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Ethnic Attitudes and Social Projection in the Classroom

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This research examined the process and conditions of social projection of biased ethnic attitudes to classmates in two samples of Grades 4–6 children (n = 342, M_{age} = 10.75, SD = 0.98; 49% girls; and n = 525, M_{age} = 10.49 years, SD = 0.96; 51% girls). Children reported on the ethnic group norm in their classroom and on their own ethnic attitudes. Multilevel analyses showed that ethnic majority (Studies 1 and 2) and ethnic minority (Study 2) children's norm perceptions were partly accurate as they not only reflected the aggregated attitudes in each classroom but also related to children's unique attitudes that indicated social projection. Projection was stronger for the most disadvantaged minority group and for children with less depressed affect.

Social developmental research has convincingly shown that, from middle childhood on, intergroup attitudes and behaviors are regulated by peer group norms (Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Mähönen, & Liebkind, 2011; Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2011; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005; Sierksma, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2014). Children's negative and positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors depend on perceived in-group norms that promote either prosociality or prejudice. This research works from the assumption that social norms exert their influence through children's awareness and understanding of them. Yet, in addition to processes of social influence there is the possibility of the reversed process of social projection whereby children have the tendency to assume that others think, feel, and behave similarly to themselves (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). This possibility has been largely neglected in the developmental literature on intergroup relations but has important implications: If there is mutual influence, perceived norms partly reflect what children themselves already think, and this means that these norms play a less formative role in intergroup relations than previous research suggests.

The classroom is a particularly relevant and ecologically valid context for examining children's perceived peer group norms. Children spend many hours at school and classmates constitute an important reference group for children and contribute to a classroom norm about intergroup differentiation (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013). In the present research, we sought to explain preadolescent children's (Grades 4–6) perceptions of a descriptive classroom norm about ethnic in-group bias: the more positive evaluation of the ethnic in-group compared to the ethnic out-group. We focused on preadolescence because of important sociocognitive developments in this age period that make children increasingly aware of social group norms and of ethnicity as a dimension for group evaluation (Aboud, 2008; Killen & Rutland, 2011). We examined ethnic Dutch majority children (Studies 1 and 2) and children of Turkish or Moroccan descent (Study 2) from various ethnically mixed schools in the Netherlands. Due to large-scale labor immigration in the 1960s, people of Moroccan and Turkish origin are the two largest and most typical non-Western ethnic minority groups in Dutch society. They have low socioeconomic status, face relatively much discrimination (Gijsberts, Huijnk, & Dagevos, 2012), and are evaluated rather negatively by native Dutch children (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) and other ethnic minority group children (Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000), whereby the Moroccan Dutch are the most disadvantaged group that is evaluated most negatively (SCP, 2007).

In two studies we measured children's perceptions of the descriptive classroom norm by asking them to indicate how their in-group and their out-group(s) are evaluated by most children in their classroom. We expected that children's subjective norm perception would not only partly reflect the

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"actual" norm in their classrooms—that is, the aggregated attitudes of all classmates—but also that there would be normative misperception due to social projection. To examine this process of social projection we tested different hypotheses about the conditions under which social projection should be most pronounced. Specifically, we examined the moderating role of classroom acceptance and identification, ethnic similarity in the classroom, ethnic group status (majority vs. minority; Study 2), depressed affect (Study 2), and age.

Social Influence and Social Projection

According to self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people rely on others because they provide them with relevant information about the social world. Group membership regulates individual thinking and feeling by providing a shared perspective. When a peer group is important to children, they tend to see the world from the perspective of its members. There is correlational evidence for such normative effects in relation to children's group evaluations (Kiesner, Maass, Cadinu, & Vallese, 2003; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013). Additionally, experimental research has shown that peer group norms influence children's intergroup evaluations. Peer group norms about intergroup relations become salient around middle childhood (Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013) and affect children's behavioral intentions (De França & Monteiro, 2013) and intergroup behavior (Fitzroy & Rutland, 2010). Children tend to be aware of how their classmates think about intergroup relations and the descriptive classroom norm can influence their own evaluations.

However, there is also the possibility of the reversed process of social projection. In everyday settings, what other children think about social groups is not always clear. This means that there is room for normative misperception and that children might use their own attitudes and beliefs to assess what is endorsed in their peer group. Social projection is "the process, or set of processes, by which people come to expect others to be similar to themselves" (Robbins & Krueger, 2005, p. 32). This process is also referred to as self-anchoring, whereby the self is used as a heuristic to make group judgments: the egocentric projection of personal self-attributes onto a group (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996). Social projection is a robust phenomenon that has been studied extensively among adults in many settings (see Robbins & Krueger, 2005), and also children are likely to project their own attitudes onto their peers (e.g., Abrams, 2011; Wetzel & Walton, 1985). Social projection leads to perceptions of false normative consensus because children generalize their attitudes to their peer group and therefore wrongly assume that their classmates' attitudes are more similar to their own than they actually are (Krueger, 1998).

In the present research, we examined the possibility of projection by regressing children's perception of the descriptive interethnic classroom norm on their own attitudes. Yet as children are part of the classroom peer group, the measurement of their personal attitudes may be confounded with the "actual" norm in the classroom (the aggregated attitudes). To control for this confound we used a group-mean centering approach (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), which means that we aggregated the individual attitudes across all students in each classroom and that we subtracted those from the participants' own attitudes. The resulting measure indicates children's unique deviation from the "actual" norm in their classroom, or that part of their own attitude that is not shared with their classmates, and by definition this deviation is independent of the latter (see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Thus, a positive deviation indicates a relatively high score for children's own attitude, whereas a negative deviation indicates a relatively low score. When the norm deviation predicts the perceived classroom attitude, this effect suggests false consensus due to projection. Given previous studies, we expected this to be the case in our research. This expectation and our approach to studying social projection are shown in Figure 1. Whereas path "a" denotes the impact of the "actual" norm as a shared

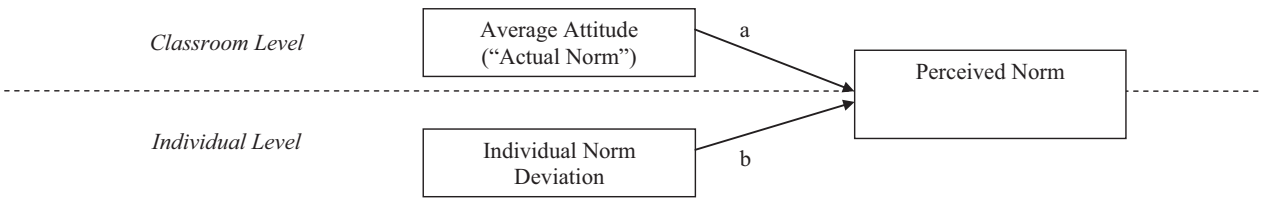

Figure 1. Examination of social projection in the present studies.

classroom characteristic, path "b" indicates the unique impact of children's individual norm deviations (IND; i.e., the effect of their unique attitudes), and thus, the degree of social projection. Note that path "b" involves a linear effect and that no theoretical distinction is made between the effect of positive versus negative deviation.

Conditions of Social Projection

Ethnic Similarity and Classroom Belonging

Although social projection is a robust phenomenon, there are different contextual and individual conditions that could make it less or more likely. First, social projection tends to be stronger when there is greater (perceived) overlap between oneself and the group (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). In the present research we studied this overlap in terms of actual ethnic similarity, and in terms of perceived classroom acceptance and identification, and we tested whether these factors moderate the link between children's norm deviation and the perceived classroom norm (path "b" in Figure 1). We examined the role of ethnic group similarity by considering the percentage of coethnic students in the classroom. Social projection implies assimilating the group to the individual self, and this is more likely when the group is more similar to oneself (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). Coethnic peers tend to be more similar in preferences, beliefs, and practices than other ethnic peers, making social projection more likely in relation to coethnics. Thus, in classes with more coethnic classmates, we expected a stronger link between the norm deviations and the perceived classroom norm (indicating more projection).

Unlike ethnic similarity, classroom acceptance and classroom identification reflect the extent to which a child feels similar and connects to his or her classmates. In contrast to social projection, self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) proposes a process of assimilating the individual self to the in-group. Self-categorization implies that norms and beliefs of the in-group become part of the psychological self and thereby provide the guidelines for appropriate intergroup behavior; this is especially likely for children who experience acceptance and belonging. Acceptance and group identification, however, might also stimulate social projection (Ames, 2004). When children identify with their classmates and feel accepted by them they are probably more likely to assume that their classmates think and feel similarly as themselves. Self-categorization theory acknowledges this possibility by arguing that group belonging also implies that we *expect to agree* with fellow group members (Turner et al., 1987). When children identify with their classmates they do not only take over the perspective of their classmates but also expect to agree with them on important issues. Thus, for children who feel more accepted by their classmates (Study 1) and for higher classroom identifiers (Study 2), we predicted a stronger link between norm deviation and perceived classroom norm.

Ethnic Group Status

In Study 2—where there were sufficiently large numbers of Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch students in the sample—we also examined the moderating role of children's ethnic group status (Study 2). Research among adults has shown that social projection occurs among majority and minority groups alike (e.g., Krueger & Clement, 1997). Yet, in these studies, group status (majority or minority) is defined by participants' own scores on the beliefs or attributes they are asked to estimate for their level of consensus. To our knowledge, no studies have examined whether the projection of ethnic group attitudes is equally likely for ethnic minority versus ethnic majority group members. In the present research we examined two contradictory hypotheses. On the one hand it can be expected that ethnic minority children project their ethnic attitudes more than majority children because of self-protective considerations. Research in the Netherlands has shown that there is a relative dislike of Turks and Moroccans, not only among native Dutch children but also among youth from other ethnic minority groups (Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000). Moreover, Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch children suffer relatively high levels of discrimination, and this has a negative impact on their self-feelings (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). Social situations that are threatening to one's sense of self can stimulate self-projection (Elkind, 1967). On the other hand, however, as members of a low-status group, minority children are probably more aware of their classmates' ethnic attitudes. This might mean that they are less likely to rely on their personal attitudes when making inferences about the classroom norm. Thus, in the present study we explored whether children's ethnic minority status increased or rather diminished their personal norm deviation.

Depressed Affect

Children's social projection might depend on their tendency to experience depressed affect such

as sadness, fear, and nervousness. Research among adults has shown that self-uncertainty increases reliance on others and stimulates sensitivity to what those others think and say (Pelham & Wachsmut, 1995). Children who feel depressed tend to be less certain about themselves and look to others for reassurance and guidance (Rudolph, Flynn, & Abaied, 2008). In contrast, children who feel secure about themselves tend to show autonomy and independence (Harter, 1999), and therefore are more likely to attribute their own attitudes to their classmates. Thus, children who feel positive and secure about themselves will more easily project from themselves to others compared to insecure children who rely more on others for their judgments and behavior. Thus, we expected a weaker association between norm deviation and perceived classroom norm among children who experience more depressed affect (Study 2).

Age Differences

We examined whether social projection depends on age. Social projection is a form of egocentric thinking, and from middle childhood on, children become less egocentric and increasingly sensitive to group differences and peer group norms (Aboud, 2008). With age children gain social-cognitive competencies, develop perspective taking abilities, and have more experiences with groups. As a result they develop increased understanding of how groups work and become more sensitive to group norms (Killen & Rutland, 2011). This could mean that social projection is less likely for older children. However, research has not found consistent age differences in children's assumptions that others share their own attitudes (see Abrams, 2011). Therefore, we will explore whether there are age differences.

Control Variables

In evaluating our hypotheses we considered four additional control variables. First, we controlled for children's gender because ethnic in-group bias appears to be lower among girls (e.g., Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012). Next, we controlled for norm dispersion (the degree to which there is variation around the average attitude in each classroom) and class size. Finally, in Study 2, we considered children's perceptions of multicultural education. In the Netherlands, there is variation in the extent to which teachers address issues of cultural diversity in their classrooms. Multicultural education has not only a prescriptive influence on children's ethnic attitudes (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013), but it may also affect their perceptions of group norms, which means that it is important to control for this factor.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data were collected in the spring of 2013. Participants were 342 children (M_{age} = 10.75, SD = 0.98; 49% girls) who had two native Dutch parents. We used this relatively strict criterion, as for our ethnic evaluation measures (see below) it was important that the children's ethnic in-group was "exclusively" Dutch and not a mixed or hyphenated category. The children were from 23 classes (Grades 4–6) in 8 schools in different parts of the Netherlands. The classes differed with respect to ethnic composition ($\%_{Dutch}$ = 67.4, SD = 25.8; range = 11.1–100), but no information was available about the socioeconomic status of the students. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous and all children with parental permission participated. Together with their classmates (native Dutch, or of different, mixed, or unknown ethnicities) the children independently filled in a questionnaire in their classroom under supervision of their teacher and a research assistant. The measures considered in the current study were part of a larger questionnaire. The booklet started with a short introduction that asked the children to respond to questions about school and themselves. Originally, the sample consisted of 349 ethnic Dutch students, but we used listwise deletion as the number of missing values on the relevant items (see below) was very small (< 1.5%) and Little's MCAR (Missing Completely At Random) test indicated that missings were completely at random, $\chi^2(41) = 45.38$, $p = .29$.

Measures

Children completed the "seven faces" scale developed by Yee and Brown (1992) to indicate their separate evaluations of Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan people, respectively. This scale ranges from 7 = *a big smile* to 1 = *a big frown* and has been successfully used to examine group attitudes in research among children (e.g., Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012). Earlier research in the Netherlands has provided support for the construct validity of this measurement by showing positive relations between

interethnic bias and ethnic identification in both minority and majority children (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). In the present study, we could also examine its concurrent validity by relating children's face evaluations of Moroccan people to their positive stereotypes of Moroccan children (as friendly, honest, nice, and helpful; see Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011) available for 339 respondents. As anticipated, there was a strong positive correlation (r = .69).

We first calculated an individual biased attitude score by computing a combined out-group evaluation score (the mean of the evaluations of Turks and Moroccans were M = 4.59, SD = 1.74 and M = 4.38, SD = 1.83, respectively; Cronbach's α = .90) and subtracting it from the evaluation of the Dutch. The bias score was positive (M = 2.31, SD = 1.73), and higher than zero, $t(341) = 24.67$, $p < .01$, indicating a significant preference for the Dutch in-group. To assess the *actual peer group norm* for each participant we calculated the average bias score in her or his classroom. This means that we assumed that each student contributed to the shared norm in his or her classroom. To assess *classroom norm dispersion* (our control variable) we calculated the standard deviation of the bias score in each classroom. Note that we used the full sample to compute these scores: the ethnic Dutch participants and their classmates of different, mixed, or unknown ethnicities. Of these other children, only 3 and 16 could be identified as Turkish and Moroccan Dutch, respectively. For < 1% of his larger group of children (N = 516) the individual bias score was missing. We computed children's *IND* by subtracting the actual peer group norm from their individual bias score. For the Dutch children, this norm deviation tended to be positive, M = 0.16, SD = 1.67; $t(341) = 1.82$, $p = .07$.

After reporting their personal group evaluations, children used the same seven faces response format to estimate how most of their classmates evaluate Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan people in the Netherlands. To obtain measures of the *perceived classroom norm* we averaged classmates' perceived evaluations of Turks and Moroccans (Cronbach's α = .86) and calculated a bias score in the above-described manner. Like the individual bias score, the mean score for the perceived classroom norm was positive indicating a bias in favor of the Dutch in-group compared to the Turkish and Moroccan out-groups, M = 2.29, SD = 1.61; $t(341) = 26.42$, $p < .01$.

Children's *perceived peer acceptance* in the classroom was measured with four items adapted from a 10-item measure developed by Rutland et al. (2012). These items were selected to diminish the burden of data collection for the participating students, translated by researchers fluent in English and Dutch, and reformulated to pertain to the classroom rather than the school in general. The items were "Are there many kids in class you can talk to?," "Are there many kids in class you do fun things with?," "Are there many kids in class you get along with?," and "Do most kids in class like you?" The response scale ranged from 1 = *no, certainly not!* to 5 = *yes, certainly!*. The four items loaded on one component explaining 71% of the variance and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .86. The four peer items that we used were considerably and negatively related to peer victimization (teasing, name-calling, social exclusion) in another sample of Dutch preadolescents ($r = -.46$; Thijs & Fleischmann, submitted for publication). Hence, our scale can be considered as an appropriate indicator of children's perceived peer acceptance.

Analyses

To account for the nested data in our sample, we used for the analysis multilevel models in MLwiN version 2.0 (Rasbash, Browne, Healy, Cameron, & Charlton, 2004). Two levels were specified: Level 1 pertaining to the individual children (n = 338) and Level 2 pertaining to each class (n = 23). Although classes were nested in schools, we did not include a third level representing the school as we had only eight schools. As MLwiN does not yield effect sizes, we standardized all continuous measures (z-scores) to facilitate the interpretation of the results. Gender differences were tested with a contrast that was coded "0.5" for girls and "−0.5" for boys.

Results

We examined whether there was social projection as well as perceived norm accuracy by regressing children's norm perceptions on their IND and the actual descriptive norm in the classroom. Children's peer acceptance and the ethnic classroom composition (percentage of Dutch students) were also included as predictors, and we considered the effects of age, gender, actual norm dispersion, and class size as well. Results are shown in Table 1 (Model 1). The effect of the actual classroom norm was significant indicating that children were at least partly accurate in their norm perceptions. Yet there was also a strong effect of the deviation measure that supports our hypothesis that children projected their own group evaluations onto the classroom

Table 1
Multilevel Models for Classroom Norm Perceptions in Study 1

	Model 1	Model 2
Level 1 predictors		
Individual norm deviation (IND)	.57**	.58**
Peer acceptance	.00	.00
Age	.11*	.11**
Gender	.07	.11
Level 2 predictors		
Classroom average norm	.50**	.49**
Classroom norm dispersion	−.07	−.09
% Dutch students	.22**	.20**
Class size	.13**	.12**
Interactions		
IND × Peer Acceptance	—	.13**
IND × Age	—	−.01
IND × % Dutch Students	—	.02
Variance		
Level 1	.413	.394
Level 2	.018	.016
Deviance	679.371	662.426

IND = individual norm deviation.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

peer group. Next, children's norm perceptions were unrelated to their gender, but older participants perceived a stronger classroom norm in favor of the in-group. As this effect was independent of the actual norm it appears to indicate an overestimation. Likewise, children in larger and more "ethnically Dutch" classrooms tended to overestimate the degree to which Turks and Moroccans were disfavored in their classroom.

In a next model (Model 2 in Table 1), we entered the interactions of norm deviation with peer acceptance, age, and ethnic classroom composition. Only for peer acceptance the interaction was statistically significant ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$). To examine the nature of this interaction, we conducted a set of simple slope analyses (see Aiken & West, 1991). Specifically, we calculated the effect of norm deviation for children who reported high versus low levels of peer acceptance (1 $SD > M$ and 1 $SD < M$, respectively). Results showed that the link between norm deviation and perceived peer norm was significant in both cases, but considerably stronger for strongly compared to weakly accepted children ($\beta = .71$, $p < .001$ vs. $\beta = .45$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Discussion

Study 1 provides evidence for social projection of children's own ethnic attitudes onto the classroom. Children's perceived descriptive classroom norm was partly accurate as it reflected the "actual" (aggregated) peer attitudes in their classroom. But on top of this, there was within-classroom variation in children's norm perceptions which indicated normative misperception.

This misperception was related to children's IND, which is by definition independent of the "actual" classroom attitudes. These findings suggests that the children used their personal views as a heuristic to make peer group judgments and hence that there was self-projection. Additional support for this interpretation is that the effect of IND was stronger among children who felt well accepted in the classroom. This fits with the theoretical notion that those who feel to belong to their group are more likely to use self-anchoring. We did not find an interaction between ethnic composition and norm deviation but rather a positive effect of the percentage of Dutch in-group children. Apparently, the children were more likely to assume that their classmates were more biased against Turks and Moroccans when more of their classmates were Dutch. This interpretation is a reasonable one as previous research has shown that native Dutch children are positively biased toward their in-group (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). Yet, the effect of classroom composition was found independently of the average pro-Dutch bias in the classroom and thus seems to involve an overestimation of the actual classmates' attitudes. In the next study, we examined the effects of in-group presence also for ethnic minority children.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate the findings of Study 1, to address two limitations of Study 1, and to additionally examine the moderating role of children's ethnicity and depressed affect. We explored whether children's ethnic minority status makes them more or rather less prone to use their own ethnic attitudes to estimate the classroom norms, and we tested the hypothesis that children with more depressed feelings are less likely to project their own attitudes on their classmates. Furthermore, we used a measure of children's classroom identification rather than peer acceptance, and we expected stronger social projection for higher identifiers. Concerning the limitations of Study 1, we sampled in Study 2 a larger number of classrooms, and we measured children's subjective norm perceptions prior to their personal group evaluations. In Study 1, we first measured children's own

evaluations and this might have artificially induced children to socially project their own attitudes to their classmates. Finally, we controlled for perceived multicultural education as it might act as a "third variable" causing spurious shared variance between children's own ethnic attitudes and the perceived classroom norms.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data collection took place in the beginning of 2014. Participants were 525 children (M_{age} = 10.49 years, SD = 0.96; 51% girls) from 39 Grades 4–6 classes in 18 schools, not included in Study 1. Of these students, 381 children were identified as native Dutch, 73 as Turkish, and 71 as Moroccan. This identification was based on children's self-labeling, and for native Dutch children, we used the additional criterion that both parents were born in the Netherlands. Based on an index that involved the number of cars, computers (including laptops and ipads), and televisions in the household (cf. Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) and that was available for 98.7% of the children, it could be concluded that the Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch children had considerably lower socioeconomic status than their Dutch peers ($p < .01$; partial $\eta^2 = .11$). The ethnic composition of the classes ranged from 0% to 100% Dutch students (M = 64.6, SD = 32.8). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous and all children with parental permission participated. Children independently filled in a questionnaire in their classroom under supervision of their teacher and a research assistant. Originally the sample consisted of 544 children (394 native Dutch, 75 Turkish, and 75 Moroccan). Because there were few missing values (< 1.5%) and missings appeared to be at random, $\chi^2(174) = 142.71$, $p = .96$, we used listwise deletion.

Measures

To measure children's evaluations of Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan people, as well as their perceptions of how those groups were evaluated by most students in their class, we used exactly the same measures as in Study 1. The only difference was that children's perception of the classroom norm was assessed prior to their own group evaluations, and that both measures were separated by six filler items. The calculations of the *actual* and the *perceived norms* as well as *classroom norm dispersion* and children's *IND* were also similar to those in Study 1. However, because we had different groups of respondents in our sample, the in-groups and out-groups were not the same for all of them. As in Study 1, Turks and Moroccans were examined as a combined out-group for the native Dutch children (for own evaluations, M = 4.45, SD = 2.01 and M = 4.29, SD = 2.10, respectively, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; for perceived class evaluations, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). For the Turkish and Moroccan children, we examined the Dutch as an out-group. For all groups, the average individual bias scores were significantly positive ($p < .01$), but the bias was significantly stronger ($p < .01$; partial $\eta^2 = .065$) for the Dutch children (M = 2.41, SD = 2.04) than for the Turkish and Moroccan children (M = 1.40, SD = 2.40 and M = 1.00, SD = 1.92, respectively). On average, the perceived classroom norm was positive as well, but again the score was higher ($p < .01$; partial $\eta^2 = .096$) for the Dutch children (M = 2.32, SD = 2.08) than for the Turkish and Moroccan children (M = 0.85, SD = 2.30 and M = 0.70, SD = 2.13, respectively). As in Study 1, we used the full sample (N = 843) to calculate the actual group norm and the norm deviation scores. Few values were missing for the personal evaluation scores in the larger sample (< 2.3%). On average, the norm deviation was positive indicating that children were more positive about their own ethnic group than their classmates. However, the norm deviation was stronger for the Turkish and Moroccan minority children (M = 1.51, SD = 2.16 and M = 1.18, SD = 1.90, respectively) compared to the Dutch majority children (M = 0.43, SD = 1.93; partial $\eta^2 = .043$).

Children's *classroom identification* was assessed with two items: "Do you like being in your class?" and "Are you proud of your class?" These items were adapted from a previous measure of group identification (see Sierksma et al., 2014), and had 5-point response scale ranging from 1 = *no!* to 5 = *yes!* and an α of .83. Children's *depressed affect* was measured with three items (4-point scale) adapted from the Profile of Mood States (McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971): "Some children are sometimes sad. How about you?," "Some children are nervous. How about you?," and "Some children are often afraid. How about you?." Principal component analyses yielded one factor explaining 66.84% of the variance and α was .75.

Children's *perception of multicultural education* in their classroom was measured with three items taken from previous research in the Netherlands

(see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013): "Does your teacher ever say that all cultures should be respected?," "Does your teacher ever say that it is wrong to discriminate?," and "Does your teacher ever say that people from all cultures are equal?" The response scale ranged from 1 = *absolutely never!* to 5 = *very often!*. The items loaded on one principal component explained 65.22% of the variance (α = .73).

Finally, the percentage of in-group students was calculated separately for the three ethnic groups. For the Dutch children, it was the percentage of Dutch students (M = 85.0, SD = 20.7). For the Turkish and Moroccan children it was the percentage of Turkish and Moroccan students (M = 36.9, SD = 21.2 and M = 47.1, SD = 1.83), respectively.

Analyses

We analyzed our data with multilevel models in MLwiN version 2.0 (Rasbash et al., 2004), and we specified a Level 1 to denote the individual children (n = 525) and a Level 2 to indicate the different classes (n = 39). We did not include a third level as the school and classroom level were confounded, as seven schools were represented by one classroom only. Again, we standardized all continuous measures at the student level to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

As we were interested in the role of ethnic group status, we used a contrast to compare the minority to the majority group children (coded "0.25" for the Turkish and Moroccan children and "−0.5" for the ethnic Dutch children). Yet we also specified an additional orthogonal contrast to explore the difference between Turkish ("0.5") and Moroccan ("−0.5") children (coded "0" for the Dutch respondents). Differences between girls and boys were also examined by means of a contrast ("0.5" and "−0.5," respectively). Finally, as there was a strong correlation between the proportion of in-group students and the actual classroom norms (r = .80), we also conducted our analyses without the latter. Although this yielded stronger main effects of in-group proportion, our conclusions about this variable were essentially the same. Hence, we do not present these additional analyses here.

Results

First, we tested whether the perceived classroom norms are predicted by the actual (average) classroom norm and children's IND (indicating projection), independent of students' classroom identification, perceptions of multicultural education, gender, age, and the percentage of ethnic Dutch children, classroom norm dispersion, and the size of the class. As shown in Table 2, the results were similar to the findings in Study 1. Again there was a significant positive effect of the deviation measure, which suggests projection. But there was also a positive effect of the actual norm suggesting that, on average, the norm perception was at least partially accurate. Again, there was a negative main effect of the percentage of in-group students indicating that children were more likely to assume that their classmates were positively biased toward their group the more these classmates shared their ethnicity. In addition to this, there was a unique positive effect of the minority–majority contrast, despite our previous univariate finding that minority children reported a less biased classroom norm than their majority peers. Once the effects of the actual classroom norm and the proportion of in-group students were partialed out, minority children were more likely to overestimate the classroom's preference for their ethnic in-group.

In Model 2, we added the interactions of children's norm deviation with their ethnicity, age,

Table 2
Multilevel Models 1 and 2 for Classroom Norm Perceptions in Study 2

	Model 1	Model 2
Predictors		
Individual norm deviation (IND)	.48**	.55**
Ethnicity Contrast 1 (minority vs. majority)	.45**	.38**
Ethnicity Contrast 2 (Turkish vs. Moroccan)	−.01	.06
Classroom identification	−.01	.01
Insecurity	−.06*	−.06*
Age	.03	.03
Gender	−.04	−.03
Classroom average norm	.64**	.66**
Classroom norm dispersion	.00	.02
Multicultural education	−.05	−.03
% In-group students	.23**	.20**
Class size	.02	.01
Interactions		
IND × Ethnicity Contrast 1	—	.15
IND × Ethnicity Contrast 2	—	−.24*
IND × Classroom Identification	—	.05*
IND × % Insecurity	—	−.07**
IND × Age	—	.03
IND × % In-Group Students	—	.03
Variance		
Level 1	.373	.356
Level 2	.013	.011
Deviance	986.350	960.281

IND = individual norm deviation.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

classroom identification, depressed affect, and the percentage of in-group students. Table 2 shows that three of these interactions are significant. First, although there is no interaction with the majority–minority group contrast, the effect of the norm deviation differed for the Turkish versus the Moroccan students. Further inspection with dummies for ethnicity showed that this effect was weaker for the former ($\beta = .47$, $p < .01$) than for the latter group ($\beta = .70$, $p < .01$), and also that it was significantly ($p < .05$) weaker for the Dutch ($\beta = .47$, $p < .01$) compared to the Moroccan but not compared to the Turkish children. This indicates that the Moroccan children were more likely to project their ethnic attitudes on their classroom peers.

Next, norm deviation interacted significantly with classroom identification and depressed affect. Consistent with our hypothesis, simple slope analyses showed that the positive effect of children's norm deviation was somewhat stronger for children with higher versus lower classroom identification ($\beta = .59$ vs. $\beta = .50$, respectively, both ps $< .01$). Also as expected, the effect of the IND was weaker for children who reported more versus less depressed affect ($\beta = .47$ vs. $\beta = .62$, respectively, both ps $< .01$).

In a third model (see Table 3), we explored whether the interactions of norm deviation with classroom identification, depressed affect, age, and proportion in-group students differed for the different ethnic groups. Therefore, we calculated the three-way interactions between the ethnicity contrasts and these two-way interactions and entered them as predictors to the regression model. For the sake of completeness, we also included the two-way interactions between ethnicity and the four aforementioned variables. There were two significant three-way interactions: between the minority–majority contrast, norm deviation, and proportion in-group students ($p = .05$); and between the minority–majority contrast, norm deviation, and classroom identification ($p < .05$). These three-way interactions are plotted in Figures 2 and 3. As Figure 1 shows, the interaction between norm deviation and the percentage of in-group students was significant for the minority children only ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). For them, the effect of their IND was stronger in classrooms with more coethnic peers. However, the two-way interaction between the minority–majority contrast and in-group percentage was significant as well ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .01$), and as shown by the differences in intercepts in Figure 2, the main effect of in-group percentage was significant for the Dutch children only ($\beta = .35$, $p < .051$).

Table 3
Multilevel Model 3 for Classroom Norm Perceptions in Study 2

	Model 3
Two-way interactions	
Classroom Identification × Ethnicity Contrast 1	−.10
Classroom Identification × Ethnicity Contrast 2	−.38**
Insecurity × Ethnicity Contrast 1	−.05
Insecurity × Ethnicity Contrast 2	.00
Age × Ethnicity Contrast 1	.00
Age × Ethnicity Contrast 2	.16
% In-Group Students × Ethnicity Contrast 1	−.47**
% In-Group Students × Ethnicity Contrast 2	−.26
Three-way interactions	
IND × Classroom Identification × Ethnicity Contrast 1	−.19*
IND × Classroom Identification × Ethnicity Contrast 2	−.09
IND × Insecurity × Ethnicity Contrast 1	.01
IND × Insecurity × Ethnicity Contrast 2	.05
IND × Age × Ethnicity Contrast 1	−.05
IND × Age × Ethnicity Contrast 2	.04
IND × % In-Group Students × Ethnicity Contrast 1	.18*
IND × % In-Group Students × Ethnicity Contrast 2	−.11
Variance	
Level 1	.326
Level 2	.011
Deviance	914.996

Note. Predictors from Model 2 (Table 2) are included but not shown in the model. IND = individual norm deviation.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p < .01$.

Next, the interaction between classroom identification and norm deviation was significant for the Dutch children only ($\beta = .09$, $p < .01$). Figure 3 shows that the effect of projection was stronger when those children identified more with their class.

Discussion

Similar to Study 1, Study 2 indicates that children's ethnic peer norm perceptions in the classroom partly reflects their IND, that is, that part of their ethnic attitude not shared with their classmates. This again suggests that they used their personal views as a heuristic to make peer group judgments, and hence that there was social projection. Going beyond Study 1, we found this projection for each of the three ethnic groups although it appeared to be especially strong for the Moroccan-Dutch children. Moreover, for all three groups we

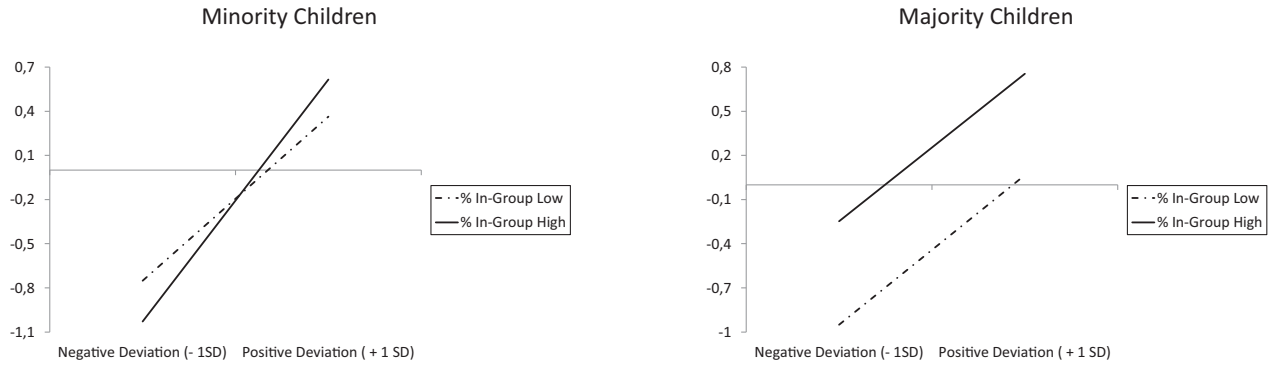

Figure 2. Effects of norm deviation on perceived classroom norm (social projection) by ethnic group (minority vs. majority) and percentage of ethnic in-group students.

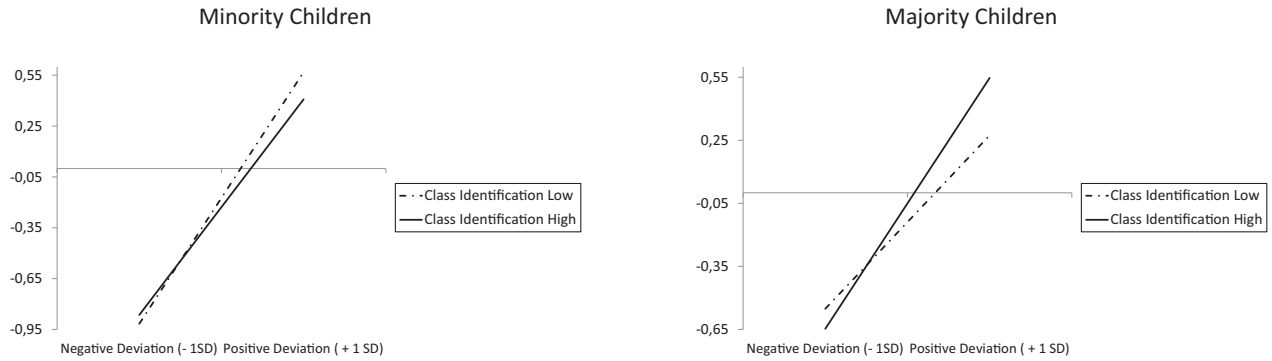

Figure 3. Effects of norm deviation on perceived classroom norm (social projection) by ethnic group (minority vs. majority) and class identification.

found the expected negative interaction between depressed affect and IND. Thus, children with less depressed self-feelings and therefore more self-certainty were more likely to assume that their classmates shared their ethnic attitudes. However, two of the other expected moderators appeared to work out differently for the different ethnic groups. Classroom identification was associated with more projection but not among the ethnic minority children. Conversely, the percentage of ethnic in-group classmates strengthened the relation between norm deviation and the perceived classroom norm for the Turkish and Moroccan children only. Yet and similar to Study 1, for the Dutch children this ethnic similarity had the positive main effect indicating more overestimation of bias in "more Dutch" classrooms.

General Discussion

In this research, we provided systematic empirical evidence indicating that the perception of peer group norms can in part be the result of social projection. Although our studies had a cross-sectional design and therefore do not allow strict causal conclusions, our interpretation of the direction of effects is clearly consistent with our theoretically derived hypotheses. Children seem to use their ethnic attitudes as a heuristic to make peer group judgments. Thus, they assume that peers share their own attitudes that confirm the contention that projection from the self can be an important element in intergroup biases (Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Robbins & Krueger, 2005). This process of self-anchoring indicates that the relation between descriptive peer norms and individual attitudes is a two-way street. Peers do not only influence children's intergroup evaluations, but these evaluations also affect the perception of peer norms. Both processes can be at work and both have been shown to contribute to a sense of self-group overlap (Van Veelen, Otten, & Hansen, 2011). Importantly, we found no interaction effects for age which indicates that the social projection process is similar for our age group (Grades 4–6). Thus, although with age

children become better in social perspective-taking ability and develop an increasing understanding of groups and group norms (Killen & Rutland, 2011), these developments do not seem to affect the egocentric tendency to assume that peers share one's own ethnic attitudes. As such our findings do not support the cognitive development perspective that proposes that more advanced cognitive development involves lower egocentrism (Aboud, 2008).

The findings in our second study indicated that children's tendency to project their ethnic attitudes on the classroom peer group exists among ethnic majority and minority groups. We anticipated that this tendency could be both stronger and weaker for minority children. Given their low status position, ethnic minority children are more likely to like their own group more than their classmates, and this was indeed evidenced by the higher deviation scores among the Turkish and Moroccan children in Study 2. Theoretically, this could lead not only to more projection to protect one's self-feelings but also to a more realistic assessment of what others are actually thinking and saying. Our results were consistent with the first possibility. The evidence for projection was especially strong for the Moroccan children. This fits with recent conclusions that although both Turks and Moroccans are at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy in the Netherlands, the latter are most discriminated and least accepted in Dutch society (SCP, 2007). Despite this difference, however, the degree of projection was considerable for all ethnic groups.

Aside from children's ethnicity, the relative impact of children norm deviations, and hence the degree of projection, was found to depend on a number of contextual and individual conditions. Social projection tends to be stronger when there is overlap between self and others (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). This is consistent with the claim of self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) that shared group membership also implies that people *expect* to agree more with in-group members. We examined the overlap between children and their classmates by including the percentage of coethnic students as well as the degree to which children experienced a sense of belonging to their class (feeling accepted in Study 1, and identification in Study 2). The effects of these moderators were consistent with our hypotheses, but they differed for the ethnic minority and majority children in Study 2. For the latter, there was the anticipated moderating effect of acceptance and identification, indicating that majority children projected more when they felt more connected to their classroom. This effect was absent for the minority children suggesting that for them a sense of classroom connection is not a sufficient condition for more strongly assuming that their classmates share their ethnic attitudes. Presumably, this difference has to do with the fact that pro-Dutch bias is far more common than pro-Turkish or pro-Moroccan biases in Dutch school classes (e.g., Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013), something we found in the present research as well. Thus, even if a stronger sense of classroom identification would make minority children feel more similar to their classmates, this sense of similarity does not seem to extend to the perception of peer ethnic attitudes.

However, for minority children, the (false) assumption of consensus is a reasonable one to make when the peer group is more ethnically similar. Accordingly, we found that Turkish and Moroccan students projected more in classrooms with more coethnic students. For the Dutch children, the proportion of fellow Dutch students did not moderate the effect of the IND suggesting that it did not create an overlap between self and others that stimulates social projection. This may have to do with the fact that the Dutch children were the numerical majority in almost all of the participating classrooms. Yet, in both studies there was a direct positive effect of the percentage of in-group students. Apparently Dutch children assumed that the norm in the classroom was more pro-Dutch when there were more Dutch classmates. Although this did not cause false consensus, it still led to a less accurate norm perception.

As expected, children's depressed affect was related to less social projection, and this was found for each of the three ethnic groups. Depressed affect implies self-uncertainty (Rudolph et al., 2008) and therefore less reliance on the self when making social judgments (Pelham & Wachsmut, 1995). As a consequence, self-anchoring is less likely. In contrast, children who feel positive and secure about themselves will more easily attribute their own attitudes toward others (Harter, 1999). It is important to note that especially this finding supports our interpretation in terms of social projection (assimilating the group to the self) rather than a reversed explanation in terms of social influence (assimilating the self to the group). If the relation between norm deviation and norm perception reflected the latter, it should be stronger rather than weaker among children with depressed feelings. Given their self-uncertainty, these children would be more rather than less strongly oriented toward their peers' opinions (Pelham & Wachsmut, 1995).

Some limitations of the current research and some future directions should be considered. First, as noted, we used a cross-sectional design to investigate the associations between children's deviations from the "actual" ethnic attitudes and their subjective perceptions of what they thought that most classmates felt about ethnic groups. These associations might therefore also be understood in terms of the reverse process of social influence. It is very likely that both processes are at work, and future research should use longitudinal designs to disentangle the two. Yet, our interpretation of the direction of effects is consistent with our theoretically derived hypotheses about the conditions of social projection. Moreover, two of our findings—the moderating effect of depressed affect and the stronger link between norm deviations and norm perceptions among the Moroccan minority children—are supportive of an interpretation in terms of social projection. Additionally and in contrast to other research on social projection (e.g., Abrams, 2011), our approach made it possible to examine this process in a, for children, important and ecologically valid context and by considering the actual attitudes of their peers.

Second, in examining ethnic attitudes and processes of social influence and social projection, future studies could consider social network analysis. The present analyses focused on the whole school class, and in using aggregated scores we made the assumption that each student contributes to the shared norm in his or her classroom. However, research on peer harassment and peer networks at school has shown that there less and more influential students and the latter—so-called social referents—may be more important in setting social norms (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012).

Third, future studies should consider studying a broader age range to examine possible age differences in social projection and in particular the possible decline in social projection with age (Yinon, Mayraz, & Fox, 1994). These studies should also consider to include measures of cognitive development such as social perspective-taking ability. Doing so could improve our understanding of the cognitive abilities and motivational mechanisms underlying social projection. In general, further research needs to determine the generalizability of these results across different ages, individual difference variables, contexts, and types of groups.

Despite its limitations, the current research contributes to our understanding of children's interethnic attitudes by showing that descriptive peer norms do not only influence children's attitudes but that children also have the tendency to assume that their peers have the same attitudes. The two studies demonstrate that the perception of the classmates' attitudes does not only depend on the actual attitudes of these classmates but also on the extent to which the child's attitude differs from these actual attitudes.

With this research we provide a deeper understanding of the role of peer group norms in children's interethnic attitudes. An increasing number of studies focus on the role of peer norms for children's intergroup relations. This research has shown that these norms affect children's negative as well as positive attitudes and behavioral intentions (De França & Monteiro, 2013; Sierksma et al., 2014). Going beyond this literature, our findings indicate that children also rely on their own attitudes as an anchor to give meaning to their peer group and that there are specific conditions under which this is more likely. The theoretical implication is that the role of peer group norms for interethnic relations should not only be considered from a social influence perspective but also from the perspective of social projection.

The practical implication of the findings relate to the improvement of interethnic attitudes. There are various approaches and interventions for trying to improve ethnic attitudes (see Aboud et al., 2012, for a review) and a focus on peer influences is one of them (e.g., Liebkind & McAlister, 1999). Peers can play an important role in developing ethnic attitudes. Our findings indicate that for peers to have a positive influence, it is important that the information about what peers actually think is clear and unambiguous (Otten & Epstude, 2006). Clear knowledge about peer group norms and how one's group is different from other groups will work against the tendency to think that others feel and behave similarly to oneself. This is important when children are more biased toward their own group compared to the classmates, which is something we found in both studies. Importantly, however, the tendency to project might protect children from developing more negative ethnic attitudes when his or her peers think rather negatively about ethnic out-groups. Thus, self-projection can help to maintain a more favorable ethnic attitude in a rather negative peer context. Furthermore, it is important to be sensitive to ethnic group differences and the class composition because the tendency for self-projection might be stronger for ethnic minority children and appears to differ depending on the number of coethnic classmates. This indicates that social influence and self-projection processes

depend on various factors and therefore that approaches and interventions that try to improve ethnic attitudes through normative peer processes should take these factors into account.

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