



# Parental acceptance of children's intimate ethnic outgroup relations: The role of culture, status, and family reputation<sup>☆</sup>

Anke Munniksma<sup>a,\*</sup>, Andreas Flache<sup>a,1</sup>, Maykel Verkuyten<sup>b,2</sup>, René Veenstra<sup>a,3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Groningen, Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology, Grote Rozenstraat 31, 9712 TG Groningen, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Department of General Social Sciences, The European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands

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## ABSTRACT

Research on adolescents' interethnic relations indicates that parents can resist their children's ethnic outgroup relations. However, there is little insight into the underlying reasons for this. The current study examines how cultural groups differ in parental acceptance of their children's outgroup relations, and it examines the role of perceived family reputation vulnerability as well as parents' religiosity. In addition, it was investigated whether parental acceptance of outgroup relations differs for different outgroups. This was studied among Turkish ( $n = 49$ ) and Dutch ( $n = 73$ ) parents of first grade middle school students. Parental acceptance of intimate ethnic outgroup relations was lower among Turkish–Dutch than among Dutch parents. This difference was explained by group differences in perceived family reputation vulnerability and religiosity. It is concluded that concerns about culture transmission and family reputation are related to parental acceptance of outgroup contact, which explains differences in parental acceptance between cultural groups. In addition, status considerations seem to explain differences in parental acceptance of their children's close contacts with different outgroups.

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## 1. Introduction

Although multi-ethnic schools are an important arena for adolescents' interethnic contacts, research on friendship networks typically found ethnic segregation in friendships in these schools (Baerveldt, van Duijn, Vermeij, & Hemert, 2004; Moody, 2001; Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Ethnic school composition (Vervoort, Scholte, & Scheepers, 2011) and school policies affect interethnic relations within school classes (Goldsmith, 2004; Stearns, 2004). In addition, parents might have an influence on their children's outgroup attitudes and on close peer relations in particular (Edmonds & Killen, 2009). Research on school choice (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2009; Karsten, Ledoux, Roeleveld, Felix, & Elshof, 2003), outgroup marriage (e.g. Tolsma, Lubbers, & Coenders, 2008), and dating (Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004) shows that parents often resist the idea of

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 50 3636212; fax: +31 50 3636226.

E-mail addresses: [a.munniksma@rug.nl](mailto:a.munniksma@rug.nl) (A. Munniksma), [a.flache@rug.nl](mailto:a.flache@rug.nl) (A. Flache), [m.verkuyten@uu.nl](mailto:m.verkuyten@uu.nl) (M. Verkuyten), [d.r.veenstra@rug.nl](mailto:d.r.veenstra@rug.nl) (R. Veenstra).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +31 50 3636214; fax: +31 50 3636226.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +31 30 2535559; fax: +31 30 2534733.

<sup>3</sup> Tel.: +31 50 3636240; fax: +31 50 3636226.

their children having intimate relations with peers of other ethnic groups. In addition, Edmonds and Killen (2009) found that perceived parental attitudes toward outgroup contacts affect adolescents' friendships and dating behavior.

Whereas there is evidence of parents' resistance to their children's close contacts with ethnic outgroup peers, there is relatively little understanding of the underlying reasons why some parents show more resistance than others. The current study examines ethnic group differences in parental acceptance of close and intimate outgroup relations, and whether these differences can be explained by parents' perceived family reputation vulnerability and religiosity. Family reputation vulnerability refers to the degree to which parents perceive that the reputation of their family is affected negatively when their children deviate from ingroup norms. Religiosity captures the extent to which parents practice their religion in daily life. To assess parental acceptance of outgroup contact and the role of family reputation and religion, we compare Turkish–Dutch and Dutch parents. Dutch parents belong to the ethnic majority group, whereas the Turkish–Dutch are the largest non-western ethnic minority group in the Netherlands. In addition, we assess whether acceptance of ethnic outgroup contact differs depending on the target group. For the native Dutch parents in our study the outgroups are peers of Turkish and Moroccan origin, and for the Turkish–Dutch parents the outgroups are native Dutch and Moroccan peers.

### 1.1. Parental acceptance of intimate outgroup relations

Perceptions of cultural differences between ethnic groups can be a reason for parents to prefer ethnic ingroup over outgroup contacts for their children. This is in line with the homophily principle (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) and the similarity attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971) which both state that people prefer similar others to affiliate with. Research showing parental resistance to ethnically mixed schools (Karsten et al., 2003) suggests that the homophily principle generalizes to parents' preferences for their children's interethnic relations. In addition, Kwak (2003) showed that parents typically try to transmit their ethnocultural norms and values to their children. Children's intimate outgroup relations can be perceived as undermining this transmission process because the values that adolescents endorse are influenced by their peers (Vedder, Berry, Sabatier, & Sam, 2009).

Studies in the United States have shown that ethnic groups differ in the extent to which they endorse collectivist versus individualist values (e.g. Ayçiçeği-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris, 2011; Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). Ethnic groups in the Netherlands also differ in their value orientations. For example, immigrant parents often think that Dutch society is too liberal (Pels, Distelbrink, Postma, & Geense, 2009). Furthermore, values like obedience, respect for parents, and norm conformity are more strongly endorsed in the Turkish culture and among Turkish–Dutch people than in West-European cultures and among the native Dutch (Pels et al., 2009). Conversely, values like independence, assertiveness, and individual success are endorsed more in individualistic cultures (Harwood, Schoelmerich, Schulze, & Gonzalez, 1999) and among the native Dutch. Thus, both Turkish–Dutch and native Dutch parents might perceive the cultural values of other-ethnic peers as somewhat incompatible or contradictory to the culture they want to transmit to their children.

In addition, parents might be concerned about the related behavior of outgroup peers. Dutch parents might perceive peers from immigrant backgrounds to engage more in deviant and criminal behaviors, in part because that is what is reported in the media (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Westers, 1998; Lubbers, Scheepers & Vergeer, 2000). And Turkish–Dutch parents might be concerned about the 'dangers of the Dutch society'. That is, they might worry about the behavior of Dutch children, because of the permissive socialization styles of Dutch parents (Pels et al., 2009) and the liberties in Dutch society toward, for example, sexuality and the use of drugs. Thus, parents might be less accepting of outgroup relations because they are concerned about their children to adopt the different values and behaviors of ethnic outgroup peers.

Resistance to intimate outgroup relations is likely to exist in many ethnic groups, but not necessarily to the same extent. Particularly in cultures that put high value on conformity and family integrity it is more important for parents that their children do not deviate from ingroup norms. Several studies have shown that conformity and family integrity are more strongly endorsed among the Turkish–Dutch than the native Dutch (e.g. Phaet & Schönpflug, 2001a; Verkuyten, 2001). In addition, as an ethnic minority group, Turkish–Dutch parents may be concerned that their children will 'Dutchify' (i.e. "acting White") and lose their culture (Nijsten, 1998; Verkuyten, 2003). Therefore we expect that parental acceptance of intimate outgroup relations will be lower among Turkish–Dutch parents than among native Dutch parents (*cultural background hypothesis*).

An additional argument for the cultural background hypothesis is that ethnic groups may differ in the relative feeling of control over their children when it comes to friendship or partner choices. For Turkish–Dutch parents it generally is more important that their children defer to parental wishes regarding friendship or partner choices compared to native Dutch parents. Native Dutch parents, however, expect their children to be more independent (Huisberts, Oosterwegel, VanderValk, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2006) and to choose their own friends and partners.

Studies on interethnic marriage argue that social influence from third parties affects the preferences for ingroup versus outgroup marriages (e.g. Kalmijn, 1998). More generally, significant others in the ethnic community can set the norms for behavior, and individuals who do not follow those norms tend to face sanctions. This is in line with the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1985) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) that both argue that preferences and behavior are influenced by group norms and the perceived pressure to conform.

Following the idea that the ethnic community reinforces ingroup norms, we argue that *family reputation vulnerability* may be related to the parental acceptance of their children's outgroup contacts. Family reputation vulnerability refers to the extent to which parents think that the behavior of their child affects the reputation of the family within their ethnic

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