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Parents, teachers, and media: agents of biased socialization

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Chapter 6

General Discussion

The aim of my dissertation was to gain deeper understanding into gender and ethnic bias in socialization by various socializing agents. In this general discussion, I will connect previous chapters to socialization theories and summarize the findings, present limitations and future directions, and I will end my dissertation with general conclusions and implications for parents, policy makers, and educators.

Theoretical reflection and summary of findings

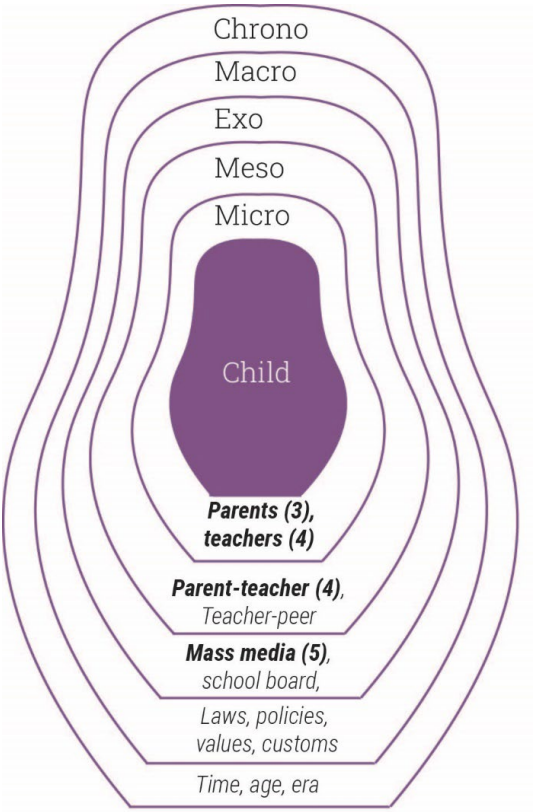
It is important for (behavioral and social) research to be based in theory. This allows for better research designs, greater integration between various research areas, and for a deeper understanding of how certain mechanisms work (Leaper, 2011; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Therefore, in this section the previous chapters will be reconnected to the theories presented in the general introduction (Chapter 1).

According to the ecological model of development, constructivist theorists, and the social cognitive learning theory, learning and development take place within social settings and interactions (Bandura, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). In the lives of developing children, there are many important people and entities that form these settings and are part of direct or indirect social interactions. These people and entities can be seen as models of cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. In social cognitive learning theory they are called socialization agents (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The socialization agents can transfer biased attitudes and behaviors unto individuals, and they can affect the motivations, emotions, and values of individuals (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In this dissertation, I focused on three different socialization agents: parents, teachers, and the media.

By focusing on various socializing agents, we also acknowledge the ecological perspective that children's development takes place within various systems. According to the ecological model, there are five types of systems that engulf the developing individual (see Figure 6.1 Bronfen-

Figure 6.1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model



Note. The model consists of five types of systems that engulf the developing child like nesting dolls. The names of the five types of systems are seen at the top of the model, examples of the systems are in italics at the bottom of the model. Examples in bold italics represent the socializing agents for each chapter in this dissertation, with chapter numbers in parentheses.

brenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner, who established the ecological model, urged researchers to not just look at the individual level of the developing child, but also at other levels of the ecological model (1977, 1979). He argued that other systems, like the interactions between parents and teachers at the level of the mesosystem, and values and beliefs at the level of the macrosystem, should also be studied as they affect the lives of individuals. Below, I will place the socialization agents within the various types of systems, and summarize the findings of the previous chapters.

Parents

In **Chapter 3**, we focused on parents as socializing agents, and the messages that they communicate to their adolescent children about sexual behavior. We aimed to investigate whether the sexual double standard (SDS) was present. The SDS entails the way in which men and women are treated differently for the same sexual behavior (Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Based on gendered expectations of sexuality, men generally gain social status through sexual activity, while women are more likely to be derogated (Endendijk et al., 2020). Parents are part of a microsystem, in which they have direct and immediate interactions with their developing child. We investigated these direct interactions, in which parents answered questions about adolescents' sexual behavior read to them by their adolescent child. In previous research on the SDS, findings were inconsistent, which led researchers to questioning the perpetuated existence of the SDS (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). One reason for these inconsistencies was that the SDS was commonly investigated outside of real world contexts and relevant social settings (Marks et al., 2019; Marks & Fraley, 2007). By examining the microsystem of interactions between parents and their children, we increased the likelihood of finding authentic sexual scripts relevant to the participating parents and their adolescent children.

In our study, we specifically focused on interpersonal scripts used by parents. Interpersonal scripts involve the way in which broad social

norms are adapted and/or diverted from within social interaction (Wiederman, 2015). By using a structured interview, we were able to elicit various social scripts. This was important because another cause of inconsistencies could be the common use of closed-ended and Likert-type questionnaires in SDS research (Endendijk et al., 2020). Using these types of instruments increases the participants' awareness of the research aim, which in turn increases the likelihood of social desirability affecting the answers of parents. Moreover, these types of instruments not only lack relevant social context, but also do not allow the discovery of new social scripts (Elliott, 2010; Simon & Gagnon, 2003). Likert-type questionnaires often focus on specific cultural scripts, which commonly relate to promiscuity, assertiveness, passivity, the (perceived) romantic nature of women, and positive and negative evaluations (Caron et al., 1993; Endendijk et al., 2020; Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). Through content analysis, we found that some parents indeed use interpersonal scripts that were clearly related to these cultural scripts. Firstly, some parents related having six successive relationships and kissing a stranger to promiscuity. However, there were no gendered differences in the use of these types of scripts, indicating that there was no SDS present within these scripts. Secondly, parents used scripts that positioned boys as players and girls as sluts. This relates to gendered ideas and expectations of men as sexually agentic, dominant, powerful, and successful when having multiple partners (Fjær et al., 2015; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Reid et al., 2011). Woman who have multiple partners are more often penalized, which is reflected in the use of derogatory terms like slut (Armstrong et al., 2014; Farvid, 2010; Kreager et al., 2016). Thirdly, parents used scripts describing girls as dependent, passive, and romantic creatures, while these scripts were rarely used to describe boys. However, we found that the most common scripts related to normative sexual development, which refers to adolescents' sexuality as normal and acceptable, and adolescence as a time of sexual initiation, discovery, and experimentation into sexual activity (Tolman & McClelland, 2011; World Health Organization, 2002).

These findings indicate that, within social interaction in the microsystem of Dutch parents and children, parents most commonly used scripts that are often missing in SDS research. As such, our study adds to the body of knowledge on SDS, and offers a stepping-stone for further investigation into scripts involving sexual behavior of adolescents.

Teachers

In **Chapter 4**, we focused on teachers as socialization agents and whether bias based on gender and ethnicity was present in their written evaluations of pupils. The report cards we investigated in this chapter, can be seen as authentic and natural data (Ni & Li, 2013), that form an interaction between teachers and pupils. Teachers can therefore be seen as part of a microsystem, as they have direct and immediate interactions with their pupils. However, the report cards that were investigated in Chapter 4 regularly appeared to be aimed at the parents, making the report cards an interaction or interrelation between microsystems. This means that the report cards could also be seen as part of a mesosystem, in which teachers interact with parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The findings of research on gender and ethnicity based teacher bias have been inconsistent (Wang et al., 2018). Specifically within the Dutch context, one explanation for these inconsistencies can be found in the methodological approaches. Some Dutch studies that were aimed at interactions and school processes through observations and ethnographic methods, do indicate bias (Denessen et al., 2020; Van den Bergh et al., 2010; Weiner, 2015, 2016). However, the most common research traditions consist of large scale quantitative studies, which mainly focus on describing differences in educational outcomes between groups of pupils, without addressing possible gender and ethnicity based bias in school processes (Stevens et al., 2011, 2019). These research traditions are fueled through funding by the Dutch government, and by close relationships between educational researchers and policymakers (Stevens et al., 2011, 2019). These relationships illustrate how macrosystems indirectly affect

developing children, as policies informed by these studies influence the daily school practice of pupils. In these large-scale quantitative studies, lower achievements are subsequently explained by characteristics of the pupils and their families, like the lack of certain resources that pupils from low SES and ethnic minority backgrounds experience. While these studies provide valuable information about achievements gaps, they disregard possible social injustices within school processes. Our focus on the authentic messages communicated by teachers to pupils and their parents therefore forms an important addition to the study of teacher bias.

We focused on the evaluations on report cards because it is very difficult for teachers to inhibit subtle and implicit forms of bias in written evaluations (Beukeboom, 2014). We examined differences between the messages that teachers wrote on report cards of boys and girls, belonging to the ethnic majority group or to ethnic minority groups. We found that ethnic majority girls received the most positive statements. Negative statements were formulated more abstractly towards ethnic minority pupils than towards ethnic majority pupils. This finding indicates that teachers showed negative bias towards ethnic minority pupils, because people tend to use higher levels of language abstraction when they describe things in concordance with their expectations (Beukeboom, 2014; Menegatti et al., 2017; Semin & Fiedler, 1988). Ethnic minority girls especially received more negative statements related to performance. Statements unrelated to performance mainly involved behavior and character traits. Boys received more negative performance-unrelated statements than girls did, and ethnic minority pupils received more of these than ethnic majority pupils did. This means that ethnic minority boys received most of these negative statements, and ethnic majority girls the least, further indicating bias based on gender and ethnicity. Our findings reinforce the idea that research in the Netherlands into educational inequalities could benefit from employing greater variation

of methodologies, including in-depth, qualitative, observational, and ethnographic studies (Stevens et al., 2011, 2019).

Media

In **Chapter 5** we focused on the media, which is an exosystem, as neither the child nor the parents are active participants in mass media (for studies that focus on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in social media, where individuals are active participants, see for instance Popović, 2018a). The media are often specifically mentioned as agents of socialization and communicators of cultural scripts (Brown & Stone, 2018; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Endendijk et al., 2022; Wiederman, 2015; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The content of magazines, newspapers, television programs, films, and advertisements have often been investigated, and bias and prejudice towards various groups have been found regularly (Aubrey et al., 2020; Coyne et al., 2014, 2016, 2021; Runderkamp et al., 2022; Signorielli, 2009; Weatherred, 2017). However, less is clear about the transmission of bias and prejudice by the media. It is generally accepted that the media affect attitudes, but it is unsure to what extent and whether these effects last over time (Easteal et al., 2015; Mutz & Goldman, 2010). While some studies indicate longitudinal effects on biased attitudes (Arendt & Northup, 2015; Coyne et al., 2014, 2016; Schiappa et al., 2006; Slater, 2007), others show none (Breuer et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2018) or only towards specific groups (Tukachinsky et al., 2017).

In concordance with previous research (Weatherred, 2015, 2017), it became clear that a single large CSA case had caused a prolonged peak of media attention to CSA. In this case, a male early childcare professional and babysitter, was eventually found guilty of the sexual abuse of a large number of children aged 0 to 4 years. The effect of the prolonged media attention to a notorious CSA case on the attitudes of parents towards hiring a male babysitter, adds proof to the theory of the media as agents of socialization, spreading cultural scripts of bias by emphasizing the unfitness of men in caring roles. Additionally, it illustrates how more

distant systems can affect children's development. Previous obscurities in research on longitudinal effects of media on attitudes may be explained by the resonance thesis. According to this thesis, bias and prejudice can be reinforced by the media, when media coverage is closely linked to an individual's everyday reality (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004).

Subtle bias and small effects

The bias in the socializing messages in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 was mostly subtle. For instance, while we found that the media attention for the big CSA case in Chapter 5 was large and prolonged, newspaper articles did not state that men working in early childcare are pedophiles. Still, the news story affected parents' attitude towards hiring a male babysitter. Our findings of subtle expressions of bias is in concordance with other contemporary bias phenomena. In the past, bias was often overt and explicit, but nowadays, bias is mainly subtle and elusive (Dovidio et al., 2016). This makes the recognition and study of bias more complex. This is exemplified by the development of the SDS, as described in Chapter 3. The SDS was first introduced and investigated in the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of premarital sex (Reiss, 1956, 1964). In this era, the SDS was investigated with scales consisting of explicit statements. Results showed that people were on average more negative about women who engaged in premarital sex than they were about men. In more recent years, the SDS was no longer found consistently, especially in studies that employed similar methods (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Kreager et al., 2016; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). By using innovative methods, focusing on people for whom the concepts are relevant, and collecting data that is as authentic as possible, the study of contemporary bias can be aided.

According to guidelines (Kirk, 1996), most of the effects found in the quantitative studies in Chapters 4 and 5 are small. The relevance of effect size has been discussed at length in Chapter 2. Most importantly, effect size measures provide insight into the practical significance of an effect. In theory, small effect sizes indicate low practical significance. So, does

this render our findings in Chapters 4 and 5 practically insignificant? There are several reasons to conclude otherwise. Firstly, small effects are interesting and practically significant for several reasons (Prentice & Miller, 1992), as established in Chapter 1. The most important reason may be the possible accumulation of adverse effects caused by bias. For instance, some of the effects of pupil gender and ethnicity on teachers' written evaluations are small, but they can accumulate with the effects of bias in other school processes. This can result in the widening of achievement and wellbeing gaps between specific groups of pupils (Rubie-Davies, 2015). This accumulation may be what makes the subtle expressions of bias particularly pernicious. While subtle discrimination can be hard to recognize and is often expressed unknowingly and unintentionally, it has a higher frequency and thus more chronic nature compared to overt discrimination (Jones et al., 2016). So while a small microaggression may not have a large impact on its own, due to cumulative effects these small subtle expressions of bias can lead to large unfair inequalities in the long run (Dovidio et al., 2016).

Secondly, the cut-off values that are used to decide whether an effect is small, medium or large are arbitrary (Cohen, 1988). Effect sizes cannot be seen as a one-size-fits-all, as they vary across specific areas of research (Maxwell et al., 2018; Primbs et al., 2022). It is often unclear what the smallest effect of interest within a specific field actually is (Lakens, 2022). While some guidelines exist (Anvari & Lakens, 2021; Primbs et al., 2022), studies into what constitutes a meaningful effect within the field of subtle bias and inequality in socialization are therefore needed.

When dealing with subtle issues, it is important to use correctly calculated effect sizes. When using variance analyses (ANOVA), like we did in Chapters 4 and 5, the most commonly used effect size is (η_p^2). However, η_p^2 structurally overestimates effect size, especially with smaller sample sizes. Therefore, we explained in Chapter 2 how to calculate less biased effect sizes for variance analyses (ANOVA). Our advice includes the sharing of effect size formulas and full ANOVA tables, which makes effect

sizes easier to interpret and enables other researchers to calculate a different effect size when desired.

Limitations and future directions

Ecological approach and agency of the learner

In the previous section, the socialization agents were placed within the various ecological systems defined by Bronfenbrenner. While most systems were present within this dissertation, we focused on quite different types of biased socialization within the separate chapters. For instance, in Chapter 3, we added a relevant social context to the existing body of literature by examining the interpersonal scripts used within the microsystem of immediate interactions between parents and their child. In most studies, the SDS is studied as the attitudes or cognitions of individual participants towards sexual promiscuity of men and women, often using Likert-style questionnaires (Endendijk et al., 2020). However, we did not look into the extent to which these sexual scripts are still present within exo-, marco-, and chronosystems. We assumed that the SDS is still present in contemporary society based on literature (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Zaikman & Marks, 2017), but did not actually investigate this. In the future, it would be worthwhile to see how these scripts are present in systems like mass media, and in societal beliefs and values, and how these scripts may change due to the age of the child and due to changes in the zeitgeist. This can perhaps also offer insights into how these types of harmful attitudes can be impeded. Likewise, in the context of Chapter 4, it would be interesting to investigate settings and interactions in which the child is not involved, to gain further understanding into gender and ethnicity based bias in schools. For instance, by examining bias among the school boards the teachers work for and related policies implemented by the municipality the teachers work with. Lastly, in relation to Chapter 5, including the perspectives of (male) early childcare professionals, their educators, and the managers who are responsible for hiring policies would result in a more complete

framework. This framework could provide a deeper and broader understanding of the effects of CSA stories in the media on the attitudes of socializing agents from various social systems. Additionally, it would aid in examining how the effects of the media can be impeded, how bias against men in caring professions can be decreased, and in how the stark gendered division of labor in these professions can be combatted.

Another, related limitation lies in the focus on the socialization agents. By focusing on the socialization agents, the individuals that are socialized can appear as being relatively passive (Bem, 1983), especially in Chapters 3 and 4, in which the adolescents who are socialized are not investigated. This is a limitation, as people assimilate, accommodate, and adapt biased socialization, within social interactions and individually at the intrapsychic level (Bandura, 1977; Piaget, 1954; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978; Wiederman, 2015). Therefore, while we know more about the biased messages that were sent by parents and teachers, we do not know how these were received and formed into intrapsychic scripts, attitudes, and behaviors by the adolescents at whom they were aimed. Nor do we know how the scripts, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents affected parents and teachers. Socialization is a reciprocal process, through which both child and socializing agent are affected (Gelman, 2009). People can show great variation and flexibility in the formation of scripts and attitudes throughout their life (Bem, 1983). This variation is reflected in how the attitudes of parents towards hiring a male babysitter changed over the years following the breaking of a large-scale CSA case, as we found in Chapter 5. Future research into inequalities could therefore be further enriched by investigating which interpersonal scripts children form and use within interactions with their parents, teachers and other socialization agents, and how the interpersonal scripts of socializing agents change through interactions with children. And, especially within the context of Dutch schools, studying the effects of bias on pupil outcomes that go beyond educational achievement. For instance, the

transfer of bias, social exclusion (Alan et al., 2021), and the effects on their social functioning and emotional wellbeing (Wang et al., 2018).

Sample composition

In the preface of my dissertation, I explained that there were limitations in the composition of the samples in the context of the lack of LGBTQI+ people. Here, I will discuss some additional limitations of the sample composition.

Due to the exclusion criteria that were used during the recruitment process in the overarching longitudinal research project, the participants were mostly White, did not have severe physical or mental disabilities, and included only mixed-sex parent couples. Additionally, while this was not part of the inclusion criteria, most participants had a high socio-economic status (SES), as they were highly educated and had a high income. Overall, the samples were quite homogenous, and the participants came from privileged positions. This means that the results in most studies are only representative of a selective part of the Dutch population. This is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, previous research has shown that various socialization processes work differently for specific groups of people. For instance, a higher level of education is associated with a lower level of endorsement of prejudice (Gök et al., 2019; Peri, 2018), the effect of media on attitudes is stronger for people with low SES and people from ethnic minority groups (Callanan, 2012; B. J. Wilson et al., 2005), and the endorsement of ethnicity based bias varies between ethnic groups (Nosek et al., 2002; Tukachinsky et al., 2017). Secondly, the effects of bias and prejudice are often more severe for people who are part of marginalized groups (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Leaper & Brown, 2018). By excluding them, we miss exactly the people for whom the stakes of our research are the highest.

There are several reasons why our samples were not more representative. In part, this was because the samples were part of a research project that followed up on a longitudinal study on gender

socialization in young families. This meant that selection criteria were predetermined. In the context of SES, research has shown that people with low SES are more likely to not respond, opt-out or drop-out of research (Goodman & Gatward, 2008; Schmidt & Woll, 2017). It is possible that this was amplified by our passive recruitment strategy: we invited people through a formal letter that was sent to their home address. Using a combination of passive and active recruitment strategies, like face-to-face contact and direct conversations, could potentially have reached more low-SES individuals and families and increase the likelihood of participation (Carlson et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2016). Chances of willingness to participate are for instance further increased by word of mouth recruitment, referrals by community leaders, general practitioners, friends, and extended family members. However, adding other recruitment strategies was not feasible due to some of our inclusion criteria and due to privacy laws. As per our inclusion criteria, each family had to have at least two children, who were born in specific periods. The likelihood of finding families with these specifics through strategies like referrals or word of mouth recruitment is too small to be cost effective. We received addresses of families that satisfied the birthdates criterion from municipality records. In the past, research teams would sometimes visit addresses from these records in low-income neighborhoods for face-to-face recruitment. Because this could put undue pressure on people to participate, and because of renewed privacy laws, our only option was contacting families through mail. Using strict age criteria for children can be an important requirement to investigate detailed developmental patterns, and to compare these patterns between families and social groups. However, in future research projects, it could be beneficial to use less restrictive inclusion criteria, which gives more possibilities for various recruitment strategies. This could additionally be helpful in diversifying future samples in other areas, like ethnic and sexual diversity.

In the study on school reports in Chapter 4, I recruited an extra sample of ethnic minority pupils with the aim of increasing representation. As this was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, options for active recruitment were limited. It was mostly impossible to enter schools, community centers, youth clubs, religious organizations, and other places where participants could be recruited. Moreover, the pandemic made it difficult for potential participants to access report cards, as these are usually held at schools and only distributed two to three times a year. Ultimately, this resulted in a small subsample of ethnic minority pupils. While this subsample was big enough to run the analyses of variance in Chapter 4, it was not big enough to differentiate between various ethnic groups. It is quite possible that there are large differences between various ethnic minority groups (Crawford et al., 2019), which may now have gone unnoticed. In the future, collecting report cards texts may be more fruitful when done through school boards, instead of through families. By recruiting via school boards, report cards written by a large number of teachers can be examined, as we did in our study, but with a far larger numbers of report cards per teacher. This could potentially result in a higher number of school reports belonging to pupils from various ethnic groups. Additionally, future studies could employ computer-automated coding processes and natural language processing (Johnson-Grey et al., 2020; Rojek et al., 2019), making the analysis of large amounts of data more feasible.

Societal relevance: Practical and policy implications

Within specific social contexts, we found bias in the messages and attitudes of socialization agents. This is in concordance with studies that have found that bias changes over time and is still present, albeit in different and more subtle forms (Dovidio et al., 2016; Endendijk et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2016; Leaper & Brown, 2018; Van Schie, 2018). This begs the question what can be done to combat bias, and although this question was not the focus of my dissertation, it is an essential next step that can

be informed by our findings. Previous research gives several directions for fruitful interventions that have been successful in decreasing bias and prejudice. I will provide examples of various kinds of interventions below.

First, as bias expressed through various forms of microaggressions can result in serious adverse effects and increasing social inequalities (Dovidio et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2015), paying attention to subtle forms of discrimination is worthwhile. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, bias can quite easily and unintentionally be expressed through language. It is vital to take inclusive language seriously (Murray, 2018). People, especially important socializing agents like teachers and policy-makers, can follow various courses and guidelines in order to improve their inclusive language skills. One example of such a guideline was published in the spring of 2023 by a Dutch national organization led by secondary school pupils which advocates for the rights of pupils (Landelijk Aktie Komitee Scholieren, 2023). However, the guideline published by this organization was met with hostility and mockery by politicians and in the media (Van der Aa, 2023). If inclusive language would be made inherent and integral in various ecological systems like schools and government communications, this could lead to more inclusive language in other social systems too. Social norms are a strong motivator to change behavior (Felten & Broekroelofs, 2022). Therefore, when people become used to reading inclusive language in many place, they will become more inclined to use similar language themselves. Additionally, publications in (for instance) parenting magazines, newspapers, and on online parenting platforms could inform parents specifically on the importance of inclusive and unbiased language, and offer valuable tips on how to use such language.

Second, direct instruction and group discussions about bias and prejudice can help in reducing them (Kågesten et al., 2016; Leaper & Brown, 2018). For instance, talking about ethnicity can reduce ethnicity based bias (Sue, 2013). Acknowledging and addressing subtle negative messages can aid in combatting bias as well (Byers et al., 2020). In a study

where a primary school teacher taught her pupils about transgender and gender-nonconforming people, pupils showed more inclusive attitudes towards gender expression and identity, as well as the ability to question existing social systems that can be restrictive (Ryan et al., 2013). Discussing gendered stereotypes about specific school subjects, like stereotypes about girls being less fit for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) than boys, has also shown reduce bias, while also increasing girls' interest in those subjects and boys' overall school engagement (Leaper & Brown, 2018). Based on our findings in Chapter 3, where we found that some parents convey biased gender messages about sexual behavior, it may be advantageous to aim interventions at parents, suggesting how they can communicate positive aspects of sexuality to sons and daughters alike, including talk about age-appropriate sexual behaviors.

Third, facilitating intergroup contact can decrease intergroup bias, by increasing knowledge about and increasing empathy towards other groups, and by reducing fear about intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The effects of intergroup contact are further enhanced when the groups share similar status and common goals, when the groups cooperate rather than compete, and when the contact is supported by authorities, laws, and policies (Pettigrew et al., 2011). While prejudice reduction through intergroup contact has mainly been investigated in the context of differing ethnic groups, research has shown that it can also reduce gender prejudice (Martin et al., 2017). The intergroup contact can even be indirect, for instance by watching television programs including characters from specific (marginalized) groups, like gay and bisexual people (Schiappa et al., 2006). Additionally, intergroup contact has been found to moderate linguistic bias (Prati et al., 2015).

Fourth, interventions aimed at engaging in (counter-stereotypical) activities and contact with role models that defy stereotypes have been successful in reducing prejudice and stereotypical attitudes (Kågesten et al., 2016; Leaper & Brown, 2018). For example, children who received guest

lectures by female STEM professionals showed higher gender awareness and decreased gender stereotypical ideas about STEM (Booij et al., 2013). As only very few men work in early childhood education, which appears to increase negative attitudes towards the men who do (Rentzou, 2011), interventions that show positive male role models may both decrease negative stereotypes, and increase boys' aspirations to work in this type of profession. These types of role models may offer a counterweight to the effects of mass media, as exemplified in Chapter 5.

While the examples above give directions for interventions, some studies indicate that finding (more) successful interventions is still needed. For example, a meta-review has shown that interventions using counter stereotypical role models are often not effective, and it is unclear why some interventions work while others do not (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). In a study focusing on improving the attitudes of secondary school students towards the LGBTIQ+ community through a peer educator intervention, there were even negative effects found in some student populations (Kroneman et al., 2018).

Ideally, many socialization agents and ecological systems are involved in socialization against bias. Solving societal inequalities should be a shared endeavor that does not rest on one type of agent or context (Good et al., 2018). Macro systems can be involved in decreasing bias, for instance through governmental and educational policies that stimulate interventions aimed at various socializing agents. Successful interventions include programs aimed at parents, but also at other adults that are part of other microsystems, like teachers and sport coaches (Kågesten et al., 2016). The government can stimulate makers of (educational) television programs and social media influencers to promote counter stereotypical attitudes and equality. Policies can also be aimed at making anti-prejudice programs a mandatory part of teacher education, so all teachers are stimulated to become socializing agents of inclusion and social justice (Nieto, 2000; Pantić & Florian, 2015). For teachers specifically, informed by our findings in Chapter 4, new

interventions could be developed aimed at reducing bias in written evaluations.

Other socializing agents that are likely involved in the formation of bias and prejudice include religious institutions, youth clubs and sports clubs (Kågesten et al., 2016). Better understanding of the roles of these agents is needed, as these agents can also play an important part in reducing bias. However, it is impossible to force each socialization agent to implement anti-bias interventions, and it is undesirable and unethical in a free society. Additionally, not every child is involved in a club or religious institution, and not every child watches the same television programs or social media influencers. As each child attends school, schools have been called the great equalizer, as they have the potential to create social justice and unity (Grant & Agosto, 2008). Therefore, schools and teacher education may be the best places to test and use various types of interventions, with school policies aimed at equality, mandated by the government, informed by research (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Nieto, 2000).

Conclusions

In the past, research findings have not been conclusive on the existence and transmission of bias in various specific contexts. Dutch people indicate that they find equality important, but that they feel like emancipation has gone far enough (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022). This attitude combined with unsureness about to what extent inequality and bias exist, may lead to inaction while action is still warranted. Therefore, I aimed to document instances of bias and provide insight into mechanisms of bias in socialization in various social contexts.

In my dissertation, I have presented theory-based evidence for bias in specific social settings in the messages of three different kinds of socialization agents: parents, teachers, and the media. Messages that were sent by parents and teachers contained various indicators of bias, based on gender and ethnicity. Biased media messages affected parental

attitudes over a prolonged period of time. To quote the title of an article by Lynn Liben (2016) on the perpetuated existence of gender inequality: "We've come a long way baby, but we're not there yet." The bias we found in various contexts, underlines that research into the characteristics of bias, socializing processes, and effective interventions remains important. The findings in my dissertation indicate that previous inconsistencies in research findings may be clarified firstly by focusing on participants for whom the measured concepts resonate with their everyday reality and the social contexts they are part of. Secondly, using data that is as authentic as possible, like responses within parent-child dyads and actual school reports, may have higher validity for bias research than, for instance, responses to Likert-type scales.

For the future, investigating authentic data, within multiple ecological systems among diverse samples forms a worthwhile recommendation. As bias and social learning are affected by time and era, this has to be done consistently and continuously. When researchers and educators find bias that leads to social inequalities, this appeals to a moral duty to intervene. Thus, hopefully, the findings in my dissertation do exactly that, and as such make a contribution to creating a fairer society.