



# Ethnic ingroup friendships in schools: Testing the by-product hypothesis in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden



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## ABSTRACT

This study set out to examine to what extent ethnic ingroup friendship in secondary school classes are a by-product of cultural and socioeconomic ingroup friendship. Based on homophily theory, we expected similar opinions, leisure activities, religion, risk behaviour and socioeconomic factors to (partly) explain ethnic ingroup preferences. Multilevel  $p_2$  models on 13,272 pupils in 625 secondary school classes in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden showed that adolescents tend to have friends similar in ethnicity, cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. We find no evidence, however, that ethnic homophily is explained by cultural and socioeconomic homophily.

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## 1. Introduction

Friendships of adolescents are segregated along ethnic boundaries in many countries, as has been shown in the United States (Currarini et al., 2010; Mouw and Entwisle, 2006; Zeng and Xie, 2008), Israel (Eshel and Kurman, 1990), and the Netherlands (Vermeij et al., 2009). Scholars have argued that ethnic segregation in friendships is due to limited opportunities to meet adolescents of a different ethnicity, and, beyond opportunities, also caused by preferences to befriend same ethnic peers, i.e., ethnic homophily (Mouw and Entwisle, 2006; Vermeij et al., 2009).

Such ethnic ingroup preferences are usually explained by the idea that co-ethnic peers have more in common with each other than peers of different ethnic groups (Byrne, 1971; McPherson et al., 2001). Sharing the same ethnicity, so is argued, is related to similar behaviour, resources, attitudes and tastes, which facilitate joint activities and understanding. In order to properly address to what extent adolescents prefer same-ethnic friends over interethnic friends, it is therefore necessary to examine to what extent ethnic homophily is a by-product of homophily with respect to

behaviour, resources, attitudes or tastes. For example, if ethnicity and religion are correlated, choosing friends with the same religion is likely to result in choosing co-ethnic friends, whereas ethnic in-group preferences are not necessarily present.

The idea that ethnic homophily can be explained by homophily on other characteristics – what we will call the ‘by-product hypothesis’ – has been tested in several studies. Previous research found that ethnic homophily cannot be explained by similarity in terms of age, gender or parental socio-economic status (e.g., Hamm et al., 2005; Mouw and Entwisle, 2006; Shrum et al., 1988). Some studies tested the by-product hypothesis in terms of cultural taste, political orientation and club memberships for US college students (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006; Mayer and Puller, 2008). Based on on-line social network data (i.e., Facebook and e-mail traffic), these studies found that social relations between students are partly based on other characteristics than ethnicity, but they explained only little of ethnic ingroup friendship.

Another study focused on music preferences, deviant behaviour, going out and school behaviour (Stark and Flache, 2012). Using data on adolescents in the Dutch city of Arnhem, Stark and Flache (2012) showed evidence for the by-product hypothesis in a selection of the studied classes (i.e., 16%). In these classes, ethnicity is correlated to one of the other characteristics (e.g., deviant behaviour) and similarity on the other characteristics also drives friendship choice.

In this study, we pose the following research question: *to what extent is the overall ethnic homophily tendency among adolescents a*

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by-product of homophily on other characteristics? We aim to contribute to previous research in three ways.

First, we study many different cultural and socioeconomic characteristics one-by-one that can possibly explain ethnic homophily. Some studies modelled basic demographic characteristics (Hamm et al., 2005; Mouw and Entwisle, 2006; Shrum et al., 1988), included all homophily characteristics simultaneously or in combination with other predictors (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006; Mayer and Puller, 2008), or included the strongest correlating type of homophily per school class and modelled different types of homophily as one parameter (e.g., in some class it is similarity in deviant behaviour, in another class it is similarity in music taste) (Stark and Flache, 2012). It is therefore not sufficiently clear from previous research which *specific* characteristic might explain what part of the *overall pattern* of ethnic homophily. For example, did religious homophily or homophily on music taste contribute to the explanation ethnic homophily? In this study, we specifically examine possible mediators and provide a more detailed test of the by-product hypothesis as such.

Second, most leading studies that address the by-product hypothesis were restricted to limited convenience samples of university students and proxy measures of friendship in the US (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006; Mayer and Puller, 2008; Wimmer and Lewis, 2010), or to one particular city in the Netherlands (Stark and Flache, 2012). We test the by-product hypothesis for adolescents of all educational levels in a large number of secondary schools with nationally representative data across different countries. As such, our study increases the generalizability of conclusions. We research adolescent ingroup friendships in four European countries: England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Third, previous research has studied the by-product hypothesis using logistic models without taking into account that coefficients in those models cannot be readily compared (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006; Mayer and Puller, 2008; Stark and Flache, 2012; Wimmer and Lewis, 2010). The size of coefficients in the family of logistic models depends on the total variance explained within models. As a result, coefficients of previously added variables do not only change because of mediation, but also because of rescaling whenever variables are added to the model (Kohler et al., 2011). This could imply that the size of the ethnic homophily coefficient in logistic models goes up when adding variables to the model that affect friendship choice but are uncorrelated with ethnic homophily. Mediation and rescaling effects work in opposite directions (decrease and increase of coefficients, respectively), so that mediation effects become obscured. In this study, we improve on previous research by addressing the rescaling issue by y-standardization.

We use the first wave of the 'Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study for Four European Countries' project (from hereafter, CILS4EU) to test our hypotheses (Kalter et al., 2013). These data constitute a nationally representative sample of 18,716 pupils (around 15 years old) in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. The data contain information about native pupils and first and second generation immigrant pupils. We define ethnic groups by pupil's parental birth countries, as is common in European ethnic research (Baerveldt et al., 2004, 2007; Lubbers et al., 2010; Vermeij et al., 2009; Zijlstra et al., 2006).

Because we use cross-sectional data, we examine the structure of friendship networks on a specific moment and we cannot examine the dynamic process that underlies friendship choice. Therefore, we cannot single out actual preferences, as there are many other mechanisms that may have caused a friendship to develop. In this study, we approximate ethnic homophily (i.e., a preference) by examining the relative frequency of ingroup and outgroup friendships taking the opportunities to have such friends into account.

Ethnic homophily thus relates to the tendency to have more ethnic ingroup friends than is expected from the opportunity structure alone.

As we study four countries, we will provide a short description of relevant immigrant groups in these countries in the next section before we discuss our theoretical framework, data, methods, results and conclusions. Our dataset includes children of immigrants of circa 100 countries. All these pupils are included in our analysis, but we only explicitly describe and analyze the largest and most salient immigrant groups in the four countries.

## 2. Children of immigrants in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden

Although Western-European countries have their own immigration history, they share similarities in the types of immigrants that have settled. Western-European countries at first recruited low educated foreign workers from the European periphery in the 1950s and later from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s in order to meet demands of production expansion (Castles and Miller, 2003; Rystad, 1992). Because of chain migration (i.e., migration of extended kin and friends long after the first labour immigrants arrived) and marriages with partners from the country of origin, children of Turkish immigrants in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, Italian immigrants in Germany, and Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands account for a large part of the immigrant adolescent population.

Second, there is a considerable group of children of immigrants from post-colonial countries. These include children of Indian, Pakistani and Caribbean immigrants in England and children of Surinamese, Antillean and Aruban immigrants in the Netherlands. In the process of de-colonization by the beginning of the 1950s to the 1970s, a large share of the colonized countries' population chose to immigrate to England and the Netherlands with an economic motivation (Castles and Miller, 2003). Due to chain migration and marriage migration, children of post-colonial immigrants still constitute a considerable share of immigrant children.

Third, refugee immigrants and their children fled from war or conflict in their home country (Castles and Miller, 2003). Examples are Iraqi, Bosnian and Lebanese immigrants in Sweden and Nigerian immigrants in England. These groups are generally relatively new immigrant groups.

Lastly, some immigrant groups originate from neighbouring countries, like Polish immigrants in Germany. Children from Russian immigrants in Germany make up an exceptional group. A considerable share of them are known as 'ethnic Germans' and descent from Germans who emigrated to Russia and repatriated (Castles and Miller, 2003).

Immigrant groups per country vary in their socioeconomic and cultural integration. Immigrants from neighbouring countries are highly similar to the native population and are therefore known to blend relatively easy into the host society. In contradiction, many labour and post-colonial immigrant groups struggle with educational and socioeconomic deprivation (Algan et al., 2010; Rystad, 1992; Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006). This is usually explained as a consequence of recruiting low educated immigrant workers for low-cost and unskilled labour. Also, efforts to socioeconomically integrate immigrants have been minor at first as the Dutch and German government expected guest workers to stay temporarily (Algan et al., 2010; Castles and Miller, 2003).

In addition, many large labour and post-colonial immigrant groups also culturally differ from the native population as they adhere to Islam instead of Christianity (i.e., Pakistani, Turks and Moroccans). For these groups, the process of cultural integration has been considered more difficult, which has raised concern

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