Birds of a feather ... Selection and socialization processes in youths' social networks

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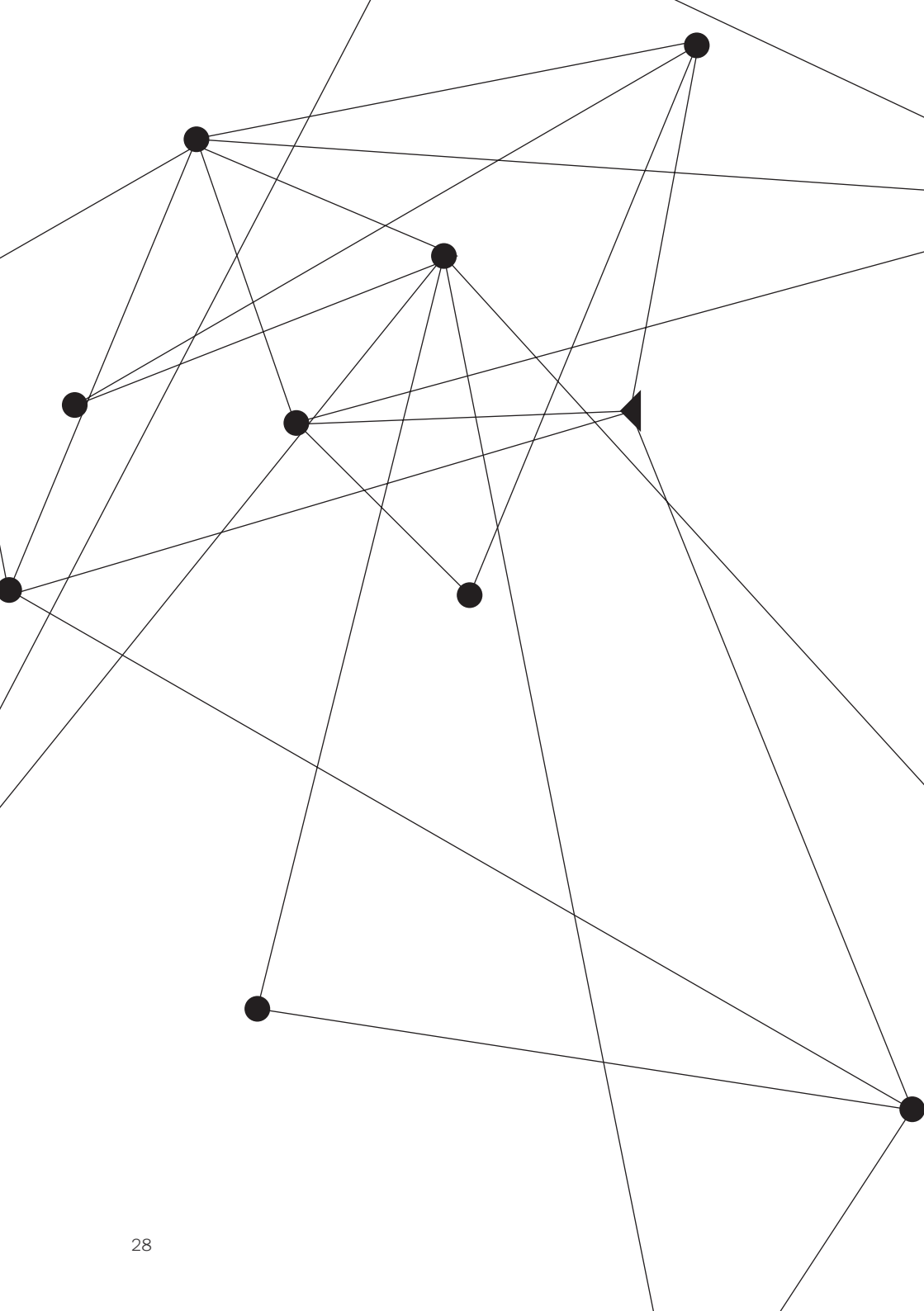

CHAPTER 2

Ethnic preferences in friendships and casual contacts between majority and minority children in the Netherlands

Abstract

Children bond with other children that are similar to them with regard to many aspects, one of which is ethnic background. In this study, we use network analysis to test whether this is equally true for two different qualities of relations; friendship and common social interaction. Participants were 296 6th grade elementary school children from 14 multi-ethnic schools in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, like in many other countries, schools have the task to make sure that children develop positive social relationships with all children, irrespective their ethnic and cultural background. We found that children form both friendships and social interaction networks with others that have a similar ethnic background while controlling for structural network effects, sex effects and effects of sociometric status. For schools it is important that this was found for both types of interaction networks, because schools have more means to impact on casual relationships than on friendship relationships.

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1 Introduction

Children's peer relationships determine whether they are cared for, esteemed and valued by peers, and whether they are part of a network of communications and mutual obligations between peers. Peer relationships serve as a source of social and emotional support, and as a context for learning and practicing social, cognitive and language skills (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Goza & Ryabov, 2009; Ryan, 2000; Wentzel, 1999). In the Netherlands, where this study was conducted, as in many other western countries, schools explicitly have the task to stimulate students' development of positive relationships with other children and adults. Because the Netherlands is a culturally diverse community this also means that students are supposed to be prepared for collaboration with children and adults with cultural and ethnic backgrounds that may differ from their own; now and in the future. In this way schools contribute to social participation of all citizens and towards a socially cohesive society (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Because schools and other educational institutions are traditionally viewed as major arenas for intergroup contact and acculturation, they are perceived to be of great importance for attaining the desired goal of creating 'multicultural societies' (Vedder, Horenzyk, & Liebkind, 2006). Masson and Verkuyten (1993) even suggested that in the Netherlands the classroom is the primary and major medium, and perhaps an ideal one to bring students from different ethnic groups in continuous first hand as well as prolonged contact with each other. And indeed, in a recent study (Van Geel & Vedder, 2011) we found that in classrooms that harbor more cultural diversity, students are more likely to come into incidental contact with students who have a different ethnic background and have a more favorable attitude towards the cultural diversity they experience, than classes that provide less firsthand experience with cultural diversity.

In a review published at the end of the last century, Vedder and Veugelers (1999) concluded that schools in the Netherlands performed rather well in terms of achieving the goals in the social and multicultural domain. However, since the turn of the century much has changed in terms of the multicultural

climate in the Netherlands. Ethnic segregation between neighborhoods, and between and within schools has increased (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2005). Voicing negative feelings about interethnic relationships has become more common and national policy has changed from one favoring cultural diversity and integration with attention for maintaining ethnic and cultural heterogeneity to one requiring immigrant assimilation to what is called a 'common core' of Judeo-Christian values and western/Dutch habits (Entzinger, 2006; Leeman, 2008; Maussen & Bogers, 2010). As a consequence interethnic friendships between students may have become more difficult and casual interethnic contacts more rare.

With regard to ethnicity many studies have shown that, in general, students choose friends that have a similar ethnic background or race (e.g. Kupersmidt, DeRosier, & Patterson, 1995; Moody, 2001). Some studies have shown that ethnic homogeneity in friendships is less prominent in minority group students when compared to majority (native Dutch or European-American) students' friendships (Hamm, 2000; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). It has been argued, however, that this higher proportion of interethnic friendships is linked to the fewer opportunities that minority group students have to interact with students of their own ethnic background, because their numbers in society, schools and classes are relatively low. From the perspective of their ethnic background there are relatively more others, thus resulting in a relatively high proportion of interethnic friendships (Baerveldt, Zijlstra, De Wolf, Van Rossem, & Van Duijn, 2007). Indeed, when studies corrected for the opportunity to interact with students from various backgrounds, the proportion of interethnic friendships of minority group students became similar to the proportion of interethnic friendships of native students (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Baerveldt, Van Duijn, Vermeij, & Van Hemert, 2004). With or without this correction, it seems that both minority (immigrant) students (Kao & Vaquera, 2006; Titzmann, Silbereisen, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2007) and majority (native) students (Kao & Joyner, 2004) show a preference for intra-ethnic friendships. These results seem to be generalizable to the Netherlands, as Baerveldt and colleagues (2007) found that both majority and minority

members in the Netherlands tended to prefer contacts within their own ethnic group. These findings particularly refer to friendships whereas contacts may also refer to more casual forms of contact. Casual contacts may be less intimate and less exclusive than friendships, but they may also be more frequent and may hold the potential of exploring new relationships; important qualities for stimulating and improving interethnic contacts.

Friendships are an important motive to stay involved in activities and in the setting or organizational context that provides the opportunities for being involved in these activities, e.g., a school. If students do not have an opportunity to build and maintain friendships, or even worse, if they experience being ridiculed, excluded or discriminated against, they may choose to quit school (Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013). Schools have means to support positive relationship building and to avoid exclusionary practices, albeit limited. The means they have should be used and optimized. Two of these means are signaling experiences of isolation or exclusion, and changing the organizational and normative climate in schools allowing students the exploration of new relationships and establishing and maintaining friendships (Brown, 2013). As we shall argue, organizing structured opportunities for casual contacts is a way to go.

The Current Study

This study will primarily address the signaling task by focusing on ethnic homophily of peer relationships. The tendency for ethnic homophily in the Netherlands has been demonstrated for friendship (Baerveldt et al., 2007) and more casual forms of contact (Vermeij, Van Duijn, & Baerveldt, 2009). In the current study we study both intercultural friendship and casual interethnic contacts between school children in the Netherlands and will try to replicate these earlier findings. The systematic replication of research is particularly important in the social sciences (Bakker, Van Dijk, & Wicherts, 2012; LeBel & Peters, 2011). In addition, however, the current study analyzes whether students' preferences for ethnic homophily are equally strong for friendships as for casual contacts. Friendships may withstand such social developments

as depicted in the preceding section, because they are to a large extent inspired or driven by a joint interest in engagement in particular activities (Brown, 2013), but casual contacts may not. Whereas intercultural friendship contacts primarily depend on a strong motivation to establish a rewarding contact with someone who is liked or even loved and who can join in activities that are of mutual interest, casual contacts crossing ethnic borders seem to depend more on non-personally controlled access or opportunities for avoidance. Schools, teachers and classmates, all can influence such contacts through measures that push students to collaborate, e.g., through implementing strategies for collaborative learning and mutual interdependence between students, or by facilitating opportunities for avoidance. The latter is realized by accommodating or even stimulating ethnic segregation in school, e.g., through group specific lessons (ethnic language lessons or separate religion lessons for Muslim and Christian children) and differentiation strategies along ethnic lines (Fredricks, Hackett, & Bregman, 2010; Moody, 2001). Moreover, age seems to have an influence. Aboud and colleagues (2003) reported that while primary school children had more same- than cross-race *companions* (casual contacts), only adolescents had more same- than cross-race *friends*.

Given the depicted social developments in Dutch society and the findings on the role of students' age (Aboud et al., 2003), we hypothesize to find in our primary school students a stronger ethnic homophily preference for casual contacts than for friendship relations.

Students' peer relationship choices depend on peers' ethnic background and opportunities for contacts with students who have a similar ethnic background, as pointed out earlier. However, children also have other qualities that make them more or less attractive candidates for establishing and maintaining contacts. In this respect children's sociometric status is of particular importance. Based on the work of Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) we distinguish sociometrically popular (or 'accepted') from rejected children. Rejected children tend to be emotionally and cognitively at risk, whereas the sociometrically popular children are generally resourceful and well adapted

(c.f., Inderbitzen, Walters, & Bukowski, 1997; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993). In addition, children's sociometric status appears to be related to their school adjustment and academic achievement (Tuma & Hallinan, 1979; Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Apart from popular children being more attractive as friends and for casual contacts and having a rejected status being indicative of more problematic relationships, an additional reason for taking sociometric status into account is that earlier research (Kupersmidt et al., 1995) yielded the insight that children who are sociometrically similar have a greater chance of being friends. Moreover, children of minority ethnic background may have a greater chance of receiving lower sociometric scores (Coie et al., 1982; Rican, 1996). Hence, controlling for sociometric status is important to make sure that those friendship choices and casual contacts are not attributed to similarity in ethnic background, when children's social preferences actually are the result of their sociometric status. In our study we furthermore control for sex, and structural network effects.

2 Method

Participants

Data was collected in fourteen elementary schools in the western urbanized part of the Netherlands. In each school, one of the 6th grade classrooms was randomly selected for the study. In total 296 pupils took part in the study. These pupils were approximately 11.4 years of age (*SD* = 0.63) and 52% were girls. The participants were asked in which country their parents were born. Ethnic background was determined by the country of birth of both parents: 32% of the children were of Dutch ethnic origin, 12% Turkish, 8% Moroccan, 8% Surinamese and 6% were of Antillean or Aruban (the Dutch Caribbean) origin, and 16% of the pupils had other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Columbian, Russian, Lebanese, former Yugoslavians, etc.). Eighteen percent had a mixed ethnic background, e.g., Dutch-Moroccan. Due to the variegated group distribution and the relatively low numbers of students in each immigrant

group, we could not conduct analyses for each group. Alternatively we decided to contrast Dutch national students and all immigrant students. Of the 296 pupils, 30 had some missing values. Due to data-requirements of the models that were used these 30 children were disregarded.

We could not collect information about individual students' SES. Instead we collected information about the income and social security position of all families living in the neighborhoods in which the participating schools are located. In the Netherlands children commonly visit a primary school in their own neighborhood. Families on average had a yearly income of 25.375 euros (*SD* = 5.132 euros) and 12.4% had social security as their sole source of income. This indicates that most children came from low SES backgrounds, which reflects the generally low SES backgrounds of families living in neighborhoods with high proportions of immigrants in the Netherlands.

Measures

Sociometric status. Each child was given a list with all the names of his or her classmates, and was asked to indicate for each child how much they liked this child. This was done on a 7-point likert rating scale, which went from "least liked" via "neutral" to "most liked". These ratings were then processed with the program SSRAT (Maassen, Van der Linden, Goossens, & Bokhorst, 2000) to determine children's status as sociometrically popular and rejected.

Friendship networks. The children were asked to name up to three classmates that were their friends. The friendship nominations were entered into matrices that represent the friendship networks, whereby a 'zero' indicates no tie between children and a 'one' indicates a unilateral friendship nomination.

Social interaction networks. Each child had to describe which classmates frequently interact with one another. The children were asked "who hangs out with whom", given a sheet with circles drawn on it, and were encouraged to enter all the names of classmates in one circle, if they formed a 'group'. Also, it was emphasized that children could be member of several groups at the

same time, that boys and girls could interact, that the child should not forget to include its own groups and that not all circles had to be used. This resulted in a 'social map' of the classroom, based on frequency of interaction, drawn by each participating child. All of these social maps were then combined, using the program NETWORKS 4.0, into one combined social map. NETWORKS uses a method of testing conditional and unconditional chances of being named in a specific network, given the total amount of networks in the classroom and total amount of networks in which a particular child is named (Kindermann, 1996). The combined social map shows all the networks that are present in the classroom. This map reflects the general or average opinion about the social structure in the class and is referred to here as the social interaction network. Sadly, the social interaction networks (who hangs out with whom) of five schools could not be analyzed because too many students reported that all students hang out with all other students; they presented the class as one clique. Thus for the friendship data all schools were included in the analyses, and for the social network data nine schools were included in the analyses.

Procedure

After their parents gave consent, the children were asked to complete a questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered by research assistants during a regular day in the classroom, while the teacher of the class (homeroom teacher) was present. Students were assured that their responses would be treated anonymously, and that participation was voluntary. The research assistants were students of Education and Child Studies who received a short training preparing them for the administration of the questionnaire. All questionnaires were completed within 30 to 45 minutes.

Method of Analysis

We used a two-step analysis: first we analyzed all school(classe)s using friendship and social interaction as dependent variables and with ethnic background as main explanatory variable. For sake of clarity, we further use the term 'schools' to refer to the analyses of the one class that we sampled in this school. This means that for each school, we conducted an analysis using

friendship data, resulting in 14 models for friendship data, and an analysis using social interaction data, resulting in nine models for social interaction networks. The analyses per school were done by running Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGM) using the program SIENA 3.11a (Snijders, Steglich, Schweinberger, & Huisman, 2007).

After conducting the analyses for each individual school the outcomes were used in a meta-analytic procedure that was first employed and described by Snijders and Baerveldt (2003) and is implemented in the program Siena08 (Snijders, 2007). We present the results of this analysis in this paper.[1] One meta-analysis was used to combine the outcomes for all fourteen analyses on friendship models, and one meta-analysis was used to combine the nine social interaction network models. Using this method, parameter estimates and variances obtained for the individual schools are tested to see whether there is a main effect across the schools and whether this effect is significantly different between schools. The analyses on friendship were controlled for reciprocity, which reflects the extent to which children reciprocate received friendship nominations; because children strongly tend to reciprocate friendship nominations, the reciprocity effect must almost always be included in ERGMs (Ripley, Snijders, & Preciado, 2011). Both the analyses on friendship and interaction networks were controlled for alternating k-stars, alternating k-triangles and alternating independent two-paths (all reflecting transitivity or tendencies to nominate friends of friends), and for the tendency to select same-sex peers. Furthermore, in the friendship analyses we controlled for the alter effects of the 'rejected' and 'popular' sociometric status of children: the degree to which rejected or popular children tend to be nominated by others.

1 Reporting all individual models for each school would take up much space and is not very informative for most readers. However, anybody interested in the seperate models can contact the first author to receive these models.

3 Results

Descriptive Statistics

The basic characteristics of each school and network are described in Table 1. We can see that there is a large variation between the different schools as regards most of the variables; e.g., size of the classes ranges from 15 to 30, number of different ethnic backgrounds in the class ranges from four to eleven, and in seven classes, the largest ethnic group was a non-Dutch group.

Friendship Networks

The results of the meta-analyses with friendship networks as dependent variable are presented in Table 2. All network analyses were controlled for reciprocity effects (children are more likely to form a friendship with another child if this friendship is reciprocated) and network transitivity (if your friend is friends with someone, you tend to also form a friendship with this person). Moreover, we controlled for the sex similarity effect and alter effects of a popular or rejected status (alter effects concern the number of nominations an individual receives). All control variables were significant, indicating that the control variables were indeed related to friendship selection. Controlling for these variables we found a significant ethnic similarity effect, which means we found support for the ethnic similarity hypothesis. This indicates that children tend to form friendships with other children that are similar to them with regard to ethnic background. To increase comparability with the analyses on social interaction networks, for which we could only use nine schools, the analyses for the friendship networks were also conducted with only nine schools that were included in the analyses for the social interaction networks; this did not change the statistical significance of any of the results. Most notably, ethnic similarity had a similar value with the nine schools (M = .37, SE = .11, p < . 001) as with the 14 schools (M = .30, SE = .09, p < .001).

Social Interaction Networks

In Table 3, we present the results of the meta-analyses of the nine schools for which the models using social interaction networks converged. Again,

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all network analyses in this meta-analysis were controlled for transitivity effects, sex similarity and effects of a popular or rejected status. The different transitivity variables and sex similarity effects were significant, indicating preferences for interaction with same sex partners and indirect relations. Contrary to the friendship networks, in social interaction networks we did not find any evidence for the effect of sociometric status (either popular or rejected) on the ties. Nevertheless, as with the friendship networks, we found support for the similarity attraction hypothesis. Similar ethnic background is a selection criterion when choosing interaction partners. Even without testing it is clear that the strength of this effect is comparable for social interaction networks (M = .35) and friendship networks (M = .37).

Table 1. Descriptive information about analyzed schools

school	*n*	% missing values	Average degree friends[a]	Transitivity friends[a]	Average degree[b] SIN	Transitivity[b] SIN	Similarity in ethnic background[c]	# of ethnic groups[d]	Largest ethnic group[d]	% students of this group[d]
1*	21	4.76	2.350	0.284	3.800	0.745	0.379	10	Moroccan	40.0
2	17	23.53	2.308	0.436	4.462	0.769	0.590	5	Moroccan	53.8
3*	25	8.00	2.652	0.393	5.913	0.677	0.237	11	Turkish	26.1
4	15	13.33	2.769	0.694	3.077	0.688	0.256	7	Turkish	30.8
5	30	20.00	2.375	0.400	4.583	0.682	0.333	9	Antillean/Moroccan	29.2 (each)
6*	27	3.70	2.962	0.489	5.692	0.830	0.526	9	Dutch	50.0
7	21	4.76	2.750	0.379	5.300	0.690	1.268	4	Dutch	85.0
8	21	0.00	2.762	0.585	4.095	0.962	0.338	8	Dutch	28.6
9	23	0.00	2.696	0.478	3.913	0.860	0.466	6	Dutch	47.8
10*	15	13.33	2.769	0.527	2.615	0.750	0.513	6	Turkish	46.2
11	22	18.18	2.111	0.606	2.111	0.636	0.614	6	Turkish	50.0
12*	21	4.76	2.600	0.439	5.900	0.825	0.863	7	Dutch	60.0
13	22	22.73	1.765	0.543	2.118	0.875	0.831	5	Dutch	70.6
14	19	5.26	2.222	0.333	8.222	0.930	0.327	9	Dutch	27.8

[a] Friendship Network
[b] Social Interaction Network
[c] Ranging from 0 (no similarity) to 2 (total similarity)
[d] Based on mother's ethnic background
* schools excluded in analyses on social interaction networks

Table 2. Results of the meta-analysis of the friendship networks (N=9)

	Parameter test		**Variance test**		
	mean	*Se*	*SD*	χ^2	*df*
Reciprocity	2.47[a]	0.37	0.55	9.88	8
Alternating k-stars	-0.34	0.24	0.0	8.28	8
alternating k-triangles	0.72[a]	0.08	0.22	14.57	8
Alternating independent two-paths	-0.32 [b]	0.12	0.0	3.82	8
same sex[1]	0.85 [a]	0.24	0.35	2.48	3
Sociometric Status 'Popular' alter effect	0.72 [a]	0.14	0.0	7.11	8
Sociometric Status 'Rejected' alter effect	-0.71 [c]	0.28	0.0	10.60	8
Similar ethnic background (centered)	0.37 [a]	0.11	0.0	5.47	8

The statistical significance for mean effect is approximated by calculating a *t*-ratio of the estimate divided by its standard error and then using the standard normal distribution. [a] $p<0.001$, [b] $p<0.01$, [c] $p\leq0.05$.

[1] These results are based on four schools. In the remaining five schools, the effect for sex similarity had to be fixed to a high positive value.

Table 3. Results of the meta-analysis of the social interaction networks (N=9)

	Parameter test		Variance test		
	mean	*Se*	*SD*	χ^2	*df*
Alternating k-stars	-1.68 [a]	0.51	1.71	38.40 a	8
alternating k-triangles	2.05 [a]	0.27	0.59	17.05 a	8
same sex[1]	1.80	1.08	2.01	10.79 c	3
Sociometric Status 'Popular'	0.14	0.15	0.00	3.21	8
Sociometric Status 'Rejected'	0.03	0.20	0.00	3.92	8
Similar ethnic background (centered) [2]	0.35 [a]	0.10	0.09	7.87	8

The statistical significance for mean effect is approximated by calculating a t-ratio of the estimate divided by its standard error and then using the standard normal distribution. [a] $p<0.001$, [b] $p<0.01$, [c] $p<0.05$. The statistical significance of the χ^2 tests is calculated using the χ^2 distribution.

[1] All results are based on only four schools. In the remaining five schools the parameter was fixed to a high positive value due to no cross-sex ties.

[2] The results for the Snijders and Baerveldt's method do not include one school due to large standard error.

4 Discussion

The current study was conducted to analyze whether children demonstrate more ethnic homophily in friendship selection than in more casual contacts. We controlled the analyses for sociometric status and structural network effects. We found a strong ethnic similarity effect in both friendship and social interaction networks, indicating that children form friendships and engage in social interactions with children that are similar to them with respect to ethnic background. These results show that the similarity-attraction hypothesis is valid for both friendships and social interactions of primary school children with regard to ethnic background. Our results are in line with previous studies on ethnic homophily in friendship networks (Baerveldt et al., 2007; Kupersmidt et al., 1995; Moody, 2001), and ethnic homophily in more casual interaction networks (Aboud & Snakar, 2007; Vermeij et al., 2009). However, we did not find support for the hypothesis that selection effects would be stronger for casual interaction networks than for friendship networks, as the parameter estimates were almost similar. This suggests that ethnicity is as important in choosing friends as it is in choosing interaction partners. This result indicates that ethnicity functions somewhat as a 'dividing line' as children are not only using it to select friends, but are also reluctant to interact with classmates with a different ethnic background.

Earlier we wrote that casual contacts are likely more susceptible to school and teacher regulation than friendship relations. From the perspective of schools' responsibility to stimulate healthy social relationships and to contribute to social cohesion in communities and the society as a whole, the combination of the notion that casual relationships can be regulated and the finding that students are relatively heavy biased in favor of interactions with peers that are culturally similar, leads to a major educational challenge: create healthy and pleasant culturally diverse school communities. It should be noted that there were substantial differences between schools in terms of the strength of the ethnic homophily effect. Though overall children tend to interact with peers who are similar in terms of ethnicity, this tendency is stronger in some

schools than in others. The differences between schools entail additional research challenges: What causes the differences? Do school policies and their implementation play a role? And do schools' differentiation strategies and the use of particular instructional approaches, e.g., collaborative learning, make a difference? Perhaps school policies can be developed to reduce ethnocentrism among students.

Limitations

In the method section we clarified that the social interaction network data of five schools were not included in the analyses, because too many students indicated that each and every student in the class hang out with each and every other student in the class. Statistics need variance and hence these data could not be analyzed. However, sometimes a lack of variance can have substantive relevance. It could be that all these children in those schools genuinely and enthusiastically interact with all classmates irrespective their ethnic background. It could also be that the lack of variance is linked to children's eagerness to provide social desirable answers, because their school and more particularly their teachers succeed in creating a strong normative climate when it comes to exclusion, prejudice and interethnic relations. We cannot discern these different reasons. Future research might address this by collecting information on schools' normative climate and how it is established and maintained.

Another limitation is that we could only compare national students to a group of immigrant students with a broad variety of cultural backgrounds. We found strong in-group preferences in both subsamples, but could not further specify our analyses exploring whether within the group of immigrant students there was even more specificity in in-group bias, for instance in the group of students with a Moroccan or Turkish background. The subsamples of these specific groups were simply too small. Future studies should address the specificity of in-group preferences. Last but not least, we worked with students living in low SES neighborhoods. We could, however, not collect data on individual students' SES background and hence could not control

for the role of SES. Future studies should control for differences in SES between students.

Conclusion

To date, it is policy in the Netherlands and in many other western countries to try to have ethnically mixed classrooms, so that children can experience contact with many different cultures. It is hoped and supposed that this reduces ethnic stereotyping and racism. However, in many Western countries, including the USA and the Netherlands, it proves very difficult to ensure multi-ethnic classrooms (Vedder, Horenczyk, & Liebkind, 2006). Our study shows that even though we sampled culturally diverse schools with many different ethnic groups, children still prefer friendships and casual contacts with others of the same ethnic background. Our results suggest that if an educational goal is to make children experience interethnic contacts, just organizing mixed classrooms is not enough. Schools at least can try to better signal undesirable exclusionary practices in school. This paper shows that it is important to look both at friendship relationships and casual relationships. They are different but both characterized by an ethnic selection effect. Friendships are more centered on particular activities liked by co-participating peers. As stated by Brown (2013), friendships mostly serve positive, constructive goals, but they are exclusionary in that engagement with particular peers means that a youth is not involved at that same time with other peers. Casual contacts may be less focused, less committed, less centered around particular activities and interests. If they are characterized, however, by an ethnic preference or ethnic bias, while in a limited school bound space like a classroom or playground, this is likely to indicate active avoidance. When teachers signal this they should know that students need additional enticement and opportunities to establish and maintain intercultural contacts. Schools may help by providing such didactic instruments as the jigsaw method, in which students of different ethnicities are forced to work together on tasks. Such approaches have been found effective in reducing prejudice (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 2001). They may also try to change the normative climate (Brown, 2013), for instance, by avoiding the use of differentiation and selection

strategies that, although based on relevant criteria like academic performance, may result to be contaminated with ethnic bias in that cultural minority children get more excluded or separated than national children (Moody, 2001). They also can organize supervised curricular as well as extra-curricular activities and settings giving children space to explore new relationships, allowing children more initiative and autonomy than characteristic of most typical, formal learning settings (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013), but with a watchful eye on exclusionary practices based on ethnic preferences. Children need to experience classmates with different ethnic backgrounds as pleasant company. They don't necessarily need to be friends, but they need a positive reason for mutual contact.

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