identity as well as an increased need to become more sensitive to issues related to racism as proposed in detail by Banks (2007), while providing further emphasis on core similarities between in-groups and out-groups as proposed by Argyrides (2007). Findings are indicative that the approaches of multicultural education that were occurring in Cyprus were not sufficient to be able to 'healthily' accept and embrace these fast-paced changes in demographic statuses that occurred after entering the European Union. It is also argued that multicultural training should also occur even within the Greek-Cypriots, since there seems to be an imbalance between their perceived diversity and unity, as well as their perceived identity discourse.

At the level of educational and government policy development, the findings suggest that there is a need to promote diversity teaching and training at all levels of the government following a 'top-down' approach where politicians will serve as models of a balance between unity and diversity and not encourage discrimination. The discrepancy between the Hellenocentric and Cypriocentric discourses should also be researched and addressed more thoroughly and attempt to bridge their differences, at least for the ethnic identity of indigenous Cyprus people. In a country such as Cyprus which suffers from ethnic and other forms of conflict, similar, strong and healthy levels of ethnic identity, increased levels of perceived in-group and out-group core similarities and decreased levels of racism will aid in the handling, dealing and consequently, overcoming these multidimensional, multifaceted conflicts.

The current study had some limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, during the three years of reference, separate samples were used for each year (2000, 2004 and 2010). Even though a power analysis indicated fair results, the fact that the same people were not followed through this specific decade assessing their levels of ethnic identity, person perception and racism, it should be taken into consideration and results should be interpreted with caution. A longitudinal design using the same participants is recommended in order to replicate similar results. Furthermore, the sample size for each year of reference could have been larger so that the results would be more generalizable. A study comparing ethnic identity levels and perceived similarity of the two discourses in Cyprus (Hellenocentric versus Cypriocentric) can also be very beneficial to the literature.

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