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Child interethnic prejudice in the Netherlands: social learning from parents and picture books

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

One of society's biggest challenges today is racism. All over the world, Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020 have increased attention for the subject, and have stirred up discussions on how to improve interethnic relations and create an anti-racist society. One aspect of these questions focuses on how to include children in this process. Children can already perceptually differentiate between people with different ethnic backgrounds at 3 months old (Kelly et al., 2005; Kelly, Liu et al., 2007). Later on, they develop the ability to categorize people based on race or ethnicity (Pauker et al., 2017). More problematically, children also develop different attitudes towards various ethnic groups, resulting in interethnic prejudice (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Although the research field examining children's prejudice is growing rapidly, the bulk of research is conducted in the United States (U.S.), and the specific ethnic composition of the population, as well as cultural and historical differences, limit generalizability to other countries (Zick et al., 2008). In the Netherlands, interpersonal discrimination experiences are common among underrepresented ethnic groups and there is growing awareness of structural racism (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2020; Ghorashi, 2020). To effectively improve interethnic relations from a young age, research tailored to the Dutch context is highly needed. Some studies have examined youth interethnic attitudes in the Netherlands (e.g., Vedder et al., 2016; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001; Verkuyten, 2002; Verkuyten, 2007), but few have researched children in middle childhood, when prejudice against lower status outgroups is at its peak (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Theories on prejudice development and reduction in children that stem from social learning theory highlight the potential influence of various socialization agents, among which parents and media (Levy & Hughes, 2009). However, examinations of parental attitudes and ideologies as well as a thorough analysis of representation and messages regarding ethnic diversity in books that children in the Netherlands are exposed to, are lacking. The aim of this dissertation is to provide insight in interethnic prejudice of children in the Netherlands, and attitudes and ideologies that they are exposed to through two socialization agents (parents and children's books).

Development of Ethnic Prejudice

Definitions of ethnic prejudice vary. Some scholars describe ethnic prejudice as a relatively negative evaluation, meaning that it can be based on a positive ingroup or negative outgroup bias (Hewstone et al., 2002). Others describe ethnic prejudice as a negative evaluation of ethnic outgroup members, distinguishing it from ingroup favoritism (more positive evaluations of ethnic ingroup members, Nesdale, 2004). Ethnic groups can be based on common culture, origins and history, and are associated with race (Berreman, 1972; Brown & Langer, 2010). Although children's understanding of ethnicity seems to develop from a focus on physical, racial, characteristics (Quintana, 1994), 'ethnicity' rather than 'race' is preferred throughout this dissertation, as race has been argued to be an inappropriate term to describe humans (Keita et al., 2004), and is not commonly used in the European context (Berg et al., 2014). The term race, however, is very commonly used in international literature on prejudice in children and families. It will therefore be used in this dissertation when discussing previous literature using the term. In addition, in one chapter

(Chapter 2) the terms 'ethnic majority group' and 'ethnic minority group' are used. In response to reviewer feedback, the terms used in the other chapters written later are 'dominant ethnic group' and 'underrepresented ethnic group'.

Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT) proposes that ethnic prejudice is the fourth phase following (1) an undifferentiated phase, (2) an ethnic awareness phase, and (3) an ethnic preference phase (Nesdale, 2004). SIDT argues that not all children reach the phase of ethnic prejudice (Nesdale, 2017), making this a particularly interesting phase to examine in light of improving interethnic relations. The developmental pathway of prejudice depends on the status of the outgroup considered: children's interethnic prejudice towards lower status outgroups generally increases between early (2-4 years old) and middle childhood (5-7 years old), followed by a slight decrease towards late childhood (8-10 years old), whereas prejudice towards higher status outgroups does not change between early and middle childhood, yet increases towards late childhood (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). In this phase between middle and late childhood, however, most divergence in prejudice development is found (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), which suggests that children may be particularly sensitive to environmental factors or socialization agents in this phase. In the same period, children go through important developmental stages in terms of social perspective-taking skills (Selman & Byrne, 1974), better enabling them to grasp attitudes portrayed in their environment. At age six, most children are able to differentiate between their own and others' perspectives, while at age eight to ten they are increasingly able to understand these perspectives and relate them to their own perspective (Selman & Byrne, 1974). Therefore, it is highly relevant to examine interethnic prejudice in children and potential predictors in this developmental period. Interethnic prejudice can lead to discriminatory behaviors, which can have detrimental effects on individuals experiencing discrimination. For example, children experiencing discrimination are more likely to have poor mental and physical health outcomes (Paradies et al., 2015), and adolescents are more likely to disengage from school and engage in externalizing and risky behaviors (Benner et al., 2018).

Social Learning Theory

There are numerous approaches to explaining the development of interethnic prejudice, such as cognitive, social-cognitive developmental, and social learning approaches (Levy & Hughes, 2009). Although both social-contextual and cognitive factors are theorized to play a role in the development of prejudice, ideas about reducing prejudice stem primarily from research on social-contextual factors (Aboud et al., 2012), fitting the social learning approach. This branch of theoretical approaches specifically focuses on the role of others from whom children can learn (see Levy & Hughes, 2009). Two socialization agents that are frequently looked at in regard of preventing or reducing child prejudice are parents and media. Meta-analytic research shows a medium association between parent and child intergroup prejudice (Degner & Dalege, 2013), and interventions using forms of media can be effective in reducing children's prejudice (Aboud et al., 2012). Among the theories

that fit under the social learning branch are theories based on intergroup contact and diversity ideologies.

Intergroup Contact

Intergroup contact theory proposes that one social-contextual factor that has a prejudice-reducing effect is intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Whereas some longitudinal studies have found support for this association to be bidirectional (Binder et al., 2009; Levin et al., 2003), others only provide evidence for the contact effect on attitudes or report on mediation effects for this direction only (Brown et al., 2007; Vezzali, et al. 2010; Swart et al., 2011). Initially, it was argued that contact had to meet optimal conditions: (1) equal group status, (2) common goals, (3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) support of authorities, laws or custom. The negative association between intergroup contact and prejudice, however, has received meta-analytic support even when these criteria were not met, although these effects are stronger when they are met (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Positive contact effects are found in both dominant and underrepresented groups, but are stronger for higher status groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Bikmen, 2011). Also for children specifically, contact with members from other ethnic groups is related to more positive interethnic attitudes, and thus less prejudice (Tropp & Prenovost, 2008). Presumably, children learn to develop more positive ideas about members from other ethnic groups by interacting with them. Two mediators in particular explain a large part of the association between intergroup contact and prejudice: intergroup contact reduces intergroup threat and anxiety and increases one's perspective-taking abilities and empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Both reduced anxiety and increased perspective taking in turn are related to reduced prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Young children, however, might be very dependent on their parents to facilitate social contact and relations, in line with the idea that intergroup relations are influenced by third parties (Kalmijn, 1998). Parents can have four different roles directly influencing and shaping peer relations: (1) designers, influencing the setting in which children can engage in social contact, (2) mediators, directly helping children engage in this social contact for example by arranging playdates, (3) supervisors, overseeing and regulating children's social relationships, and (4) advisors or consultants, assisting children with problems regarding social relationships (Ladd & Parke, 2021). In middle childhood, mothers most frequently act as mediators and supervisors (Cohen & Woody, 1991). Parental attitudes toward child interethnic relations, therefore, may have a big impact on the prejudice of their children, as parents may facilitate or restrict prejudice-reducing interethnic contact opportunities (unconsciously) based on these attitudes.

Taking the intergroup contact theory one step further is research on the effects of indirect forms of intergroup contact. For example, the extended contact hypothesis implies that learning about an ingroup member being in a close relationship with an outgroup member results in more positive intergroup attitudes and thus less prejudice (Wright et al., 1997). Similar to the intergroup contact theory, this

hypothesis has received meta-analytic support in the context of ethnic outgroups, independent of age (Zhou et al., 2019). In contrast to direct contact, extended contact has similar effects for dominant and underrepresented groups (Zhou et al., 2019). Apart from examples set by family members themselves (e.g., Turner et al., 2007), fictional examples of extended contact, such as in books, also relate to more positive child interethnic attitudes (e.g., Cameron et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2007; Cameron et al., 2011). In addition, vicarious contact refers to observing a positive interaction between an ingroup and outgroup member (Dovidio et al., 2011). Like extended contact, vicarious contact through books has been shown to improve intergroup attitudes and relations (Vezzali et al., 2012). Similar to direct contact effects, indirect contact effects on intergroup attitudes are partly explained by reduced anxiety and increased empathy (White et al., 2021). Additionally, social ingroup and outgroup norms play a role (White et al., 2021). A study among children (aged 6 to 11 years old) showed that extended contact results in improved interethnic relations because children perceive the norms of the outgroup about cross-ethnic friendships to be more positive (Cameron et al., 2011). Perceived ingroup norms about cross-ethnic friendships only play a role for older children (Cameron et al., 2011).

Another hypothesis based on indirect contact is the parasocial contact hypothesis (Schiappa et al., 2005). This hypothesis combines intergroup contact theory with media research and suggests that exposure to positive portrayals of outgroup members (irrespective of the presence of interactions with ingroup members), so-called parasocial contact, also has prejudice reducing effects (Schiappa et al., 2005). Often, indirect contact is seen as easier to establish than direct contact, and therefore viewed as a prejudice-reducing method of great potential. To establish extended, vicarious, or parasocial contact effects through media in general or books in particular, however, ethnically diverse characters need to be represented. Therefore, it is relevant to examine ethnic diversity in books that children are most likely exposed to. Previous research in other countries shows an underrepresentation of characters of color (e.g., Koss, 2015; Koss et al., 2017; Lee, 2017), suggesting that opportunities for indirect contact through books might also be limited in the Netherlands. Taken together, the intergroup contact theory and theories on indirect contact propose that children can learn from exposure to intergroup contact, be it directly or indirectly, and that parents as well as forms of media such as books can help facilitate such prejudice-reducing processes.

Diversity Ideologies

Various theories on prejudice development and reduction have developed from diversity ideologies. Two commonly distinguished diversity ideologies, referring to beliefs about how diversity and demographic differences in society should be approached, are colorblindness and multiculturalism (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Both have been used to theorize about the development of prejudice, and apply a social learning approach (Levy & Hughes, 2009). The colorblind ideology is based on the belief that prejudice stems from an emphasis on social categories and differences such as those based on ethnicity, and thus argues that not emphasizing ethnicity will

prevent bias (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). According to this ideology, deemphasizing ethnicity and thereby reducing prejudice can be done in different forms, such as shifting children's attention to similarities or individual differences, rather than focusing on information on social groups or categories (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). It is argued that there are two domains of the colorblind ideology, of which one is characterized by the denial of racial or ethnic differences, and the other by the denial of inequalities or discrimination based on race or ethnicity, and that this denial of racism is a form of racism in itself (Neville et al., 2013). In fact, Kendi (2019) describes how the term colorblind is related to terms such as 'not racist' and 'race neutral', which 'are bound to fail in identifying and eliminating racist power and policy' (pp. 189) and are 'a mask to hide racism' (pp.14). Throughout this dissertation, this ideology will be described as colorblind, as it has predominantly been done in other scholarly literature described in the chapters. Other scholars, however, also argue that this term does not cover the load and point towards alternatives such as color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017).

Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is based on the belief that ethnic differences do need to be taken into account and need to be valued, because prejudice stems from a lack of knowledge and appreciation about other ethnic or cultural groups (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Therefore, it is argued that learning about other groups and learning to respect and appreciate differences improves children's interethnic attitudes. Other definitions of multiculturalism furthermore refer to the endorsement of cultural diversity and maintaining different cultures within a society, as opposed to assimilation (Berry & Kalin, 1995).

A substantial amount of research has focused on the association between diversity ideologies, among which colorblindness and multiculturalism, and prejudice within individuals. Meta-analytic research has shown that although both ideologies relate to lower levels of prejudice, multiculturalism is more beneficial (Leslie et al., 2020; Whitley & Webster, 2019). Less is known, however, about the effects of these ideologies on prejudice of children. Parental ideologies might be conveyed to children through engagement in explicit discussions, and the extent to which emphasis is put on social categories such as ethnicity. For example, there is evidence that parent-child discussions about race have more positive effects on child interethnic relations than colorblind parenting (Perry et al., 2020; Perry, Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Some studies furthermore show that exposure to (aspects of) multicultural ideology at school has positive effects on children's interethnic attitudes (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). At the same time, parental ideologies might impact children in more implicit ways. For example, colorblindness is related to more negative nonverbal behaviors in interethnic interactions (Norton et al., 2006; Apfelbaum, Sommers et al., 2008), which children seem to pick up on (Castelli et al., 2008). Scholars however agree that more research on these ideologies and socialization practices in the context of parenting is needed (Perry, Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2020).

Apart from being exposed to parental attitudes and ideologies, children can be exposed to various ideologies through media, such as books. Ethnic diversity in its characters can help books reach their potential to serve as mirrors (providing opportunities to identify with characters), windows (providing opportunities to learn about other cultures and values), or glass sliding doors (taking windows one step further by actively engaging readers in the world created in the book; Bishop, 1990). However, whether books can function like this, and what messages are conveyed, is not only dependent on mere representation. Degrees of cultural specificity and authenticity presented (i.e., accurate cultural values and details, and the absence of stereotypes, Yoo-Lee et al., 2014), might impact the extent to which readers identify with characters, and the messages about cultures that readers perceive. Previously, scholars have identified colorblindness to prevail in children's literature, in the form of dismissal and neglect of ethnically specific experiences of people of color (Winograd, 2011). Exposure to colorblindness in this form, lacking cultural specificity and authenticity, might have similar effects as exposure to colorblind ideologies from parents or at school, as ideologies presented in books have the potential to impact children's worldviews (Sutherland, 1985). For example, experiments using children's books with counter-stereotypical information about gender roles have shown that exposure to these books influences children's perceived gender-appropriateness of characteristics, activities, and jobs (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978; Karniol & Gal-Disegni, 2009). Furthermore, moral lessons in books can alter children's behaviors (Larsen et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2020). Apart from the colorblind ideology, other ideological positions and moral lessons regarding ethnic diversity and specific cultures may be presented in books through power relations between characters and cultures (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). Therefore, a multi-method approach is needed to gain insight in both the quantitative and qualitative representation of ethnic diversity in books for children.

The Dutch Context

When studying interethnic attitudes or messages concerning ethnic diversity, sensitivity to the population and the context included is highly needed. The Netherlands provides an interesting multi-ethnic context for research on this topic, and ethnic diversity is expected to increase in the coming years (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). Whereas most research on interethnic prejudice has been performed in the U.S., the dissimilar ethnic composition of the population, as well as cultural and historical differences (Zick et al., 2008), call for a different approach in the Netherlands. The dominant ethnic group in the Netherlands is White, and two of the largest underrepresented ethnic groups are formed by Black (in this dissertation referred to as Afro-Dutch) people and people of Middle Eastern descent. The Afro-Dutch population has a variety of backgrounds, and the largest groups are of Surinamese and Antillean descent: 3.1% of the Dutch population has a Surinamese or Antillean background (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021a). This is mostly due to postcolonial migration, although people from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles have migrated to the Netherlands for a wide range of reasons (Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk, 2006). Similarly, a variety of Middle Eastern backgrounds is represented

in the Netherlands, but the largest groups are of Turkish and Moroccan descent, covering 2.4% and 2.3% of the Dutch population (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021a). Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch people overwhelmingly identify as Muslim (Huijnk, 2018), and are often characterized as such in the Netherlands. Migration from Turkey and Morocco, in contrast, has no relation to colonialism, rather it stems from labor migration starting in the 1960s (Akgündüz, 1993).

To give a full overview of racism and responses to racism in the Netherlands is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but some recent examples, societal patterns and developments will be discussed in order to provide a brief description of the Dutch context. In the past decade, scholars have described how there has been little acknowledgement of both interpersonal and institutionalized racism in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2014; Weiner, 2014). Nonetheless, approximately half of Surinamese-Dutch and Antillean-Dutch as well as Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch people reported experiences of discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or skin color in 2018 (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2020). In addition, although criticism on the anti-Black racist nature of Black Pete ('part of' the Dutch Sinterklaas festivity) dates back to the 1930s (Heilbron, Esajas, & de Abreau, 2018), the public debate about this issue is still ongoing (Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). Furthermore, Islamophobic hate crimes against women wearing headscarves and attacks against mosques are reported (Abdelkader, 2017), and in the so-called *Toeslagenaffaire*, a scandal regarding false allegations of fraud with childcare benefits, tax authorities unlawfully specifically targeted parents with a double nationality (Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens, 2020). In response to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020, institutional racism has been a topic of debate in politics (Tweede Kamer, n.d.), awareness has increased, and racism has been a topic in media and public discussions more frequently (Ghorashi, 2020). In the same year reports of discrimination based on nationality or ethnic background have increased (Van Bon et al., 2021). Therefore, it seems that the Dutch society is in the middle of strong developments in terms of attention for (anti-)racism in the Netherlands among the general public, in the media, and in politics.

As prejudice, which can result in discriminatory behaviors and racism, already develops in childhood (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), it is highly critical to expand the existing knowledge on interethnic attitudes and prejudice of Dutch children and their surroundings. Previous research on interethnic attitudes and prejudice among Dutch children, however, has mostly focused on children aged 10 or older (e.g., Vedder et al., 2016; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001; Verkuyten, 2007). Furthermore, research on parental attitudes seems limited to measures of perceived rather than actual parent attitudes (Verkuyten, 2002), and diversity ideologies only seem researched among adults in general (e.g., Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2006). Moreover, although numerous initiatives and organizations call for more diversity in children's books, systematic quantitative research on the representation of different ethnic backgrounds in Dutch literature for children is lacking (Van den Bossche & Klomberg, 2020). Given that the majority of parents in the Netherlands (70%) reads to their child of 6 years or younger daily, and another 20% reads to them

two or three times a week (Duursma, 2014), books are an important medium through which children can be exposed to stories and experiences representing ethnic diversity similar to society.

Outline Of The Dissertation

The aim of this dissertation is to provide insight in interethnic prejudice of children in the Netherlands and attitudes and ideologies that they are exposed to through two socialization agents (parents and children's books). Attitudes and ideologies that are of particular interest are related to theories of prejudice development and reduction based on intergroup contact (Chapter 2, 3, and 4) and diversity ideologies (Chapter 5 and 6). In **Chapter 2**, levels of prejudice among 6-to 8-year-old White Dutch children towards children of other ethnic backgrounds (Black and Middle Eastern) and predictors in the form of maternal implicit bias and generalized attitudes toward child interethnic contact are examined. In **Chapter 3**, maternal attitudes toward child interethnic contact and its association to interethnic prejudice of their 6-to 10-year-old child are examined in more detail, as families of different ethnic backgrounds (White Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, and Afro-Dutch) are included, attitudes are measured towards specific outgroups, and child actual contact with outgroup friends is examined as a mediator. **Chapter 4** provides an insight in the degree of ethnic diversity that children in the Netherlands may come across, in the form of representation and prominence of characters of color in popular children's books aimed at young children (aged six or younger). In **Chapter 5**, the endorsement of specific diversity ideologies, namely colorblindness and multiculturalism, among mothers of different ethnic backgrounds (White Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, and Afro-Dutch) in the Netherlands and its association to interethnic prejudice of their 6-to 10-year-old child is examined. Results from a qualitative analysis of a subset of popular children's books using critical race theory and critical multicultural analysis are reported in **Chapter 6**, illustrating the messages and ideologies that are conveyed within these books. Finally, **Chapter 7** includes a general discussion in which the main findings presented in this dissertation as well as limitations, implications and future directions are discussed.

Positionality

Given recent societal developments regarding ethnicity and racism globally and in the Netherlands specifically, it should be noted that data on families used in the present dissertation were collected in April and May 2016 (Chapter 2), and between April 2018 and January 2020 (Chapter 3 and 5). The books studied in Chapters 4 and 6 were selected from sales, library, and award records between 2009 and 2018. Data were thus collected before racism started to receive more attention in the Netherlands after the Black Lives Matter demonstrations (Ghorashi, 2020). In addition, to further frame the research presented in this dissertation, it is important to reflect on researcher positionality. Although reflections on research positionality are more common in qualitative research (Holmes, 2020), all research can benefit from this approach (Hamby, 2018). This dissertation is written by a White Dutch

cisgender female. I was born in the Netherlands, as were my parents and grandparents, and have lived in the Western urban region of the Netherlands my whole life. Whereas I went to an ethnically diverse primary school, my other social environments (e.g., sports clubs, neighborhoods, high school, university, student associations) have predominantly consisted of White people. Apart from some relatively short-term contacts through volunteer work (e.g., tutoring), my in-depth experience with people of color and other cultures was therefore rather limited before starting this research. My privileged position as a member from the dominant ethnic group and my own biases could have impacted my work, and influences my understanding of interethnic prejudice and racism, which will not be the same to that of a person of color. As the families participating in the present research have different ethnic backgrounds (White Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, and Afro-Dutch), I have been both an insider and outsider in relation to participants at the same time. The fact that the research team that developed and conducted this study was ethnically diverse and had other experiences has enriched my view and helped me gain a better understanding of (research on) societal challenges related to racism and discrimination.

