This study examines whether and to what extent perceived threat mediates the relationship between expectations towards the Roma acculturation and anti-Roma attitudes. A model was tested using structural equation modeling. The sample consisted of 687 Serbian adolescents (mean age 17), of which 53% were females. In a survey-based study, we assessed participants’ acculturation expectations, their feelings toward the Roma, and their perception of economic and symbolic threat. The results provide support for the expected interrelationships between the constructs: the endorsement of integrative acculturation expectations was negatively associated with perceived threat and Romaphobia, whereas the preferences for assimilation, segregation, or marginalization were associated with more perceived threat, and more Romaphobia. Moreover, the relationships between acculturation expectations and Romaphobia were partially (in case of integration and marginalization) and fully (in case of assimilation and segregation) mediated by perceived threat. The implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords
Romaphobia, acculturation expectation, perceived threat, Serbian adolescents
Introduction

This study deals with anti-Roma prejudice in Serbia. Empirical research points to the widespread social exclusion of long-established Roma communities in their home countries, one of which is Serbia (Guy, 2001, Prieto-Flores, 2009; Sigona, 2005). Notwithstanding their uninterrupted presence in Serbia for almost seven centuries, the Roma are not considered part of the host society, and are subjected to negative prejudice, discrimination, low standards of living, and residential segregation (Antic, 2005; Jaksic, 2002). Being a low status group, this minority lacks the social means, like school careers, access to news media and bank loans, to participate and integrate into mainstream society (Postma, 1996). Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that status change, i.e. upward mobility of individual Roma does not reflect on the position of Roma as a group (Prieto-Flores, 2009). On the contrary, individual status change (due to educational attainment or entrepreneurship) typically goes hand in hand with assimilation into the dominant society and breaking the ties with the Roma culture (Barany, 2001; Koulish, 2005).

Past research has shown that the power advantages enable dominant group members to impose acculturation strategies on the members of subordinate groups, supposedly to protect the mainstream or majority host culture and the wellbeing of its members (cf. Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Schmidt, 2009). Stephan and Stephan (1996) demonstrated that perceived cultural discrepancies and status differences between the groups lead to the perception of subordinate group members as persons who threaten national material (i.e. realistic threat) and immaterial resources (i.e. symbolic threat). Past research has shown that perceived threat is an important predictor of outgroup prejudice (Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006, for a review). Moreover, it was found that people who were less accepting of minorities’ acculturation entailing a preference for maintaining the minorities’ heritage culture, or social participation in the dominant culture also perceived more intergroup threat (e.g., Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obrdzalek, 2000; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). In contrast, people who endorsed integrationist attitudes towards outgroups and multiculturalism were found less threatened and less prejudiced towards culturally distinct minorities (Gonzalez, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). The current study investigated if perceived threat mediates the relationships between
expectations toward the Roma acculturation and anti-Roma attitudes among Serbian adolescents.

**Acculturation expectations**

Acculturation refers to intercultural interactions and mutual influences between dominant and subordinate groups (Berry, 1999, 2003). Berry’s model of acculturation (Berry, 2003) proposes the relative preference for maintenance of the own ethnic culture and the relative preference for relationships with other groups, as the main criteria for a group’s socio-cultural adaptation. Hence, four distinct acculturation attitudes or behavioral strategies are distinguished, i.e. integration (yes to both cultural maintenance and interethnic contact), assimilation (yes to interethnic contact, no to cultural maintenance), segregation or separation (yes to cultural maintenance, no to intercultural contact) and marginalization or exclusion (no to both cultural maintenance and intercultural contact).

Much of the past research dealt with the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of minority (mostly immigrant) groups. It was found that not only one’s ingroup identity and desire for intergroup contact account for intergroup processes, but also the willingness of the receiving society to welcome and accept the newcomers. In particular, discrimination and negative prejudice were found to be related with the acculturation of subordinate groups (e.g. Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003).

Moreover, past research indicated that by virtue of power advantages, the dominant group members may have relative control over acculturation of minorities (Bourhis et al., 2009). According to interactive acculturation models (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, et al., 2002), status differences between the subordinate and dominant group may result in different, even conflicting expectations regarding the acculturation processes (Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006). The members of subordinate groups are typically interested in cultural maintenance, and often favor integration which grants them space for both contact with nationals and maintenance of their own heritage culture (Bourhis et al., 2009; Jasinskaja-Lahti, et al., 2003; Zick, Wagner, Dick, & Petzel, 2001). In contrast, the members of national groups may be concerned with the prospects of sharing national resources with subordinate groups; hence their acculturation expectations may reflect a desire to reject a ‘foreign’ culture and /or to limit intercultural relationships with “devalued”
subordinate groups (Florack, Piontkowski, Rohmann, Balzer & Perzig, 2003; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2004; Piontkowski, et al., 2000).

Recent surveys show that nine out of ten Roma seek to work with dominant group members and over 90% of the Roma want their children to befriend children of the majority (United Nations Development Program, 2003). It was found that the majority of the Roma seek to “integrate but not assimilate”, i.e. to actively participate in their society, while maintaining their heritage culture and ethnic affiliations (Jaksic, 2002). According to the interactive acculturation model (Bourhis, et al., 2009) the intergroup processes should be harmonious when both host and subordinate group members show a clear preference for integration (Bourhis, et al., 2009; Piontkowski, et al., 2002). Although the present study did not explicitly deal with this mutuality in acculturation preferences between Roma and the Serbian nationals, we assume, on the ground of the earlier research, that for part of the subjects participating in the study the aforementioned mutuality is their reality. We hold that for these nationals their integration preference is accompanied by low levels of perceived threat and by generally positive emotions toward the Roma minority. By contrast, we expect nationals who endorse assimilation, segregation or exclusion to be characterized by higher levels of perceived threat and Romaphobia (Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis, et al., 2009; Wimmer, 2004).

Perceived threat

Threat theorists argue that perceived threat may be the key to understanding negative out-group attitudes (Bobo, 1999; Sherif, 1966; Stephan & Stephan, 1996, 2000). Perceived threat reflects the belief that intergroup relationships have detrimental outcomes for ingroup members (Stephan, Boniecki, Ybarra, Ervin, & Jackson, 2002; Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). The present study focuses on the apperception of personally experienced economic and symbolic threat. Perceived economic threat concerns inter-group competition for scarce resources such as jobs and housing (Sheriff, 1966). Symbolic threat is about the worldviews of a group, which is assumingly threatened by out-group members with distinct morals, norms, and values (Sears, 1988).

Cross cultural research suggests that different types of threat play a different role in different inter-group settings, depending on previous inter-group relationships, the socio-economic context, and the particular out-group that is dealt with (cf. Riek,
Mania & Gaertner, 2006). This is why we will first present here an abridged version of the history of the relationship between the Roma and the Serbian majority. In former Yugoslavia (1943-1992), the integration of Roma into the mainstream society was actively promoted within the state-governed policy of multiculturalism (Frazer, 1992). This meant that there was room for the preservation of the language and culture of the Roma, but also that there were efforts toward equal access to education, housing, health care, and employment possibilities (Barany, 2001). Different from other communist countries, Yugoslav Roma had the right to set up their own social and cultural organizations, unsupervised by the state (Barany, 2001; Crowe, 1994). The Roma integration was nevertheless only partially successful; the socio-economic discrepancy between the Roma and non-Roma remained, particularly in the area of education and standard of living (Latham, 1999). This trend and its consequences became more rigorous during the economic and political crises of the post-Communist era, when the living conditions of the Roma further deteriorated, while negative attitudes and discrimination against the minority increased (Antic, 2005). Particularly the current economic crisis gave impetus to the growth of feelings of economic threat in Serbian nationals vis a vis the Roma. In short, the salience of economic threat may be attributed to the factors which associate the Roma group with poverty and a distribution of social benefits. For this reason, it is reasonable to expect that one’s wish to keep the Roma in segregated position may primarily be inspired by a fear that including them in all kinds of social participation and granting them equal rights will simply costs more than it will bring returns.

Symbolic threat may be a manifestation of general intolerance towards ethnic, racial, and religious diversity in the post-war society (Ivekovic, 2002). Some authors argue that the political transition from a one-party system to political pluralism induced ethnic nationalism as a device to preserve superior group status in the face of socio-political changes (Pesic, 1996; Ramet, 2006). It may also be related to the desire for cultural homogenization and fears of Roma not accommodating this desire. This longing for cultural homogeneity and social cohesion may have been triggered or reinforced by the arrival of high numbers of Roma refugees from Kosovo in 1999. Most of these new-comers were Muslims, in contrast to the majority of the national population which is predominantly Christian (European Roma Rights Centre, 1999). The contrast was sharpened by the fact that most newcomers were unable to obtain
valid residence permits and forced to live in temporary, often isolated settlements (Humanitarian Law Centre, 2003).

In addition to this account of recent history past research suggests that the Roma disadvantageous socio-economic status for ages has been attributed to the Roma culture, which is seen as a foundation of values and customs which encourage laziness and irresponsibility (Petrova, 2003). This suggests that the perception of Roma as an economic liability may be, at least partially, related to the perceived cultural discrepancies between the Roma and mainstream population.

The present study
In this study we explore the relationship between acculturation attitudes or expectations and Romaphobia. We analyze whether and to what extent this is a direct relationship or a relationship mediated by two types of threats, i.e. economic and symbolic.

The hypotheses that are tested are formulated as follows:

1. Romaphobia is positively related to assimilation, segregation, and marginalization, and negatively to integrative orientations.

2. Perceived economic and symbolic threat will mediate the relationship between acculturation and Romaphobia.

The current study contributes to the knowledge in the field because it applies theories on acculturation and intergroup threat in an intercultural context, which has not been the focus of extensive research before. It proposes acculturation expectations as antecedent of economic and symbolic threat; and investigates whether or not different types of threat mediate the effects of acculturation expectations on outgroup attitudes among Serbian adolescents.

We cannot beforehand exclude the possibility that the direction of the relationships between the variables is different. It could be that the endorsement of integration is fueled by an absence of threat and generally positive emotions toward the outgroup (Florack, Piontkowski, Rohmann, Balzer & Perzig, 2003). To be as conclusive as possible about the direction of relationships we will also test the alternative models.
Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 687 Serbian adolescents (aged 16-18; 53.3% female). Subjects were drawn from second, third, and fourth grades of secondary vocational schools (46.3%), and grammar schools (53.4%). Sixty-two percent of grammar students, and 42.3% of vocational students were females. The mean age of the whole sample was 16.96 (SD = .69), and was similar among the school types (grammar: $M = 17; SD= .66$; vocational: $M= 16.86; SD= .71$). Adolescents’ socio-economic status (SES) was assessed using two levels of father’s education: secondary education or less and higher education In the grammar sample, 54.8 percent of the fathers were highly educated (university degree and higher), whereas in the vocational school sample, the majority of fathers’ highest level of education was secondary school (66.2%).

Procedure

Prior to the data collection, we contacted twenty, randomly chosen grammar schools and vocational schools from four cities. In Serbia, vocational schools provide students with sufficient skills and knowledge to enter the labor market soon after the completion of secondary education, whereas the grammar schools’ academic curriculum prepares the student for university. Four schools, two grammar schools and two vocational schools, promptly showed interest in participating in the survey, and were surveyed first. Thereafter we assured access to six schools thanks to recommendations from the schools which already participated in the study. The directors of the participating schools had the authority to act in loco parentis to give permission for the students to take part. Data were collected anonymously, in the classrooms, during regular school hours, and supervised by the researcher (or research assistant) and a teacher. The students were asked to participate in a study on “adolescents’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and the plural society.” All students participated voluntarily, gave their consent prior to their inclusion in the study and no one refused to participate. The questionnaires were in Serbian and it took the students about 45 minutes to complete them.
Measures

The first part of the questionnaire ascertained students’ age, ethnicity, gender, school type, education and socio-economic background of the parents.

Romaphobia was measured with a 6-item scale, based on Stephan and colleagues (1996, 2000). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent the words approval, acceptance, admiration (all reverse-scored), antipathy, disdain, and disrespect reflected their feelings towards the Roma. Responses ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). A principal component analysis with varimax rotation (henceforth PCA) revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 52% variance. Cronbach’s alpha amounted to .81.

The two threat scales were based on instruments used in previous studies on perceived out-group threat (Stephan et al., 2002). Economic Threat was measured with a 11-item scale (sample items: “Too much money is spent on Roma educational programs”; “Public services favor the Roma”). The five-point response scale ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 50% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

Symbolic threat was measured with a 12-item scale (sample items: “Roma and non-Roma have different family values”; “Roma have different work attitudes than non-Roma”). The items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 37% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

The four scales on acculturation expectations were adopted from Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006). They all were 4-item scales, reflecting Berry’s bi-dimensional model of acculturation. The five-point response scale ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree).

Integration items were: “I want the Roma to keep their own culture, but also to adopt ours”; “I want the Roma to be fluent in their own and our (Serbian) language”; “I want the Roma to take part in social activities which involve both Roma and non-Roma”; and “I want the Roma to be friends with both Roma and non-Roma”. A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 60% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .75.

Assimilation items were: “I want the Roma to adopt Serbian culture and not to keep their own”; “I want the Roma to take part in social activities which do not
involving the Roma”; “I want the Roma to be more fluent in Serbian than in their own language”; and “I want the Roma to be friends with non-Roma”. A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 53% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .70.

Segregation items were: “I want the Roma to keep their own and not to adopt the Serbian culture”; “I want the Roma to be more fluent in their own than in Serbian language”; “I want the Roma to take part in social activities, which involve Roma members only”; and “I want the Roma to be friends only with the Roma”. A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 50% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .67.

Marginalization or exclusionism items: “I neither want Roma to keep their own nor to adopt our cultural traditions”; “I do not want Roma to know their own nor Serbian language”; and “I do not want Roma to participate in our own nor in their social activities”. A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 63% variance. Cronbach’s alpha was .80.

Analyses of Data

An initial check of the data revealed that eight respondents failed to complete one or more scales. As this is approximately one percent of all the respondents, listwise deletion was used for scales that were not answered. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the main study variables. In general, integration was preferred by Serbian adolescents, but there were also high scores on separation and marginalization.

The first hypothesis is that Romaphobia is positively related to assimilation, segregation, and marginalization, and negatively to integrative orientations. We will test this hypothesis using bivariate Pearson’s correlations.

The second hypothesis is that perceived economic and symbolic threat will mediate the relationship between acculturation and Romaphobia. We will test this using path analyses. As was suggested in the introduction, other models might also explain the relations between perceived threat and acculturation. In order to conclude that the relations between the variables are best described by a mediated model, a mediated model should fit the data better than other models. We will compare the fit of a mediated model to the fit of an unmediated model, and to the fit of a model in which threat explains which acculturation profile is preferred (Florack, et al. 2003). Using path analysis, different models can be tested to analyze the interrelationships between
correlations. Goodness of fit measures are used to describe how well a particular model fits a given pattern of correlations. Using these goodness of fit measures, it can also be analyzed which model fits the data best. Regression weights are computed, so that the significance of modeled interrelations can be analyzed (Byrne, 2006). The path analyses were carried out with the EQS software package (Bentler, 1995).

Results

Hypothesis 1: Romaphobia is positively related to assimilation, segregation, and marginalization, and negatively to integrative orientations

The correlations (Table 1) between the main study variables were significant, and in the expected direction, except for Romaphobia and assimilation (which were not correlated). As predicted, Romaphobia was negatively related to integration and positively to segregation and marginalization.

Hypotheses 2: the relation between acculturation and Romaphobia is mediated by threat.

The first model that was tested was a fully mediated model. This means that this model presents the assumption that acculturation variables were only related to Romaphobia through symbolic and economic threat. This model did not fit the data \( \chi^2 (2) = 32.328, p = .000, \text{RMSEA} = .10, \text{GFI} = .987 \).

Table 1 indicates that integration and marginalization are strongly correlated with Romaphobia; hence, we decided to fit a partial mediation model. Next to the relations between the acculturation variables and Romaphobia that are mediated by threat, integration and marginalization were also modeled to be directly related to Romaphobia. This model is depicted in Figure 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Economic threat</th>
<th>Symbolic threat</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Assimilation</th>
<th>Segregation</th>
<th>Marginalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romaphobia</td>
<td>2.07(.91)</td>
<td>.452**</td>
<td>.398**</td>
<td>-.270**</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.221**</td>
<td>.300**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic threat</td>
<td>1.96(.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.540**</td>
<td>-.145*</td>
<td>.242**</td>
<td>.270**</td>
<td>.327**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic threat</td>
<td>2.96(.86)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.234*</td>
<td>.121**</td>
<td>.444**</td>
<td>.431**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>3.28(.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.096*</td>
<td>-.196**</td>
<td>-.326**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>2.31(.80)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.306**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>3.20(90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.518**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>2.57 (92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01.
Figure 1 A graphical representation of the fitted model.

Table 2
Results of the path analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dependent variable</th>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Unstandardized weights</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized weights</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic T.</td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.087*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.198*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.171*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.151*</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic threat</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.425*</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic T.</td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-.073*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-.028</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.236*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.155*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romaphobia</td>
<td>Economic threat</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.318*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic threat</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.167*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>-.169</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.157*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant regression weights are marked with an ‘*’
Overall, the partial mediation model had a very good fit $[\chi^2 (2) = 3.019, p = .221, \text{RMSEA} = .03, \text{GFI} = .999]$, which supports our hypotheses that the acculturation preferences of majority members are related to Romaphobia, and that these relations are mediated by economic and symbolic threat. However, the model also suggests that direct relations between acculturation preferences and Romaphobia, and mediated relations alone are not enough to describe the processes. The results of the path analysis are summarized in Table 2.

To compare whether the mediated model would fit the data better than a model without mediation, we fitted a model that was changed so that there were no relations between acculturation attitudes and threat. Instead, we added direct relations between all the acculturation attitudes and Romaphobia. For the rest, the model was the same as the model presented in Figure 1. This unmediated model did not fit the data $[\chi^2 (7) = 242.968, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .223, \text{GFI} = .918]$. This indicates that the model in Figure 1 provides a better description of the data than an unmediated model.

The last model we tested modeled a process in which perceived threat and Romaphobia are related to acculturation preferences. Contrary to the previous models, in this model threat and Romaphobia predicted acculturation preferences. Economic threat, symbolic threat and Romaphobia were modeled to be interrelated, and both types of threat and Romaphobia were related to all four acculturation preferences. The analysis indicated that this model did not fit the data $[\chi^2 (4) = 215.889, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .251, \text{GFI} = .917]$. Thus, the only model that fitted the given pattern of correlations was a partial mediation model. As such it can be concluded that a partial mediation model provided a better description of the data than the other three models.

Discussion

Acculturation expectations and Romaphobia

The results of this study revealed that most adolescents showed clear preferences for integration, i.e. the expectation that Roma maintain their own culture and at the same time establish and maintain good contacts with the national group. Still, a considerable group of adolescents reported a preference for segregation and marginalization or the expectation that the Roma will not attempt to establish or maintain good relationships with the Serbian national group. The least favored acculturation strategy was assimilation, anticipating restriction upon the cultural
maintenance for the sake of equal social, including socio-economic participation of Roma in the mainstream society.

Past research suggests that a divergence between acculturation expectations among the dominant group members reflect a socio-political context in which inter-group relationships take shape (Abu-Rayya & White, in press; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2004). In Serbia, the acculturation processes are clearly challenged by economic instability; and ideological confrontations (for instance, between ethnic nationalism and multiculturalism) (Todosijevic, 2008). The massive support towards Roma integration found amongst the adolescents who participated in the current study may be a reflection of a recent public debate about the Roma inclusion into Serbian society (Antic, 2005), but also a promising indication of a shift towards multiculturalism in post-conflict Serbia. However, the still considerable support for segregation and marginalization suggests that many adolescents do not accept social participation of Roma on an equal basis. Given the unfavorable economic circumstances in the country, people may be unwilling to share (or compete for) scarce resources, such as jobs and housing, with out-group members. Perhaps we should conclude that the wish to preserve a dominant social status in face of economic instability overshadowed youth’s desire to reduce the salience of intercultural differences (via assimilation of minorities).

As expected, Romaphobia was negatively related to integration, and positively to segregation and marginalization. However, contrary to our expectations, assimilation was not related to Romaphobia. The possible explanation may be that assimilation expectations reflect a desire for minimization of the intercultural distinctiveness and related symbolic threat. Koulish (2005) argued that assimilated Roma are not considered a part of Roma community, but rather the members of the mainstream community.

Mediation analyses

The results yield support the mediation hypotheses. Integration (as extreme acceptance), and marginalization (as extreme rejection) were both directly, and indirectly (via perceived economic and symbolic threat) related to Romaphobia. Integration was associated with less perceived threat, which lead to less Romaphobia, whereas marginalization implied more perceived threat and more Romaphobia.
At a more general level, these findings correspond to earlier studies showing that one’s integrationist views may reflect a multicultural ideology (Berry et al, 2006; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2004) which not only expresses a personal wish for peaceful coexistence, but also entails notions and values regulating evaluations of intergroup relationships. The combination of the direct and the indirect relationship between integration and Romaphobia shows that there is more than the possible absence or presence of threat that fuels perceived Romaphobia or the suppression thereof. A comparable line of reasoning can be used for marginalization, which was found akin to enduring cognitive vulnerability, and neuroticism, which have direct negative implications to the self (i.e. low self esteem), and to others (e.g. xenophobia)(Garety, Kuipers, Fowler, Freeman & Bebbington, 2001; Hofstede & MsCrae, 2004). In addition, marginalization expectations or the wish that members of other groups are in a sense completely inactive and invisible in terms of maintaining positive relationships with their cultural environment, will most likely be accompanied by fear that this wish is not realized. Again not just expectations about other groups are basic to prejudice, but a personality structure that is akin to neuroticism and xenophobia.

The relationships between ambivalent acculturation attitudes, i.e. assimilation and segregation on the one hand, and Romaphobia – on the other, were fully mediated by perceived threat. Assimilation was associated to economic threat, which in turn led to Romaphobia, whereas the relationship between segregation and Romaphobia was mediated by both economic and symbolic threat. Like in previous research, one’s desire to limit either cultural, or socio-economic integration of out-group members, seems to reflect the anticipation of negative outcomes of inter-group relationships (Zick, et al., 2001). Given the unfavorable economic conditions in Serbia, one may primarily perceive the Roma as potential contributors to the country’s economic welfare (Frederickson, 1999; Zick, et al., 2001). One’s wish for assimilation of Roma may therefore overlap with one’s concern that assimilated Roma will not comply, hence a strong relationship between assimilation attitudes and economic threat. One’s desire to segregate the Roma may overlap with feelings that Roma threaten national values, but also with anticipation that disproportional social benefits would be spent on the Roma.

*The role of perceived threat*
The findings supported our assumption that acculturation expectations held by dominant group members have causal influence on perceived intergroup threat, which in turn lead to negative feelings towards the Roma.

In Serbia, the salience of economic threat may certainly be attributed to the economic crises (Jaksic, 2002), but also to the unfavorable social status of the Roma, whereas the symbolic threat may be seen in the context of perceived worldview differences. Moreover, the strong relationships between economic and symbolic threat may be related to the transparent status differences (i.e. disproportional high poverty or unemployment rate among the Roma population), typically attributed to a unfavorably perceived Roma culture, i.e. promoting work-shyness, laziness, and irresponsibility (Petrova, 2003).

Implications and limitations

The scientific insight into acculturation attitudes can shed light on psychological and socio-cultural mechanism that are basic to inter-group relationships (Piontkowski, et al., 2002). Our findings show that for a better understanding of the processes involved in the development of Romaphobia amongst Serbian adolescents, it is important to consider the expectations toward the Roma acculturation, and perceived threat. Consistent to earlier studies (Bourhis, et al., 2009), our findings demonstrated that integrationists’ orientations had positive implication for the outgroup attitudes; whereas the endorsement of assimilation, segregation, and marginalization had negative implication for the outgroup attitudes.

The major finding of the present study is that the perceived economic and symbolic threat mediate relationships between acculturation expectations and Romaphobia, depending on the relative degree of culture and/or contact uneasiness associated to the intercultural interactions. This explanation suggests implications for both policy makers and education. Policy makers’ efforts to improve the social participation of Roma most certainly deserve prolonged attention. However, there is a clear need to provide supportive social contexts for positive intergroup relationships (Antic, 2005). One such context is the school (Wagner & Zick, 2006). At present the Serbian school curricula offer just modest possibilities for multicultural interventions within the recently introduced civic education, but a systematic approach is lacking (Aleksov, 2004). The ethnocentric acculturation attitudes and feeling of outgroup threat among Serbian youth certainly pose a great challenge to the national educational
system (Weinstein, Warshauer-Freedman & Hughson, 2007). Multicultural interventions (Wolsko, Park, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2000) might help to mitigate the possible negative consequences of acculturation expectations that do not grant Roma space for either contacts with nationals or the maintenance of their own culture.

The current study has some limitations. First, the correlational design does not allow for causal interpretations. Although our model was a directional model in which acculturation was suggested to precede Romaphobia and threat was positioned as the mechanism of influence, and we compared the fit to a model with the direction reversed, this study actually does present no evidence about the suggested causality. We would need a longitudinal or experimental design to find such evidence. Another shortcoming is related to the use of self-reports. They are vulnerable to social desirability bias and strongly depend on the understanding of textual cues (Hofmann, Gawranski, Gschwendner, Le & Schmitt, 2005). The first problem can be better dealt with by using implicit attitude measures (Fazio & Olson, 2003) whereas the second would benefit from using direct observations and measures of behaviors instead of appreciations.

References


