



Immigrant children and their parents: Is there an intergenerational interdependence of integration into social networks?



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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the integration of immigrant children and their parents in different dimensions of social networks – referred to as multiplexity in social network terminology. These dimensions are children's friendships, their attendance at birthday parties, and contact among their parents. By attending birthday parties, children's friendships are publicly reinforced and membership in a social circle is signified. During these events, communication and social exchange drive the process of social integration at the micro-level, and ethnic boundaries can be shifted or blurred. It will be shown that a variety of homophily effects can be found in all three network dimensions. In addition, ethnic segregation in parents' networks has an impact on children's participation in these events and, thereby, on children's integration in social networks. However, the causal effect in the other way around – children's birthday party attendance on contact among their parents – is even stronger. A new approach is the non-recursive analysis of how ties in one network dimension effect ties in another dimension. Analyses are based on 76 social networks of 1266 children in school classes in the city state of Bremen, Germany.

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1. Introduction

Studies on interethnic network ties have shown a high degree of friendship segregation between racial groups and between immigrants and natives in different western countries (Quillian and Campbell, 2003; Baerveldt et al., 2004; Mouw and Entwisle, 2006). For younger age groups, children establish friendships themselves, especially within the school context (Feld and Carter, 1998). As children meet on a daily basis, they are able to easily get in touch with their peers, often crossing ethnic boundaries and establishing interethnic friendship ties. Network ties, however, are often based on a number of dimensions – referred to as *multiplexity* in social network terminology. For example, students may develop friendship ties in school that can also be linked via other common activities, such as attending birthday parties.

For such activities, parents are often actively involved: they organize the party, pay for the gifts and bring their children to the host's home. The mutual exchange of gifts between children prompts a type of obliged reciprocity that functions as a mechanism of social integration for children as well as parents. Following Allport (1954), regular cooperative contact based on equal status

and common goals is commonly known to reduce prejudice. In contrast, high levels of ethnic segregation in the parental generation may discourage trust among families of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Since allowing children to attend other children's birthday parties requires some degree of trust between participating families, the absence of ties between parents can be expected to reduce the likelihood of receiving invitations to birthday parties. Hence, the empirical question at the core of this study is whether interdependence exists between the networks of children and that of their parents, and if so, how it does affect the social integration of immigrant children and parents. Such arenas of everyday social networks and social exchange have not yet been investigated in migration and integration research.

The birthday party example illustrates how parental networks are likely to impact linkages beyond initial friendship ties between children, particularly if these dimensions also involve parental participation. On the other hand, causality can also be explained the other way around: by meeting other children at their birthday parties, children create opportunities also for parents to interact with each other, potentially strengthening more diverse ties as well as social integration. The concept of intergenerational interdependence highlights the correlation between the networks of children and the networks of their parents and is open to both causal perspectives. Presumably, the existence of more than one causal direction is possible in everyday social relationships: in some

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cases, parents get in touch because of their children's networks, and in other cases, the segregation of parent networks impedes opportunities of social integration for their children.

Using data of 76 school class-based social networks of 4th graders in the city–state of Bremen, Germany, this study investigates the intergenerational interdependence of social assimilation. It will be shown that there is social and ethnic homophily (McPherson et al., 2001) in both children and parent networks, which is also strengthened via spatial proximity. Children's friendship ties as well as ties of birthday party attendance depend on similarity in personality traits, namely empathy and low self-control. In contrast, parent networks depend on similarity in cultural capital and type of housing. The intergenerational interdependence of social networks will then be analyzed from two perspectives. First, it will be investigated whether segregation in parent networks has an independent effect on children's birthday party attendance when controlling for children's friendship ties, important indicators of homophily as well as other unobserved factors. Secondly, contact among parents will be predicted by children's birthday party attendance. In both cases, causal inference is based on an instrumental variable approach for non-recursive models (Paxton et al., 2011), controlling for unobserved heterogeneity within a multivariate probit framework. Overall, the results are in favor of the *intergenerational interdependence* perspective on social integration: in addition to evidence of homophily in all three dimensions of social networks, it will be shown that ties in parents' networks affect ties in children's birthday networks which in turn increase the propensity of ties in networks among their parents.

2. Integration, assimilation and birthday parties

In recent work, Wimmer (2008, p. 985) pointed to the “political and symbolic struggle over the categorical divisions of society”, which drives the spanning and shifting of *ethnic boundaries* at the macro-level (Alba and Nee, 2003). But also at the micro-level, individual actors can span, shift or blur boundaries by interacting and communicating with each other and by forming ethnically segregated or integrated social networks. When participating in events of interaction, actors' behavior usually meets expectations of others, but expectations become also confirmed and modified. This dynamic, situational and event-based conception of ethnic boundaries and integration is in line with Wimmer's (2008) multilevel process theory of ethnic boundaries, and also with Luhmann's theory of social systems. In the latter, Luhmann (2002) describes how personal identity emerges in a flow of communicative events. Identity emerges from condensation and confirmation of meaning in communicative processes, when ego and alter develop expectations of how the other will behave. By confirming these expectations in subsequent communication, the emerging identity becomes reinforced. Identity reduces complexity because it limits the horizon of possible topics in further communication. This selectivity makes further communication more likely, and a sustainable interactive system with increasing structure and stability can emerge over time – which already is a basic form of social integration. But communication needs favorable situations in which identity can emerge in interactive processes.

The succession of immigrant generations is often regarded as a driving force of assimilation, although this is not assumed to be a routine or linear process (Zhou, 1997; Alba and Nee, 2003). The obvious advantage of the second generation is growing up in the host country's institutions and the meeting of native peers at focus points (Feld, 1981), particularly in the school context. Provided that schools are not highly segregated, children have more opportunities to make interethnic friends than their parents, simply because of structural characteristics of the focus point of the school class.

Nonetheless, contact among parents is important because it might affect the chances of being part of significant social events that also involve parents' activities. Incomplete social assimilation in the parental generation can thus impede children's social assimilation in other network dimensions – such as children's birthday parties (Windzio, 2012). Children's birthday parties are an outstanding example of significant social events. They are an ideal-type of an everyday social situation, wherein ethnic boundaries become negotiated, condensed and confirmed (Wimmer, 2008). Mutual expectations evolve and identity becomes reinforced in networks of communication and social exchange. In addition, the participation in birthday parties reflects and confirms children's social status in the peer network of the classroom.

In one study, Sirota (2001) argues that networks of *children's birthday party invitations* are intertwined with friendship networks, wherein the invitation is a symbolic act of reinforcement and public confirmation of the relationship. In addition, the value of a birthday gift can reflect the strength of a friendship tie (Sirota, 1998). Gift economies in birthday party networks are closely linked with social status and prestige. Clarke (2007) argues that birthday parties comprise practices of social exchange akin to the famous “potlatch” ritual in Native American tribes (Mauss, 1990; see also Sirota, 2001). During a potlatch-event, luxurious presents are given, which do not primarily serve the satisfaction of material needs but rather to maintain the prestige of the community (Mauss, 1990). The interplay of social exchange and social integration has also been analyzed by Homans (1958), who argues that the cohesiveness of small groups increases with the level of reinforcement people find in the behavior emitted by others. Blau (1992) further contends that social exchange implies unspecified obligations based on trust and, at the same time, contribute to the evolution of trust in iterative processes. Along a similar vein, Coleman (1990) even based his general social theory on the idea that rational actors hold rights to carry out certain actions, but exchange the authority over their actions with significant others.

Previous studies on ethnic enclaves and networks revealed that the share of intra-ethnic ties is comparatively high particularly for Turkish immigrants (Haug, 2003; Ceylan, 2006). Network analyses of school classes have shown that two Turkish parents have higher odds of having regular contact with each other than two native German parents (Windzio, 2012). While the intergenerational family relations are an important issue in family research (Kwak, 2003; Huiberts et al., 2006; Boehnke et al., 2007), only few studies on the intergenerational transmission of social assimilation in social networks exist (Munniksma et al., 2012). According to the hypothesis of intergenerational interdependence of integration, high levels of segregation in the parental generation reduce the chances of immigrant children's integration into the “everyday life” exchange networks of birthday parties. But also a reversed causality might exist: since parents are usually involved, their children's attendance at birthday parties creates situations in which parents can interact and establish network ties. Based on these assumptions, the hypotheses of causal effects in both directions will be tested by using a simultaneous equation model with instrumental variables.

3. Methods and data

Although multiplex social network analysis is probably the best research approach for investigating social integration as well as social assimilation of immigrants, it has not yet been widely applied in this field (Baerveldt et al., 2004). While the concept of intergenerational transmission usually highlights the impact from the older to the younger generation, causality does not necessarily follow a unidirectional path in many other multiplex networks. Thus,

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