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## Ethnic Self-Identification of First-Generation Immigrants

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**657**

**Laura Zimmermann  
Klaus F. Zimmermann  
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**Ethnic Self-Identification of First-Generation Immigrants**

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# **Ethnic Self-Identification of First-Generation Immigrants\***

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## **Abstract**

This paper uses the concept of ethnic self-identification of immigrants in a two-dimensional framework. It acknowledges the fact that attachments to the home and the host country are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There are three possible paths of adjustment from separation at entry, namely the transitions to assimilation, integration and marginalization. We analyze the determinants of ethnic self-identification in this process using samples of first-generation immigrants for males and females separately, and controlling for pre- and post-migration characteristics. We find strong gender differences and the unimportance of a wide range of pre-migration characteristics like religion and education at home.

**Keywords:** Ethnic self-identification, first-generation immigrants, gender, ethnicity

**JEL Classification:** F22, J15, J16, Z10

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## **1. Introduction**

In our modern world, where many societies become more and more multicultural, the concept of ethnic self-identification, that is the subjective attachment people have to ethnic communities, is of increasing importance. Especially international migrants have to reevaluate their connections to the host and the home country soon after immigration. Empirical research on this topic (see e.g. Phinney, 1990; Rumbaut, 1994) often chooses to consider ethnic self-identification as a single linear variable, implying that feelings for the country of origin and for the host country are mutually exclusive.

Yet, as it has been pointed out in the literature, ethnic self-identification is a much more complex concept (e.g. Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, 1996; Pirie, 1996; Kinket and Verkuyten, 1997; Kolossov, 1999; Landale and Oropesa, 2002; Barrington, Herron and Silver, 2003; Bodenhorn and Ruebeck, 2003): it involves feelings of varying degrees, which can be ‘situational’ (e.g. Eschbach, Supple and Snipp, 1998; Duncan and Trejo, 2005), that is they vary over time or by place and surroundings. Furthermore, ethnic self-identification can be partially imposed on individuals from outside due to observable characteristics like race (e.g. Phinney, 1990; Giménez, 1992; Henry and Bankston, 2001), which forces people into having feelings that they would not have otherwise.

This paper acknowledges this complexity and uses an alternative approach to the concept of ethnic self-identification. Instead of a linear model we create a two-dimensional dependent variable that includes the various possibilities immigrants have in their ethnic self-identification. Furthermore, we use a more comprehensive range of explanatory variables including pre- and post-migration characteristics, whereas earlier research work mostly focused on some small aspects only (e.g.

Sengstock, 1978; Mouw and Xie, 1999; Farver, Bhadha and Narang, 2002). As findings for men and women differ widely between surveys (e.g. Kinket and Verkuyten, 1997; Khanlou, 2005), we will analyze the determinants of ethnic self-identification separately by gender. We use data from a large European country with 9% of the total population being foreign nationals, Germany. Section 2 presents the data, the used methods and some general hypotheses. Section 3 describes the empirical results. Section 4 summarizes and concludes.

## **2. Data, models, and hypotheses**

The used dataset is the nationally representative German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP, SOEP Group, 2001), which is collected annually since 1984. Our base year of observation is 2001. Included in our sample are only first-generation immigrants. With 606 women and 640 men, the whole sample contains slightly more males than females.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sub-samples of men and women. The composition of the sample is similar for both groups: Roughly one third are Muslims; Christians make up 61.2% of the female and 54.3% of the male respondents; the rest are those people of other religions and non-religious individuals. For both men and women, the mean age at entry lies between 22 and 23 years. The majority of immigrants has acquired either vocational training or complete schooling in their home country. Roughly 6% of the respondents have also a college degree or higher education in their home country. Still, 19.6% of the women and 12.3% of the men have only incomplete schooling in their country of origin.

Table 1 about here

The division of the sub-samples into different ethnicities mirrors the largest immigration groups in Germany: About one third of the respondents are Turks, about 17% ex-Yugoslavians, and 8% Greeks. Italians make up 13.2% of the female and 15.9% of the male sample, whereas there are only 3.1% female and 4.2% male Spaniards. The rest of the sample is formed by the respondents of other ethnicities. These raw statistics show that while about half of the immigrants have a higher education degree in Germany, 22.1% of the females and 17.0% of the males do not have an education degree in Germany. The average time of years in Germany since immigration is about 21 years for female and about 24 years for male immigrants.

While our thesis is that ethnic self-identification should be analyzed on a more complex basis than just a linear model,<sup>1</sup> the first question has to be whether this approach is warranted at all. If respondents consider their ethnic self-identification to be a linear concept and answer accordingly, it is not worthwhile to opt for a two-dimensional approach. In the survey, people were posed two questions concerning their ethnic self-identification. The first question asked respondents how connected to the host country Germany they feel. The second question aimed at capturing the respondents' attachment to their respective countries of origin. The answers to both questions were grouped into three categories each, ranging between strong (category 1), moderate (category 2), and weak (category 3) connections.

A cross-tabulation of the two questions is contained in Table 2. The linear approach to modeling ethnic self-identification would now mean that feelings for the host and the home country are mutually exclusive. The combinations in Table 2, which show such an understanding are the following three: Feeling hardly attached to Germany but strongly to the country of origin (feel German is equal to 3 and feel

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<sup>1</sup> A linear model assumes a rather restrictive framework, where self-identification with the host and home country are mutually exclusive.



connected to the origin is equal to 1); Feeling both German and connected to the origin in some respects (feel German is equal to 2 and feel connected to the origin is equal to 2); and having strong connections to Germany but only weak connections to the country of origin (feel German equals 1 and feel connected to the origin equals 3). As these tabulations show, 59.41% of the females and 56.41% of the males in our sample exhibit an ethnic self-identification that is consistent with the concept of mutual exclusiveness. The rest of the cells, however, show that it is possible to have more convoluted feelings. A good percentage of our sample of immigrants self-identifies with belonging to one of the other groups, and therefore implicitly uses a two-dimensional approach to the ethnic self-identification. This observation implies that reality differs from the linear approach, and promises interesting results of a further analysis of the concept of the ethnic self-identification of immigrants. What determines which path immigrants choose in self-identifying?

Table 2 about here

In order to deepen the analysis, we create a dependent variable for ethnic self-identification that incorporates the different possibilities. Similar to theories and models on ethnic identity (Berry, 1980; Constant, Gataullina and Zimmermann, 2006), we assume that there are four two-dimensional possibilities of how people view their ethnic self-identification, as they embrace new or shed old ethnic identities: people can feel integrated, that is they feel strongly connected to both the host and the home country, and the feelings can co-exist; people can feel assimilated, meaning that they completely adapt to the host country and disengage from the country of origin; they can feel separated, in the sense that they maintain strong connections to the country of origin and only a weak link with the host country; or

they feel marginalized, that is they have loose connections to either the host or the home country.

In contrast to these approaches, however, here we are mainly interested in what makes people deviate from the linear model. We therefore create a dependent variable ethnic self-identification with three categories. Category 1 contains those respondents, who, right after immigration, are clearly on their way from separation to marginalization. These are those immigrants, who do not adjust to the German way of living, style and ethnicity, while they are also disconnecting with their home ethnicity (see cells (3,2) and (3,3) in Table 2). We also classify people as marginalized, if they are hardly at all or not at all affiliated any more with home, but in some respects they feel German (see cell (2,3) in Table 2).

In category 2 we collect those respondents, who are on their direct way from separation to assimilation, and therefore exhibit their ethnic self-identification as a linear model. These are those individuals clustering on the main diagonal, namely in cells (3,1), (2,2) and (1,3) of Table 2. They all behave consistently with the linear model by identifying themselves in a mutually exclusive way with either the ethnicity of the origin (cell (3,1)), which is separation, with the ethnicity of the receiving country Germany (cell (1,3)), which is assimilation, or are on their way from separation to assimilation as attached to both ethnicities “in some respect,” (cell (2,2)).

Category 3 contains those respondents who are on their way from separation to integration. It includes all those people in Table 2 who identify strongly with one ethnicity and moderately with the other – as in cells (2,1) and (1,2) - and those who identify strongly with both ethnicities, namely individuals from cell (1,1), who are fully integrated.

To obtain a sufficient coverage of the determinants of ethnic self-identification, we employ important pre- and post-migration characteristics. The pre-migration characteristics include the age at entry in Germany, dummy variables for Muslim and Christian religion (with individuals of other religions and non-religious people being the reference group), no education in the home country (the reference group for education in the home country are all those with some kind of education in the home country), ex-Yugoslavs, Mediterranean immigrants (including Greeks, Italians and Spaniards), and those people of other ethnicities (the reference group for ethnic origin is Turks). The post-migration characteristics include the dummy variables no education degree in Germany and higher degree in Germany (with some education degree in Germany as the reference category), and the continuous variable years since immigration.

In analyzing ethnic self-identification, we expect to find gender differences in line with Kinket and Verkuyten (1997) and especially Khanlou (2005), who provides a good overview of research results on ethnic self-identification and gender differences. While there are gender differences in most of the studies, the direction of the differences varies. How female and male immigrants differ in our model, is therefore worth pursuing.

### **3. Empirical Results**

In order to analyze the determinants of ethnic self-identification with category 1: marginalized, category 2: linear model (separated, undefined, assimilated), and category 3: integration thoroughly, we employ first the multinomial logit model that allows an unstructured and flexible specification.<sup>2</sup> In this exercise we disaggregate by

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<sup>2</sup> The descriptive statistics for this variable are contained in Table 1.

gender. We use likelihood-ratio tests to measure the value of pre- and post-migration characteristics against the full model and against the base model with a constant only.

Table 3 contains the results for all likelihood-ratio tests. Basically, in all tests the impact of pre- and post-migration characteristics is significant at 99.5%, which clearly justifies the inclusion of pre- and post-migration characteristics, This is especially confirmed by the likelihood-ratio tests of the full model against the reference model with a constant only for both men and women, see row three of Table 3. Both test statistics are fairly large and of similar size for both genders. It turns out that the effects of pre-migration characteristics are much more relevant than the effects of post-migration characteristics for both men and women, and in the tests against the constant and against the full model. The test statistics for the pre-migration characteristics against the constant model and the post-migration characteristics against the full model are fairly similar for both genders. However, the effects of pre-migration characteristics are stronger for women than for men in the tests against the full model, while the effects of post-migration characteristics are weaker for women than for men in the tests against the model with a constant only.

Table 3 about here

We then proceed with an ordered probit model for females and males separately. The dependent variable is ethnic self-identification, and we impose an ordinal structure on it. We posit that integration is a “better” outcome<sup>3</sup> than the linear case of assimilation and the marginalization alternative. Table 4 presents the results

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<sup>3</sup> Integration is the case of being happy with both cultures and societies. It is the situation of feeling proud and peaceful with one’s heritage or traditions, of bringing these new traits to the host country and of being happy and at ease with the new culture at the same time. This expands the horizons and exudes positive and productive individuals. In terms of the Venn diagram, for example, integration covers the entire area of both circles. In contrast, assimilation indicates that immigrants conform to the norms, assume a new personality, that of natives, and have nothing new to offer to the new society. Marginalization of course indicates disgruntled and confused individuals with potentially unintended social ramifications.

of this exercise. We find that for women age at entry has a negative effect on ethnic self-identification. The older immigrant women are when entering Germany, the less likely they are to self-identify as integrated, and the more likely they are to identify as members of the linear approach or as marginalized. Religion and education in the home country have no significant effect. Ethnicity or country of origin, on the other hand, has an effect on the Mediterranean immigrants' self-identification and on those of other ethnicities: both are more likely to self-identify as integrated when compared to Turks.

Table 4 about here

Education in Germany is also of importance. Interestingly, both having no degree and having a higher degree in Germany makes immigrants feel more attached to Germany and more likely to self-identify as integrated. For males, years since immigration is the only significant variable but it is in line with the theory and intuition. The coefficients show that that longer people live in Germany, the more likely they are to self-identify as integrated, and the less likely they are to identify as marginalized.

As the characteristics of the people who differ from the linear approach are especially interesting, we also employ binary probit models with only minor changes on the dependent variable. Here, the dependent variable integration has two categories: category 1 contains all those people who were identified as belonging to category 3 of the variable ethnic self-identification and category 0 contains all other respondents. This dependent variable therefore analyzes the characteristics of the people who feel integrated in comparison to the rest of the sample. The dependent variable marginalization also has two categories: category 1 contains all those people who were identified as belonging to category 1 of the variable ethnic self-

identification and category 0 contains all other respondents. This dependent variable therefore analyzes the characteristics of the people who feel marginalized in comparison to the rest of the sample.

Table 4 presents the results of the binary probit models for the dependent variables integration and marginalization for both women and men.<sup>4</sup> We first report the findings from the female sample. The older women are at entering the host country, the less likely they are to self-identify as integrated. Having no degree or a higher degree in Germany both determine and lead to more integration, compared to having some degree in Germany. In addition to that, Muslims are less likely to exhibit themselves as integrated than those of other religions and non-religious people, whereas there is no difference for Christians. The more time has passed since immigration, the more likely immigrants are to identify as integrated. Where marginalization is concerned, the results show that Mediterranean people and those with a higher degree in Germany are less likely to marginalize than Turks or those with some degree in Germany; all other ethnicities, religion and education in the home country play no significant role. This means that important pre-migration characteristics play no role in determining how people self-identify.

For the male sample, Table 4 further shows, that being Muslim makes immigrants less likely to self-identify as integrated than people of other religions or non-religious immigrants. People of other ethnicities are more likely than Turks to self-identify as integrated. Also, Table 4 clearly demonstrates the positive effect of residence in Germany on feelings of integration: the longer immigrant men have been living in Germany, the more likely they are to feel integrated. In the case of marginalization, the only variable that has a significant impact is Mediterranean

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<sup>4</sup> The descriptive statistics for both endogenous variables are contained in Table 1.

origin: people from the Mediterranean region are less likely to feel marginalized in Germany than Turks.

#### **4. Summary and conclusions**

This paper questions the linear concept of ethnic self-identification that treats the attachments to the home and the host country as mutually exclusive. In the linear approach immigrants either remain persistent to their received ethnicity, or assimilate to the new ethnic environment of the host country and reduce any attachments to the home country accordingly. We, however, in this paper, are able to investigate the broader concept of ethnic self-identification of immigrants in a two-dimensional framework. Ethnic attachments to the home and host countries are not necessarily mutually exclusive, which we have empirically tested.

In the testing procedure, we had identified three possible paths of adjustment that can occur after immigration. All start from a position of separation at entry. The first path is the transition to assimilation (the complete adaptation of the ethnicity of the host country), the second path leads to integration (the complete adaptation of both ethnicities), and finally the third path ends at marginalization (the loss of association with both ethnicities). We analyze the determinants of ethnic self-identification in this process using samples of first-generation female and male immigrants, and controlling for pre- and post-migration characteristics. We find strong gender differences and that a wide range of pre-migration characteristics, like religion and education at home are not important.

For both females and males, religion and education in the home country have no effect on ethnic self-identification, the only exception being Muslim males and females who are less likely to describe themselves as integrated when integrated

people are compared to the rest of the sample. Mediterranean immigrants in general marginalize less than other immigrants, whereas those of other ethnicities, especially females, are also more likely to feel integrated in Germany. But there are also gender differences: Whereas education in the host country is an important factor for females, which in the case of no degree or higher degree in Germany, and makes them feel more integrated, education in the host country has no impact at all for males. A higher age at entry affects integration processes negatively for women, but has no impact on men. Time elapsed since immigration is of a higher importance for men than for women.

These results are in line with our hypotheses that there are important gender differences in ethnic self-identification. Ethnic identity seems to be more complex for women than for men, which may be due to different cultural expectations of women in the home and in the host country. Yet, it is surprising that some pre-migration characteristics like religion or education in the home country hardly play a role in shaping the emotions and wherewithal of immigrants, and that the impact of post-migration characteristics varies drastically between males and females. This also means that if the aim of host countries like Germany is to assure that first-generation immigrants embark on the path from separation to integration after they immigrate, the employed strategies have to differ for men and women.



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Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Females		Males	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Feel German	2.248	0.766	2.184	0.742
Feel connected to the origin	1.465	0.641	1.528	0.652
Age at entry	22.724	11.103	22.225	11.088
Muslim	0.325	0.469	0.363	0.481
Catholic	0.323	0.468	0.284	0.451
Other Christian	0.289	0.454	0.259	0.439
Other religions	0.033	0.179	0.038	0.190
Non-religious	0.030	0.170	0.056	0.231
College in home country	0.058	0.233	0.064	0.245
Vocational training in home country	0.261	0.439	0.289	0.454
Complete schooling in home country	0.252	0.435	0.250	0.433
Incomplete schooling in home country	0.196	0.398	0.123	0.329
No education in home country	0.233	0.423	0.273	0.446
Turkish	0.342	0.475	0.363	0.481
Ex-Yugoslavian	0.178	0.383	0.170	0.376
Greek	0.081	0.273	0.083	0.276
Italian	0.132	0.339	0.159	0.366
Spanish	0.031	0.174	0.042	0.201
Other ethnicities	0.210	0.407	0.177	0.382
No degree in Germany	0.221	0.415	0.170	0.376
Higher degree in Germany	0.503	0.500	0.502	0.500
Years since migration	21.097	10.581	24.023	10.630
Ethnic self-identification	2.238	0.592	2.236	0.617
Integration	0.322	0.468	0.336	0.473
Marginalization	0.084	0.278	0.100	0.300

Number of observations: 606 females and 640 males

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of the attachment to Germany and the country of origin

		Feel connected to the country of origin					
		Females			Males		
Feel German		1	2	3	1	2	3
3		227	31	13	197	40	9
		37.46%	5.12%	2.15%	30.78%	6.25%	1.41%
2		103	104	7	119	132	15
		17.00%	17.16%	1.16%	18.59%	20.63%	2.34%
1		43	49	29	42	54	32
		7.10%	8.09%	4.79%	6.56%	8.44%	5.00%

'Feel German:' "To what extent do you view yourself as a German?" = 1 if completely, for the most part; = 2 if in some respects; = 3 if hardly at all, not at all

'Feel connected to the country of origin:' "To what extent do you feel that you belong to the culture of the country where you or your family comes from?" = 1 if to a very large extent, to a large extent; = 2 if in some respects; = 3 if hardly, not at all

Number of observations: 606 females and 640 males

Table 3. Likelihood-ratio tests of the effect of pre- and post-migration characteristics

	Females	Males
<b>Likelihood-ratio test against 0</b>		
Effect of pre-migration characteristics	49.407*** (7)	50.83*** (7)
Effect of post-migration characteristics	17.80*** (3)	23.93*** (3)
Effect of full model	61.40*** (10)	63.03*** (10)
<b>Likelihood-ratio test against the full model</b>		
Effect of pre-migration characteristics	43.61*** (7)	39.12*** (7)
Effect of post-migration characteristics	12.01*** (3)	12.21*** (3)

Table shows chi-squared values with degrees of freedom in parentheses; basis of these results are the corresponding multinomial logit models

\*\*\* significant at 99.5%

Table 4. The determinants of ethnic self-identification (ordered and binary probit models)

	Females			Males		
	Integration (binary probit)	Marginaliza- tion (binary probit)	Ethnic self- identification (ordered probit)	Integration (binary probit)	Marginaliza- tion (binary probit)	Ethnic self- identification (ordered probit)
Age at entry	-0.010* (-1.66)	0.007 (0.87)	-0.009* (-1.69)	-0.003 (-0.50)	0.001 (0.16)	-0.003 (-0.52)
Muslim	-0.472* (-1.96)	-0.082 (-0.27)	-0.255 (-1.23)	-0.478** (-2.46)	-0.087 (-0.36)	-0.259 (-1.52)
Christian	0.156 (0.67)	-0.020 (-0.07)	0.121 (0.59)	-0.055 (-0.29)	-0.133 (-0.55)	0.023 (0.14)
No education in home country	0.191 (1.12)	-0.028 (-0.11)	0.142 (0.95)	0.053 (0.33)	-0.171 (-0.76)	0.082 (0.57)
Ex-Yugoslav	-0.012 (-0.07)	-0.171 (-0.78)	0.052 (0.37)	0.206 (1.34)	-0.238 (-1.15)	0.206 (1.53)
Mediterranean	0.114 (0.66)	-0.725*** (-2.71)	0.303* (1.95)	0.032 (0.20)	-0.513* (-2.10)	0.139 (0.97)
Other ethnicity	0.261 (1.54)	-0.367 (-1.56)	0.296* (1.99)	0.296* (1.82)	0.228 (1.14)	0.085 (0.59)
No degree in Germany	0.311* (1.65)	-0.355 (-1.39)	0.338* (2.07)	-0.181 (-1.09)	-0.230 (-0.98)	-0.047 (-0.33)
Higher degree in Germany	0.303* (2.01)	-0.452* (-2.16)	0.358*** (2.69)	-0.157 (-1.16)	-0.067 (-0.38)	-0.083 (-0.69)
Years since immigration	0.012* (2.03)	0.001 (0.15)	0.008 (1.44)	0.015*** (2.69)	-0.012 (-1.63)	0.014*** (2.95)
Constant (probit)	-0.820** (-2.52)	-0.994* (-2.27)		-0.541* (-1.84)	-0.740* (-1.92)	
$\mu_1$ (ordered probit)			-1.060			-1.062
$\mu_2$ (ordered probit)			0.876			0.706
Log-likelihood	-356.075	-166.480	-511.611	-391.087	-193.833	-571.499
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0647	0.0488	0.0434	0.0427	0.0683	0.0291

\* significant at 95% \*\* significant at 99% \*\*\*significant at 99.5%

z-values in parentheses; number of observations: 606 females and 640 males

Reference group: other religions and non-religious, some kind of education in the home country, Turkish, some degree in Germany

Dependent variables: ethnic self-identification: 3 categories; category 1: way from separation to marginalization (in the cross-tabulation the combinations of feel German/feel connected to the origin of 3/2, 3/3 and 2/3); category 2: way from separation to assimilation (in the cross-tabulation the combinations of feel German/feel connected to the origin of 3/1, 2/2 and 1/3); category 3: way from separation to integration (in the cross-tabulation the combinations of feel German/feel connected to the origin of 2/1, 1/1 and 1/2)

Integration: 2 categories; category 1: way from separation to integration; category 0: the rest of the sample

Marginalization: 2 categories; category 1: way from separation to marginalization; category 0: the rest of the sample