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### Social integration of refugee youth in Europe: Lessons learned about interethnic relations in U.S. schools

**Abstract:** While European nations are in the process of schooling large numbers of refugee youth from the Middle East and Northern Africa, empirical research on successful methods of social integration of this vital next generation of citizens is sparse. To address this void of knowledge, we review relevant lessons learned about school-based interethnic relations in the United States (U.S.) that offer some insights into successful social integration. By focusing on refugee youth's needs to feel safe and connected in school, we focus specifically on social policies and educational practices that separate vs. integrate different ethnic groups together in schools and classrooms. To understand how and why segregation of groups fosters prejudice, while diversity promotes greater school safety and connectedness, we specifically highlight the role of cross-group friendships and the development of multiple social identities. Recommendations for new research directions on refugee youth are also provided.

**Keywords:** immigration, schools, diversity, contact

Many European nations are experiencing unparalleled social change as a function of large numbers of recent refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Northern Africa. Recent political and social unrest in the Middle East in particular has led children and families to seek asylum in neighboring Europe. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) estimates that in 2015 there were three to four times more refugees and migrants arriving in Europe than in 2014 (Miles, 2015). The European Union received 1.3 million asylum seekers in both 2015 and 2016 (Eurostat, 2017; see also Wike, Stokes, & Simmons, 2016). While establishing precise numbers of these refugees is challenging, it is estimated that about one fourth of all asylum applicants were minors (Eurostat, 2017). Among Syrian refugees in particular, it is estimated that about 40% are under the age of 12 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015).

While the initial concerns regarding resettlement involved finding temporary shelter, medicine, food, and clothing, the more recent challenges include locating

permanent housing, preparing adults for work, and securing stable schooling for children. Although the success of refugee families depends in large part on the parents' access to, and ability to find work to support themselves financially, the children represent a critical group whose social integration is vital inasmuch as they represent the next generation of citizens in the host country. When relocating to a new culture, children from refugee families face multiple challenges (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). Their formal education is either disrupted or lacking (especially among girls; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015); they have no, or very limited, proficiency in the official language of the host country; and they are likely to encounter violence and bullying (e.g., Montgomery & Foldspang, 2008). Given the traumatizing experiences associated with leaving their home country, refugee youth also frequently have emotional needs (e.g., anxiety) that need to be met (Fazel, 2015; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). The goal of this paper is to discuss the ways in which schools can meet the emotional needs of refugee youth and help them socially integrate.

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There are multiple ways to meet the social-emotional needs of refugee youth to feel safe at school and be accepted by their peers. Instead of reviewing clinical interventions, we provide here an alternative perspective by shedding light on the ways in which the student composition – at the level of schools and classrooms – facilitate some of the most critical needs of refugee youth: feeling safe and socially connected. We propose that the magnitude of the personal and social challenges facing refugee youth partly depends on where and how they are placed in communities and schools. Guided in part by contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1988), the effects of school- and classroom-level segregation on prejudice and cross-groups friendships are reviewed. Moreover, we draw on our own research conducted in the United States on ethnically diverse schools that sheds light on environmental conditions that help students feel safe. We also discuss how social identity development can be facilitated in ways that fosters cross-group ties and reduce outgroup prejudice. Although much of the empirical evidence presented is based on research on ethnic groups in the United States rather than specifically on refugee youth, we believe that some basic mechanisms regarding the conditions that promote positive intergroup relations and interpersonal relationships across different demographic groups are applicable. Before discussing school and classroom characteristics, we first briefly review some of the mental health needs of refugee youth.

### Social-Emotional Needs of Refugee Youth

Refugee youth represent an especially vulnerable population (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Having escaped war or persecution, they are at a high risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological problems (e.g., Fazel & Stein, 2002; Fazel, 2015; Feijen, 2008). One survey conducted by the United Nations found that 70% of African migrants arriving in Europe by boat were trafficked or exploited in the process of being transported (International Organization of Migration, 2016). Although over 80% of refugee youth travelled with their parents, some of them (mostly boys) are unaccompanied minors (Eurostat, 2017).

After reaching a host country, anxieties are likely to remain high for multiple reasons. For example, concerns about securing asylum, as well as being able to establish a permanent residence, remain. For children and youth, “settling down” and socially integrating into schools is challenging. Lack of familiarity with a new host country’s primary language may keep refugee youth separated from their same-age peers in European schools and may further contribute to their feelings of isolation. Moreover, refugee youth are likely to face societal prejudice (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008) and discrimination that typically manifests as exclusionary behavior and bullying in school (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Montgomery & Foldspang, 2008). Although some of these challenges are temporary and may diminish over time, successful social

integration into schools, and thereby into the society, remains challenging.

Schools play a critical function in helping to meet the social-emotional needs of refugee youth. Research examining the experiences of refugee youth has revealed that a sense of school safety and connection with same-age peers are both especially critical. For example, feeling safe at school protects against depression (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007) and anxiety (Sujoldzic Peternel, Kulenovic, & Terzic, 2006) among refugee youth. Perceived school safety is also associated with lower levels of PTSD symptoms (Geltman, Grant-Knight, & Mehta, 2005). In addition, schools provide youth with extended and regular contact with same-age peers that can foster a sense of connection and acceptance. Emotional adjustment of youth depends in part on how accepted they feel by their peers in school (Fazel, 2015). In interviews with refugee adolescents in the UK, most of them specifically describe their longing for acceptance by their peers and the society around them (Fazel, 2015). Among those who were able to identify a key moment where their emotional well-being improved, all described events in which their new peers had embraced them in friendship. These narratives highlight the importance of social approval as an essential aspect of social-emotional adjustment and social integration. Peer acceptance also helps refugee youth feel they belong in school, and sense of school belonging is generally associated with stronger academic performance (Osterman, 2000). Thus, refugee youth are in a better position to do well as adults in their new home country when they are able to socially integrate in school with peers.

In the following sections, we discuss how the student body (i.e., ethnic) composition of schools and classrooms is related to some of the social-emotional needs of safety and connectedness. We start with the most established evidence on the effects of school segregation on prejudice.

### Segregation and Prejudice

The ethnic composition of the schools that refugee youth attend varies greatly across countries and communities. Some larger cities have entire neighborhoods of recent immigrants, where refugee youth may not only add to the overall ethnic and cultural diversity of the schools they attend, but also can join established communities of refugees and immigrants. Some of such schools do not serve any native-born ethnically European youth, while others might include a wide range of demographic groups, including more recent, and second-generation, immigrants as well as native-born, ethnically European students. In smaller communities, refugee youth are typically a visible numerical minority within schools with predominantly native-born ethnically European peers. In some schools, teachers may be accustomed to dealing with linguistic and cultural differences, just as fellow students are used to interacting with “different” peers. In contrast, in ethnically homogeneous schools, neither teachers nor schoolmates may have had much extended contact with anyone from other countries. Thus, the overall

diversity of the school, as well as teachers' and peers' exposure and familiarity with cultural differences, are all likely to affect how quickly and comfortably refugee youth can socially integrate in schools.

Contact between groups is crucial for developing and maintaining positive intergroup relations (for a review, see: Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). When schools separate youth based on their race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status (SES), immigrant status, or refugee history, lack of interactions with dissimilar contribute to the development and maintenance of prejudice towards outgroup members (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). For example, research conducted in U.S. schools shows that in ethnically homogeneous schools, white students exhibit more negative biases and stereotypes toward ethnic minority peers than in ethnically mixed schools (McGlothlin & Killen, 2010; Rutland, Cameron, Bennett, & Ferrell, 2005). Also, ethnically white American children enrolled in racially homogeneous elementary schools judge interracial exclusion less negatively than do students in more ethnically heterogeneous schools (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2008; Killen, Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, 2010). These findings suggest that when refugee families in large European cities reside in segregated neighborhoods with little or no contact with native-born ethnically European peers, it may be difficult to reduce negative stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes between these two groups.

In light of heightening anti-immigrant sentiments, there may be a strong push, however, not to include refugee youth in some schools or in general education more broadly. Native-born ethnically European adults report fear and anxiety related to the recent influx of Middle Eastern and African refugees and immigrants. At this moment, religious intolerance of Muslims is particularly problematic (Wike et al., 2016). Prejudiced sentiments manifest, at times, in explicit school policies. For example, France has passed legislation banning "overt" displays of religious faith in school settings, including large crosses, yarmulkes, turbans, and headscarves (Killian, 2007). Such laws require that Muslim girls, who may wear a headscarf as a form of religious expression, need to remove such a covering in order to attend French public schools (Ware, 2014). Policies, like these, have been associated with school drop-out and/or expulsion from school, which may further isolate youth from their peers and reduce their educational and professional opportunities (Keaton, 2005). Policies that restrict religious expression in schools, such as bans on headscarves, may also lead Muslim refugee families to place their youth in Islamic schools (either by choice or due to potential safety concerns), further segregating these youth from their native-born ethnically European peers (Killian, 2007).

Even in ethnically or culturally diverse schools, prejudice toward outgroups may persist depending on how instruction is organized. One of the unique instructional challenges facing refugee youth is posed by their language needs. Limited proficiency in the official language of the host country may dictate some instructional practices that separate recent refugee youth from their same-age peers.

Restricted contact with their language proficient peers may then result in persistent stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes (Aboud & Sankar, 2007). This is even more likely when schools rely on instructional differentiation that separates students based on their past academic performance, presumed potential, or aspirations. Such differentiation may take place between schools or classes within a larger school. For example, some European countries separate youth after primary grades to vocational institutions vs. schools that prepare students for universities. Other countries rely on within-school academic tracking. Both types of practices (between- or within-school differentiation) frequently result in *de facto* segregation across demographic groups. For example, in U.S. elementary (Oakes, 1995) and high schools (Hamm, Brown, & Heck, 2005), African American and Latino students (two historically marginalized ethnic groups) are overrepresented in the lower track classes, while Asian and white students are overrepresented in the higher academic tracks. It is conceivable that refugees, much like any recent immigrants with limited school language proficiency, are placed in environments with lower academic expectations (Peshkin, 1991). Thus, separation from language proficient peers, combined with low academic expectations, may strengthen negative stereotypes especially when youth do not have any contact across groups.

Based on our research in California middle schools (serving 11- to 14-year-old youth), we find that the ways in which youth are placed in classrooms moderate the effects of the school ethnic composition on prejudice (Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2017). Although greater ethnic diversity (both at the school and classroom level) is related to lower ethnic outgroup prejudice, the effects of school diversity vary depending on how well the classroom composition reflects the school's diversity. When students attend classes that are less ethnically diverse than their school (implying racial segregation), the positive effects of diversity on race-related outcomes are undermined (Juvonen et al., 2017). That is, when students are placed in English, math, and science classes with lower diversity than expected based on the school ethnic composition, the school diversity is no longer related to more positive intergroup attitudes toward ethnic outgroups or perceptions of teacher's fair treatment across ethnic groups. In contrast, when students attend classes that reflect or exceed the overall school diversity, the positive effects of diversity are maximized (Juvonen et al., 2017). We assume that when classrooms are less diverse than the school itself, the inequalities across racial groups are highlighted. Thus, organizational and instructional practices that divide groups of students appear to send messages about inequality of groups in ways that do not help reduce prejudice even in diverse schools.

When or how might schools then help social integration of refugee youth? We now turn to analyzing how ethnically diverse educational environments can meet the social-emotional needs of refugee youth, by focusing specifically on sense of safety and close relationships with peers that help reduce prejudice.

### Ethnic Diversity and Sense of Safety

Based on the above analyses on segregation of groups and prejudice, it does not seem wise to separate refugee youth from their native-born ethnically European (or other more established immigrant) peers. But do diverse settings automatically result in better intergroup and interpersonal relations in ways that might help meet the needs of refugee youth? In his original theory, Allport (1954) identified conditions under which contact effects are optimal in reducing prejudice. Contact promotes better intergroup relations especially when the groups are equal. Equality can be inferred in various ways, and relative numerical representation provides one such estimate. In settings with multiple (ethnic or cultural) groups that are similar in size, representation (i.e., one manifestation of power) can be fairly equally distributed. In contrast, when there are large discrepancies among groups (e.g., 90% vs. 10%), contact alone may not help the numerical minority (e.g., refugee) youth socially integrate in their school, but increase their sense of vulnerability instead.

Indeed, in schools with one large or dominant ethnic or cultural group, the numerical minority youth often feel threatened and unsafe (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011; Plenty & Jonsson, 2016). For example, Plenty and Jonsson (2016) found that recent immigrant teens in Sweden were particularly likely to be excluded in classrooms where their representation was low. Presuming that numerical representation helps capture a balance of power, in our research in California middle schools, we examined whether greater diversity is related to students' perceptions of school safety, experiences of peer victimization, and loneliness. The diversity (i.e., heterogeneity) of a setting was assessed by taking into account the number of different ethnic groups and their relative representation (e.g., Moody, 2001; Simpson, 1949). Consistent with the balance of power hypothesis, we found that greater diversity (reflecting more groups with relatively similar size) – at the school and classroom level – is associated with greater sense of safety, as well as lower rates of peer victimization and loneliness (Juvonen et al., 2017; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006). These findings suggest that refugee youth might feel safest and least vulnerable in educational settings that include various ethnic and cultural groups in similar numbers.

What might then help account for greater sense of safety and greater connectedness in more ethnically diverse schools? One possible mechanism has to do with close relationships – specifically cross-group friendships. According to Pettigrew (2008), cross-group friendships are one of the most powerful ways to reduce prejudice. Indeed, friendships encompass most of Allport's (1954) optimal conditions for contact. Friendships not only provide extended contact, but friends also consider one another as equals (Laursen & Hartup, 2002) and regularly cooperate when they make plans and do things together. Although the formation and maintenance of cross-group friendships is not easy because individuals typically prefer same-ethnic peers as friends (Aboud & Sankar, 2007; Fortuin, van Geel,

Zibera, & Vedder, 2014; Kao & Joyner, 2004), cross-group ties are related with lower outgroup prejudice (for a review, see: Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). In our research in California middle schools, we also find that cross-ethnic friendships mediate the effects of school-level diversity on perceived sense of safety and connectedness (Graham, Munniksma, & Juvonen, 2014). In other words, a greater number of cross-group ties helps account for the school-level findings, possibly capturing sense of equality and better balance of power across ethnic groups. These findings suggest that by forming close ties with native-born ethnically European youth in school, refugee youth are likely to feel safer and more connected.

Although the likelihood of cross-ethnic friendships increases based on availability of outgroup members in a school, the association between availability and cross-group relationships is not linear. Examining cross-ethnic friendships in U.S. high schools, research shows that the rate of cross-ethnic friendships depends in part on the degree to which the schools' extracurricular activities are integrated (Kao & Joyner, 2004; Moody, 2001). For example, Moody (2001) finds that students are most likely to have cross-ethnic friendships in secondary schools where extracurricular activities reflect the diversity of the school. Availability of "different" others with common interests might be particularly effective when the activity requires cooperation and common goals (e.g., team sports, choir). When extracurricular activities take place outside of school, like in many European countries, the cross-group friendship formation and social integration of immigrant and refugee groups may then depend on the communities and their ability to recruit youth from multiple ethnic and cultural groups to play soccer, sing, or dance together. Schools may nevertheless play a critical role even in community activities, inasmuch as refugee youth might be reluctant to join groups if they have little classroom contact or no school friends from other groups.

In sum, while diverse school and classroom contexts may enable refugee youth to form cross-group friendships that help reduce prejudice and facilitate their sense of safety, voluntary after-school activities and hobbies also play a critical role. By definition, engagement in such activities is voluntary and common interests provide a strong bond between youth with different backgrounds. That is, differences in ethnicity or religion are likely to fade away when youth play music together, and language is likely to pose fewer obstacles when adolescents run down the field to score a goal. Focusing on the social activities and groups that youth identify with, we now turn to examination of how refugee youth may come to develop social identities that help their integration into a new school and culture.

### Development of Multiple Social Identities

The benefits of immigrant and refugee youth identifying with their ethnic roots vs. with their new host country are heavily debated. It is presumed that social integration is possible only when youth identify

with their new host country (e.g., regard themselves as German or Norwegian). The positions regarding the role of identification with one's home country are more divided. An important distinction for researchers to consider is that between *integration* (i.e., inclusion in society) and *assimilation* (i.e., abandoning one's cultural practices to blend in to broader society). Many politicians in the position to shape social policies believe that strong identification as Syrian or Iraqi among refugees does not facilitate societal harmony between groups, arguing in favor of an assimilation approach. In contrast, scholars who study cultural processes maintain that it is important for immigrant and refugee youth to maintain their ethnic roots and identify with the culture of their country of origin.

We offer an alternative perspective on the political debates about identity formation by describing social identity development as a complex process entailing not one (dominant) identity, but multiple social identities. Relying on the construct of social identity complexity (Brewer, Gonsalkorale, & van Dommelen, 2012; Roccas & Brewer, 2002), we study the ways in which youth align themselves with multiple social groups. Starting in early adolescence, youth describe themselves increasingly based on their interest and hobbies (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran, & Foddy, 2011). When a teen is asked to describe who she is, a number of possible identities likely surface. For example, a refugee youth might describe herself as Syrian and German, as well as an artist. Another youth may describe himself as a soccer player and a Moroccan Muslim.

The development of multiple social identities, as opposed to one, is critical inasmuch as failure to fit in or succeed to meet the expectation of one identity can be buffered by having another source of validation and support (e.g., Linville, 1987). That is, when youth do not meet the expectations of one social group, such as an artist, they can maintain their self-worth by identifying artistic as a "good student" or "good friend." As such, social identities are more dynamic than static and likely vary in their salience across time and settings (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2017).

Central to the social identity complexity is the overlap among the groups with which one identifies. Rather than assuming that greater overlap is beneficial, less overlap is better in facilitating positive interactions with various outgroups. For example, when youth identify with multiple social groups that are separate, their perceptions of in- vs. out-groups may blur. On the soccer field the Moroccan-born youth is likely to strongly identify with his soccer teammates who maybe primarily ethnically Dutch and Turkish. In another situation, he may see only other Moroccan immigrants as his in-group. Less perceived overlap among multiple social identities is particularly helpful in promoting greater acceptance of ethnic outgroups. That is, lower social identity overlap (capturing greater complexity) is related to lower ethnic prejudice among youth (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2013; 2014) as well as among adults (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

What are the ways in which greater identity complexity can then be facilitated? As mentioned earlier, opportunities to foster interests and hobbies play an increasingly

important role in social identity development in adolescence (Tanti et al., 2011). Schools may offer elective classes (music or drama), co-curricular activities (student government), or encourage youth to get involved in their community organizations for sports, visual arts, or other activities. If such opportunities exist in communities with diverse student populations, youth are likely to belong to groups with varied membership. In California, we find that greater exposure to cross-ethnic peers in school is associated with decreases in the perceived overlap between one's ethnicity and other social groups over time (Knifsend, Bell, & Juvonen, 2017). Moreover, the ethnic diversity of the school predicts decreased overlap (i.e., greater complexity) of social identities and more cross-group friendships, which in turn are related lower ethnic prejudice (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2017).

Taken together, research on social identity development and social identity complexity highlights the importance for schools to provide opportunities for refugee youth to develop multiple identities and strengthen their identification with multiple social groups. Although identity development is not an issue that policy makers and educators consider when finding school placements for refugee youth, this topic is clearly relevant to social integration.

### Future Directions

The current analyses focused on the student composition of schools, classrooms, activities and hobbies in ways that reduce prejudice, and promote a sense of safety and school connectedness among refugee youth. Although we provided some examples of ways that might help refugee youth integrate into their new home country, many questions remain for future research. For example, it is vital that research on second (or third) language acquisition provides more insights into when and how segregated language learning environments may interfere with, as opposed to facilitate, the communication and learning of refugee youth. Little is also known about whether school discipline may disproportionately target refugees, much like they target ethnic minority youth. This topic is critical to consider inasmuch unfair disciplinary practices alienate youth from school and society and may fuel anger and resentment. Finally, it is essential to understand the social integration of refugees not only vis-à-vis native-born ethnically European youth, but also in the context of multicultural societies with different generations of immigrants.

### Language Learning Environments

The existing literature examining new language acquisition, although extensive, has focused little on the potential unique characteristics and circumstances surrounding refugee experiences (McBrien, 2005). While research summarized above suggests that segregating youth in classrooms based on language ability can have social and emotional costs. However it remains important that refugee youth are provided with opportunities to develop language skills of the dominant language of their new home countries. This is key also for academic and potential

professional success. Language skills develop more rapidly when refugee youth are in extended contact and friends with peers fluent in their respective host countries' primary languages. As such, researchers are left with the important question, what is the ideal period of time (if any) that refugee youth be separated from their peers to receive language instruction at school? Are there certain very basic language skills that are a prerequisite for refugee children's successful inclusion into regular education? Or should they be immersed into regular classes as soon as possible? Future research should seek to address these unknowns to optimize refugee student learning and social integration.

The effectiveness of certain practices may also vary depending on the student composition of a school. Examining the effects of separate English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in the U.S. for Mexican-origin linguistic minority (i.e., Spanish-speaking) youth, Callahan, Wilkinson, and Muller (2008) find that separate ESL instruction is beneficial only among second-generation youth in schools in which they are numerically well-represented. It is possible that greater representation protects against feeling marginalized. Other studies also highlight the importance of school context in shaping the effectiveness of segregated language instruction; immigrant youth in schools with low immigrant representation show poorer academic performance when segregated into language learner classes, whereas those in schools with a high representation of fellow immigrant youth show higher academic performance (Callahan, Wilkinson, Muller, & Frisco, 2008). It is possible that immigrant youth "hunker down" when their representation is low and suffer from the lack of language practice with their native-speaker peers, thus negatively affecting their academic performance. Clearly, additional research is needed to understand the boundary conditions of when segregated language instruction is helpful rather than harmful for social integration and academic success.

### **Fairness in School Discipline**

When refugee and other migrant youth are not able to successfully socially integrate into their new culture, they may become alienated. Feelings of alienation – and anger – may stem in part from the ways in which institutions treat them unfairly. In the U.S. context, racial and ethnic minority youth (African American, Latino, and indigenous children in particular) are often subjected to harsh and disproportionately high rates of punishment at school for violating school rules, and this disparity is related to perceptions of discrimination and feelings of alienation. It is theorized that the disparate use of punishment in American schools along racial and ethnic lines contribute to what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline," in which children as young as preschoolers are given unfair punishments at school, which in turn leads to higher rates of involvement in the juvenile justice system and incarceration as youth mature (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). While this pattern is well-established in the U.S. (e.g., Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2012; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005), less is known

about how school discipline practices for refugee youth in European countries may mirror those disparities observed in the U.S. Although researchers have yet to systematically examine school punishment practices based on refugee status in the European social context, it is reasonable to expect disparities across native-born ethnically European and refugee (and other recent immigrant) groups. Lacking parent support and advocacy on their behalf at school, unaccompanied (mostly male) minors may constitute an especially high-risk group. Thus, research on disciplinary practices and identification of school-based factors that promote fair and equitable treatment of refugee youth is needed.

### **Experiences of Refugees in Multicultural Context**

Emerging work on the experiences of recent refugees in Europe remains largely descriptive in nature. While qualitative and descriptive research are imperative to understand the unique lived experiences of refugees in European nations, less is known about the complex intergroup dynamics between refugee youth and their non-refugee immigrant, native-born ethnically European, and native-born non-ethnically European peers both in and outside of schools (see Plenty & Jonsson, 2016). When refugee children in Europe are interacting with and developing friendships with peers in their new home countries, they are often bridging across language, religious, cultural, and ethnic barriers. Much of the traditional social psychological research examining intergroup contact and close relationships relies on two groups that may have different racial or ethnic backgrounds but similar language use and religion (e.g., U.S.-born black and white Americans). As such, intergroup relations between refugee youth and their peers may be particularly complicated, and intersections of language, culture, and religion likely play a prominent role in shaping their interactions. Furthermore, refugee youth come from a wide variety of different ethnic, SES, and cultural backgrounds. As such, they are not a monolithic group, and research examining the experiences of refugee youth should seek to reflect this nuance. Future research would benefit from exploring how refugee youth from different home countries relate to one another and may or may not choose to self-identify with "refugee" as a their superordinate identity.

### **Conclusions**

Feeling safe at school is a fundamental psychological need for social and emotional adjustment, social integration, and academic success. When refugee youth are concerned about their physical or emotional safety, they are likely to withdraw and not learn. That is, fearful and anxious students may not even come to school or try to actively participate in class if they are preoccupied with worries about being ridiculed, excluded, or physically hurt. Therefore, it is important to know what types of schools can decrease students' sense of social vulnerability. To feel connected in school, youth also need to be accepted by their classmates and have friends. Students with greater

sense of belonging typically do better academically. Finally, a successful psychological integration depends also on the ways in which refugee youth identify with their schools and communities and are able to form and maintain cross-group friendships. Identification with multiple social groups in school is another critical step toward feeling part of the new school community and the culture of the host country.

The present review identifies social and developmental research that may be relevant to understanding factors that promote the social well-being, societal integration, and resilience of refugee youth in European nations. It is clear that further research is needed on how to best facilitate positive youth development and social integration among refugee youth in various European countries. At this time of many unknowns, however, it is imperative that policy makers and educators can make informed decisions guided by relevant findings that shed light on conditions under which youth from various ethnic groups feel safe at school and how cross-group friendships that can help reduce prejudice can be facilitated. There are, of course, limitations and caveats to making generalizations based on research that is not specifically focused on refugee youth or research that is largely conducted in the U.S. For example, while our research suggests that diverse schools – when available – may provide an ideal context for refugee youth to socially integrate, this is not to say that they would not also flourish in a community or school in which they are few in number and the only “other” group. When refugee families are placed in geographic regions of Europe with little ethnic diversity, this provides an opportunity for important cross-group contact that is necessary to reduce prejudice. In such communities, refugee and native-born ethnically European youth (as well as other groups) connect and get to learn about similar interests, like and dislikes in ways that may supersede differences in ethnicity, religion, or cultural traditions. In sum, much remains to be learned yet about all of the different conditions that help refugee youth to integrate and become well-adjusted and productive citizens of their new home countries.

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