

## ARTICLE

# Children's experiences and perceptions of street culture, parental supervision, and parental mediation in an urban neighborhood

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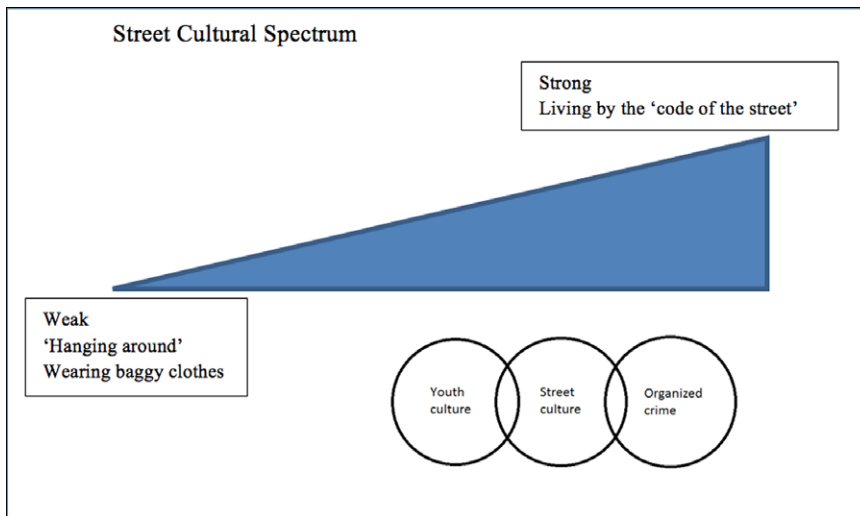
**Abstract**

Local street cultures may appear more or less “extreme,” depending on several contextual factors. Using focus groups, the current study aimed to explore what children, aged 7 to 12 years, think of the assumption that parents play an important role on the street to increase safety in the public domain. Involvement of parents can either be helpful or contribute to escalation of the conflict. Children's biggest concern was that parents are not able to be neutral or that children did not know the parent who intervened. They can imagine intervening being helpful when the intervening parents are known and trusted. We expect that when the public environment is safe and social cohesion is strong, the amount of conflicts will reduce and the help of parents will be generally accepted. We expect that increasing public familiarity and strengthening social control in disadvantaged neighborhoods can further limit the negative influences of street culture.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Children growing up in deprived neighborhoods spend a lot of time on the street. It is expected that this domain has an important socializing influence alongside other domains where children grow up—the family and the school. The socializing aspect of the street is often associated with the existence of street culture (Anderson, 1999; Hadioui, 2010; Ilan, 2015; Sandberg, 2008), in which conflict situations and violence are common. There is a great body of literature on street culture in different contexts around the world (Anderson, 1999; Briggs, 2010; Hadioui, 2010; Ilan, 2011, 2010; Sandberg, 2008), describing that youngsters adapt to social norms on the street to fit in and show behavior that is regularly referred to as antisocial in comparison with behavior in mainstream society. Most studies, however, focus on teenagers or adolescents and almost never target children younger than 12.<sup>1</sup> The current study aims to explore younger children's experiences with street culture from an ecological perspective, exploring the role that parents play on the streets.

<sup>1</sup> Most studies on younger children tend to be about homeless children (street children) in the developing world (Watters & O'Callaghan, 2016).



**FIGURE 1** Street cultural spectrum (Ilan, 2015)

The term *street culture* has a wide range of meanings that range from language use (*slang*) and clothing and music choice to codes of behavior and use of violence. In this study, we focus on the latter two, specifically the conflict situations among children on the streets. In this study, street culture is defined as a subculture that governs behavior, particularly violence, and is an informal system that stresses that youth must gain respect from their peers by establishing a tough image. How hard or severe this culture is differs in different contexts.

Ilan (2015) proposes that street culture is best understood in terms of a continuum, spectrum, or scale, on which an individual's *street behavior* can be seen as more or less extreme. At the weaker end of the spectrum (see Figure 1), street practices are very similar to youth cultural practices in general, while at the strong end, these practices give rise to criminal and/or predatory behaviors and living by "the code of the street" (Anderson, 1999). Individuals may vary their position on the spectrum depending on the social context. However, in this study, we did not focus on individual factors; instead, we examined the importance of group dynamics in street culture.

Street culture appears across different countries and, although it differs depending on the social context, it shows many similarities across different contexts. Anderson (1999) was one of the first to describe this phenomenon as a response to the lack of jobs, enduring racism in mainstream society, and alienation and lack of hope in urban neighborhoods in America.

In a less severe form, it applies to street life in deprived neighborhoods in Europe as well; for instance, in the *banlieue's* in Paris (Kaulingfreks, 2016), inner city Dublin (Ilan, 2010, 2011), urban neighborhoods in London (Briggs, 2010), or on the streets of Oslo (Sandberg, 2008). Dutch ethnographic studies show that youth living in urban neighborhoods in The Netherlands are also often involved in a street culture. The characteristic features of this group are a strong in-group feeling, with a distrustful attitude toward almost everyone outside the group, and an emphasis on tough masculine behavior, where fighting is seen as "cool" (De Jong, 2007; Hadioui, 2010; Van Strijen, 2009).

Anderson (1994) argued that the source of violence is not only an individual-level process in which one adopts the street code, but also an ecological one that is embedded in the broader social context. Therefore, it seems logical to also find solutions in the broader social context. The overall character of local street cultures may appear more or less "extreme," depending on several contextual factors, such as neighborhood context, available resources, social control, and formal and informal supervision (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2006; Odgers et al., 2009; Warner, 2014).

Most insights or empirical studies across countries concern adolescents or young adults, and there is little literature on younger children in relation to street culture. It is expected that parents still have an important role at this age, both at home and on the streets. There is much literature on parental influences on street behavior (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Odgers et al., 2012; Vuchinich, Bank & Patterson, 1992). For instance, Esbensen and Weerman (2005) provide

evidence that poor attachment to parents and poor parental monitoring—not knowing where your child is when he is outside—is a risk factor for gang membership. However, there is little research on the influences of parents who are present on the street themselves.

This study will therefore address the following research questions: (a) How do children, aged between 7 and 12 years, experience street culture in a Dutch urban neighborhood? And (b) how do they perceive parents' role on the streets, in terms of both presence and availability, as well as taking a more active role (i.e., interfering in conflict situations)?

The basis for the study presented in this article is a larger evaluation project on a community-based program—The Peaceable Neighborhood—that promotes democratic citizenship among children and their parents, stimulates active participation of children and their parents, and increases social cohesion around the upbringing of children. To foster ownership within the community and increase the likelihood that The Peaceable Neighborhood can achieve positive outcomes in the public domain, parents were trained to be *parent mediators*, who constructively resolve conflicts between children on the streets and promote positive interaction among children (Pauw, 2016).

The Peaceable Neighborhood also aims to increase child participation by *giving them a voice* (Pauw, 2016). The current study connects to this goal and supports the rights of children to be heard (Lansdown, 2011). Moreover, it seemed relevant to start with the children because they are at the heart of street culture. The current study, therefore, explores what children think of the assumption that parents have an important role on the street.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into children's experiences with street culture and their perceptions and expectations of parental supervision and parental mediation on the streets. It is expected that parents can be involved in different ways, from nonappearance, which is often seen in extreme forms of street culture (Anderson, 1999), to an active role, whereby parents exert social control, for instance, as a member of Neighborhood Watch (Greene, Osterholm, Fan, & Stone, 2014) or in a more specific role as parent mediator (Pauw, 2016).

We examine whether parents or other adults can play an important role in preventing the use of violence among children and in providing a safe public environment for children to play or hang around, from children's perspectives. In the following, we present the findings from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with children aged between 7 and 12 years.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants

The current study is part of a larger evaluation project of The Peaceable Neighborhood in two Dutch cities: Utrecht and Groningen. Four schools for primary education participate in the program, three in an urban neighborhood in Utrecht (Kanaleneiland), and one in Groningen. For the current, qualitative part of the study, students from the three schools in Utrecht were approached over a period of 3 months to participate in semistructured interviews and focus groups.

A total of 63 students participated in 12 focus group sessions (35 boys, 28 girls; aged 7–12 years). Additionally, 12 interviews were conducted with students aged 12 and 13 years (6 boys and 6 girls). Almost all participants lived in Kanaleneiland, and almost all participants were Moroccan Dutch or Turkish Dutch.

### 2.2 | Data collection

#### 2.2.1 | Focus groups

We held 12 focus group sessions, with five or six participants each. The sessions were facilitated by two skilled moderators, lasted about one hour, and took place inside the school. The aim of the focus groups was to describe the experiences and the needs of children in their street culture, their own and their parents' conflict resolution skills, and the role adults play on the streets in which they live and play. Different techniques were used during the focus group sessions. In addition to the discussion guide, in which questions were divided in themes, the moderator showed cards with

words on them (such as fighting, giving your opinion, scared) and asked the participants which domain (school, street, or home) they associated the word with. This was helpful in starting the discussion. A vignette about a situation on the street was also used (see Appendix for the discussion guide). All sessions were audiotaped.

### 2.2.2 | Interviews

The 12 semistructured interviews lasted about one hour and one researcher conducted the interviews. The topic list was divided in three sections that correspond with the themes from the focus groups: (a) experiences with street culture, (b) conflict resolution at home, and (c) conflict resolution on the streets and the role that adults play. Examples of questions are as follows: What do you see when you are on the street? Do parents normally interfere with you or other children on the streets? What would happen if a parent offered a group of children in conflict help as a parent mediator? All Interviews were audiotaped.

## 2.3 | Analysis

Both focus group discussions and interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data were imported into QSR NVivo 10 Software for Windows and analyzed using open and axial coding strategies, focusing on the organization/categorization of the data into concepts. Four members of the research team were involved in the coding and analytical phase and contributed to the interpretation in debriefing sessions to evaluate the research process.

## 2.4 | Study area

Kanaleneiland is a district within the southwest section of Utrecht, one of the four major cities of the Netherlands. It was created in a large-scale expansion of the city in the 1960s; however, it quickly became less desirable to the autochthonous, middle-class population of Utrecht. More low-income families, mostly with an immigrant background, moved to Kanaleneiland. Today it is listed as one of 38 "problem neighborhoods" in The Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2016).

Although the neighborhood does not look like a ghetto, it has a bad reputation and is associated with violence, crime, youth nuisance, and failed integration. In 2015, Kanaleneiland was ranked one of the two least safe areas of the city (Utrecht, WistUdata, 2015). In 2016, at the time of the research, 75% of the population were of non-native Dutch descent, with the largest part of Moroccan origin (almost 38%). The community of Kanaleneiland has to deal with a range of problems. In 2016, 14% of the adult population in Kanaleneiland was unemployed, compared to 9% in Utrecht as a whole. A total of 15% of the population struggle with poverty and 37% are low skilled; 66% live in social housing and 27% of the population in Kanaleneiland were in bad health (Utrecht, WistUdata, 2016).

On the other hand, there are many programs or interventions that provide social activities and assistance for those in need, from both formal organizations and neighborhood associations and other nongovernmental organizations (Utrecht, 2014). This includes many activities for youngsters. Almost 40% of the population in Kanaleneiland are younger than 24 years of age, which makes it a "young neighborhood." All of the schools in the neighborhood are so-called "black schools" (Paulle, 2007), with 98% of the primary and secondary school population of non-native Dutch descent (Utrecht, 2007). Some 89% of the school population have learning disabilities, and cases of school dropout are very common (Utrecht, 2007).

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Street life and street culture in Kanaleneiland

Respondents describe the street as a place where children play with their friends or just "hang around"; it is mostly other children or older youth who surround them. Parents or other residents sometimes walk by and, in summertime,

respondents see mothers picnicking and chitchatting near squares or parks. In general, however, parents do not meddle with what children do: "Some just go walking with their small kids, some go to the shopping center, some visit others, some parents say hi or hello, and in Moroccan they say 'selem aleikum.'" (girl, 10 years old).

Besides playing or hanging around, the street is also a place where you must show strength, and where everyone has to behave tough. Children indicated there is a high amount of (physical) violence on the streets, and they described Kanaleneiland as an environment with "many flats and many people on the streets." There are also a lot of people who they fear, for instance, bullies, child molesters, thieves, or "scary men in a van." Even though it seems, from this description, that the public domain is an unsafe environment, the older respondents (11- and 12-year-olds) say they feel safe. Younger children report they do not always feel safe.

### 3.1.1 | Conflicts on the street

As expected, respondents say that there are more conflicts on the street than in other domains where children grow up (school, home, organized leisure activities). Children state that conflicts are very normal on the streets. Respondents indicate different ways in which they react in a conflict situation. Roughly divided into three categories, the reactions are ignoring, solving the conflict, or getting help.

A few respondents choose to ignore other children when they were looking for a fight, but they say ignoring could be difficult when you are still in the conflict situation. Respondents say it takes strength to choose not to fight. Some respondents said that it would be better if all children either just went home when they were feeling angry or chose to "cool down" before they reacted.

*I would rather go home when I want to cool down because when I'm still outside they will say, "Show me, show me"! That won't help. It will make me even more angry. I have anger attacks sometimes, so it is better to walk away and visit a friend or just go home. (boy, 12 years old)*

Solving a conflict can be achieved either aggressively or constructively. When solving a conflict constructively, children refer to the skills they learnt in school. They say they "talk things out" or search for a "win-win-solution" either<sup>2</sup>. However, this is mostly the case with smaller conflicts or conflicts with or between younger children (>9 year olds). In other cases, children chose to react aggressively. Most respondents say they do this because everybody does it and you have to be tough and show strength. They also say they do this because "you have to get even."

*Yeah, I mean if they fight, you fight! I mean ... some children or people say, "Yes, fight fight fight, let's see who is stronger." It gives them energy and sometimes even the police show up. You know, sometimes you just have to fight. You have to show them you're stronger. (boy, 11 years old)*

In some cases, children or youth will get help from their parents, but in most cases, they ask friends or older brothers and cousins to help them. The help of brothers, cousins, or friends sometimes reduces the conflict, but it can also contribute to escalation when they help in a conflict by scolding, fighting, or threatening: "Maybe those boys (who are in a fight) will get their brothers, then the fight continues and it gets really big" (boy, 10 years old). Getting help from friends or brothers and cousins is called "standing up for each other."

Respondents described the culture on the streets of Kanaleneiland as a culture in which they have to act tough to fit in and the use of violence is common. The problems that occur on the streets of Kanaleneiland—in this age category—do not often result in criminal activities. Kanaleneiland is described as mildly disadvantaged and children's street behavior there can be placed in the lower half of the street cultural continuum (Ilan, 2015; see Figure 1).

### 3.1.2 | Brothers and cousins

Older youth—mostly brothers or cousins from the respondents—seem to play an important role on the street. Respondents observe that in the streets, older youth (aged 16–19 years) teach younger children (aged 8–12 years)

<sup>2</sup> In the Peaceable School method, children learn to search for a win-win solution when having a conflict. This means finding a solution in which both parties benefit (Pauw, 2013).

how to be “tough,” how to fight, and how to “fit in”: “Here on the streets, you learn to be tough, I think ... especially from the older boys—they don’t respect each other. They call names instead of just saying something” (girl, 12 years old).

Respondents often say they look up to older youth and they talked a lot about “belonging” with the group of older youth: “Yeah, sometimes they beat them up. They’ll say, ‘If you can win, then maybe you belong with us.’” (girl, 12 years old). Having older brothers or cousins also helps children to feel safe:

*I don't have an older brother, but I have big cousins. For instance, when one of them joins me outside and a boy who bullies me is there, then I'm not afraid anymore. My big cousin will say “stop that” or something. Not that he hits him, but even then the boy won't bully me because I have a big cousin. (boy, 9 years old)*

In a few cases, the older boys and girls try to intervene without violence when younger children have conflicts. But in most times, the conflict continues when they leave: “They think, *Yeah now he's gone, we can just do our thing* (boy, 12 years old).

From these findings it seems older youth in most cases have an escalating influence in scaring children, fighting and setting the wrong example.

## 3.2 | Parents' role in the street domain

As described above, respondents say that, in general, parents do not meddle with what children do on the streets. However, respondents talked about numerous incidents in which parents did have a role or parents' influence was important. At home, parents disagree about the way in which children should resolve conflicts on the streets. Fathers think that their children should always strike back—“to stand up for themselves”—or ask for help from their older brother or cousin. A girl tells us what her father told her: “When a boy hits me, I should get one of my cousins. But if a girl hits me, I must hit her back, you know!”

Mothers are more likely to say that a child should leave the situation or ask for help from an adult: “My mother always says to ignore that and to stop spending time with them for a while” (girl, 11 years old). If a child is being bullied for a longer time, all parents agree that the child should engage in physical violence on the street to protect themselves. Respondents indicate that despite the parental advice, children generally go along with the social norm that prevails on the street, which means that they often choose physical and/or verbal violence to resolve conflict situations.

### 3.2.1 | Parental presence

In the focus group discussions, children talked about the times when parents did intervene and their expectations about the consequences of parents playing a more active role on the street. The presence of parents differs in different streets or subneighborhoods: In some streets, parents or other adults are absent, while in others, they walk by or keep an eye on the children. Children will not behave differently when they do not know the adult well: “They just don’t care. I don’t care if my neighbor walks by. What should I do? I won’t stand still all of a sudden—then I will get hit very hard” (boy, 11 years old).

However, when familiar parents or residents are around, most children will not show behavior that their parents would disapprove of, such as using verbal or physical violence, bullying, and tough behavior. Respondents indicate they are afraid of the parents of children that they bully or of punishments from their own parents. They also are afraid that friends of their parents will tell their parents how they behaved.

Once the parents are away, children revert to their “street” behavior. Children will often wait until parents leave and continue a fight or quarrel: “When there are parents around you act all kind and sweet, and when they’re not, yeah, then you suddenly behave tough, then you want to fight” (girl, 11 years old).

Some respondents say it is disrespectful to their parents or other adults to behave badly in their presence, and some say it is better if adults are around so you do not have to fight or behave tough and can “*just play*.” Overall the presence from familiar parents seems to protect children from using violence.

### 3.2.2 | Parental approach and intervention

In a few cases, respondents mention that parents sometimes address children in both an encouraging (greeting or giving a compliment) and a correcting way. Children state that it is important that they know the parent or adult; otherwise it will not have an impact on them. Overall, respondents say they do not like adults meddling “too much” with what children do.

*I like my neighbors—they are nice—but they must not intrude my life too much. Sometimes it's ok, but like a said, I don't want them to go to my home and say that I had a fight or something. (girl, 11 years old)*

When a familiar adult approaches a child on the street who is engaged in undesirable behavior, the child is stimulated to play “in a normal way” with the other, to say sorry and resolve a conflict by talking to the other and not by fighting: “They come to you and say, ‘Do not fight, but try to solve this with words’” (boy, 10 years old). In other situations, parents are actively engaged in conflict resolution. They separate fighting children and if the children are having a dispute, they approach them to resolve the conflict: “Yes ... they separate them and then they talk to each other. Sometimes they don't talk to each other, then they just send them home” (boy, 12 years old). It also occurs that in case of a quarrel, the parents of a child take the initiative to talk to the parents of the other child to resolve the conflict situation: “Some children go to their parents and those parents go to the parents of the other child, then they try to resolve the situation together” (boy, 12 years old).

However, a conflict can also escalate when the children involve their parents and the parents get in a quarrel themselves or when they intervene heavy-handedly, to the detriment of the other child. Examples are given in which the parents get into quarrels themselves, resulting in two parties that are in a fight. In one of the focus groups, the children talked about this as follows:

*Imagine, there are parents, and one child from the one parent and the other child from the other parent get in a quarrel. Then the one parent would say, “Yeah your child started it” and the other parent says, “No, your child started it” and then the quarrel gets worse, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger....*

*Before you know, the whole family is involved, my dad, and their two dads, and then us, and my mother.*

Examples are given in which the parents of one child threatened the other child. Respondents often say that the parent (father) hits the other child with a flat hand.

*When Moroccan guys are in a fight, their fathers walk towards them and hit them here (respondent shows back-side of his head) and then he hits the other guy here, with his flat hand, and then he runs home crying. (boy, 10 years old)*

Sometimes the parent is looking for revenge, and does the thing that happened to his own child to the other child. The help of parents can be both constructive or escalating. Most of the time, the father is the linchpin in the escalation of a conflict.

### 3.2.3 | Parental mediation

Parental mediation is an important intervention in The Peaceable Neighborhood 2.0. However, at the time of the research, only a few respondents had experienced parental mediation on the street. These respondents had a parent who was a mediator and had positive experiences with mediation from their parents in small conflicts with friends.

We asked the other respondents for their expectations and thoughts about what would happen if an adult offered to help solve conflicts on the street as a mediator. Almost all respondents had low expectations. They thought it was a bad idea and believed it would not work. Two girls talked about this as follows:

*They would all run away or they'll just continue the fight.*

*Or they'll harass the person, for instance, say, “Go away,” yeah, “Go away, we don't want peace here, that is never gonna happen.”*

Respondents claim mediation will be experienced as meddling and “none of their business.” Because children have not experienced this, they believe everyone would be surprised: “I would be surprised. Well, you know, that never happens on the streets!”

Another explanation as to why children have doubts is because they suppose that parents are unable to be neutral. They are afraid the parent will favor their own child or the child they like most. They also indicate that it is important to know the parent who wants to intervene.

*I think I would let them help me. Well, actually I'm caught between the two. If it is someone I don't know, or don't trust, then I would say no. But with people I do know, then it's ok. In the end it's better to solve the conflict rather than staying in quarrel. (girl, 11 years old)*

Most respondents indicate that parents—through their presence, intervention, or mediation—can have a positive influence on the condition that they are known and trusted by the children on the streets. The children who had experienced mediation were positive about the intervention; it is expected this is because they knew and trusted the mediator.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into children's experiences with street culture and their perceptions and experiences with and expectations of parents' role on the streets. More specifically, we asked children what they expect of parental mediation, an intervention in which parents have an active role in reducing violence on the streets. It seemed relevant to ask children what their thoughts were on this topic because they are at the heart of street culture.

The basis for the study presented in this article is a larger evaluation project on a community-based program; The Peaceable Neighborhood. According to this program it is expected that in a mildly disadvantaged neighborhood parents play an important role in decreasing violence among children. This role can be both passive—by being present and available—or active, for instance, as a parent mediator. In (mildly) disadvantaged neighborhoods with a street culture, state actors are often absent (Anderson, 1999). Therefore, groups of youth become socialized by a subculture of opposition and violence.

Although behavior in this subculture is uncivil or antisocial compared to mainstream society, alienated groups of youngsters are also looking for recognition, justice, and equal opportunities (Kaulingfreks, 2015). It could therefore be effective to increase the proximity with other residents and increase the availability of resources in order to let the youth know that they matter. Besides formal control, informal control is found to be a promising way of reducing crime and violent behavior on the street (Groff, 2014).

The respondents described that when parents are around, most children show prosocial behavior and there is less fighting and bullying, especially when the children know the available adult. However, when parents become more actively involved with the children it can either be helpful or contribute to escalation of a conflict. Children report in most cases that the help of parents is not constructive and that they sometimes use violence or get in a fight themselves. When parents intervene in a conflict, the fighting normally continues when parents have gone.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that instead of reaching out to a parent, children rather turn to older youth on the street. Respondents remark that brothers or cousins teach younger children the values of street culture and sometimes intervene in a conflict. They believe these older youths can have a role as mediator on the streets. Their expectation was that this could work well, because adolescents have more affinity with the younger children than parents have. However, the examples given by respondents of older youths' involvement in conflicts were not encouraging. Conflicts often escalate and are not resolved constructively. It is debatable whether older youth can be positive role models for children and if they have the “right” intentions, that is, to solve problems in a constructive way. Youth mediation is, according to the respondents, promising. However, future research seems necessary to further explore the advantages and disadvantages of youth mediation.



The Peaceable Neighborhood program assumes that for constructive ways of intervening in a conflict, conflict resolution skills are necessary. Parental mediation training can therefore be helpful and empower parents to approach children on the street. However, the children in this study did not expect much of it. Their biggest concern was that parents would not be neutral or that children would not know the parent mediator. They can imagine it could work if the parents are known and trusted. Blokland (2008) addresses this as 'public familiarity'.

Being familiar with each other in the neighborhood renders social space as a comfort zone for both children and parents (Blokland & Nast, 2014). We expect this to be an important condition to increase safety before introducing an active role of parents, for instance, as a parent mediator. However, initially, children said that most parents did not meddle with children's street life. Therefore, apart from the conditions that the parents are known and trusted and have conflict resolution skills, we expect that an active role of parents on the streets also needs some time to get used to.

From observations during parent mediator training and short interviews with the participating parents, we learnt that at home their children responded the same way as our (child) respondents predicted. Parents reported that at first children thought what their parents did was ridiculous. However, after a while, they got used to it, and the constructive way of solving conflicts at home became normal. It is plausible to suggest that this might also apply to the street domain.

The current study underlines the importance of several neighborhood factors, such as social control and public familiarity. From an ecological perspective, it is expected that these contextual factors can have a positive influence on decreasing negative street cultural behavior (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2006; Odgers et al., 2009; Warner, 2014). According to children, parents' presence and availability on the streets can prevent the use of violence among children, and social control from parents seems most effective when the children know the parents or adults who are present.

It seems important to invest in public familiarity to increase social cohesion within the neighborhood. This seems an important condition to increase safety and to make the street a "comfort zone" (Blokland & Nast, 2014) before introducing the active involvement of parents, for instance, as a parent mediator. It is expected that when the environment is safe and social cohesion is strong, the amount of conflicts will reduce, but that in case of conflicts, the help of parents will be generally accepted. We expect increasing public familiarity and strengthening social control and informal supervision in mildly disadvantaged neighborhoods can further limit the negative influences of street culture.

## 4.1 | Limitations

Some limitations of the present study need to be acknowledged. First, we obtained information from a group of children in Kanaleneiland and talked with them about their neighborhood; therefore, the findings cannot be presumed to be representative for all Dutch children.

Second, the focus group discussions took place inside schools that worked with the Peaceable School method<sup>3</sup>, which may have triggered socially desirable answers. However, to avoid socially desirable responding, the children were told that there were no right or wrong answers to our questions because we were interested in their opinion. Moreover, both moderators told opposite stories about what their parents used to say about the use of violence when they were young. This helped creating a safe and convenient interviewing condition in which respondents could express their opinion or "tell the truth."

Third, we did not ask for detailed demographic information from the respondents other than the information given by the school, ethnicity, school name, and neighborhood they lived in. Therefore, it was not possible to relate the findings to other demographic variables.

We need to acknowledge that the purpose of this study was to describe *children's perspective* on street culture. We asked children what they expected from an active role of parents in the street domain, which probably differs from expectations that state actors or policymakers may have. However, we expect it to be valuable to involve youth in the development of solutions to the problems that young people face (Alder & Sandor, 1990). Besides the fact that children have the right to be heard (Lansdown, 2011), when children are involved in research leading to policy

<sup>3</sup> A central assumption within this method is that conflicts are normal, but should be solved with words, not violence.

recommendations, it is expected that policy is better suited to children, and that there will be greater support for change among children (Checkoway & Richard-Schuster, 2003). However, we believe it is also important to analyze barriers that parents may experience in approaching children or intervening in conflicts in the public domain. Future research is needed to examine parents' experiences with street culture and their attitudes toward parental supervision and informal control. We believe that combining children's perspectives with parents' experiences can lead to better suited interventions in the public domain.

## 4.2 | Conclusion

Children describe that street culture can be violent and this can be bolstered by interactions with older young people. The younger people have a number of strategies themselves to deal with interpersonal violence, but it can be challenging to eschew violence given the overall culture in the area. The presence and intervention of adults can have mixed effects on the likelihood of violence occurring. Involvement of parents can either be helpful or contribute to escalation of the conflict. Children's biggest concern was that parents are not able to be neutral or that children did not know the parent who intervened. They can imagine intervening being helpful when the intervening parents are known and trusted. The parental mediation training has had some positive effects on the ability of adults to effectively intervene, although it can take some time for this to 'bed down' effectively. The project's influence can compete with the influence of local street cultures and thus its ability to ultimately affect the overall cultural character of a neighbourhood will depend ultimately on a variety of factors from levels of investment to wider issues affecting the community. We expect that, when the public environment is safe and social cohesion is strong, the amount of conflicts will reduce, and the help of parents will be generally accepted. We expect that increasing public familiarity and strengthening social control in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can further limit the negative influences of street culture.

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## APPENDIX

### Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introductory question: What is your favourite thing to do when you are outside, on the streets?

Theme 1: Differences between street-, school- and home domain.

Part one: The moderator showed cards with words on it (such as: *fighting*, *giving your opinion*, *scared*) and asked the participants which domain (school, street or home) they associated with the word.

Q1: Why do you associate this word with this domain?

Examples of clarifying/follow-up questions:

Q1.1: What is similar in the different domains? What is different?

Q1.2: Why do you think the domains are different?

Q1.3: Do you behave differently in the different domains?

Q1.4: Would you want the domains to look more similar?

Part two: The two moderators stood facing each other in the classroom. One moderator told the participants the following: "When I was young, my parents told me to always hit back when someone attacked me." The other moderator told the participants, "When I was young, my parents told me to never hit back when someone attacked me." Participants were asked to stand close to the moderator in which they recognised themselves.

Q2: Can you tell us why you are standing there?

Examples of clarifying/follow-up questions:

Q2.1: Do you act upon this in the street domain?

Q2.2: If you were attacked on the street, what would you do?

Q2.3: If your parents would change their opinion, would you behave differently on the streets?

Theme 2: Parent's role on the street

Part one: Q3: Who do you see when you are outside, on the streets?

Examples of clarifying/follow-up questions:

Q3.1: If there are parents or other adults, do you behave differently?

Q3.2: Do parents or other adults meddle with what children do on the streets?

Q3.3: Does it matter what the parent or other adult says to you?

Q3.4: Does it matter how they say this?

Part two: A vignette was used to start a discussion about conflict situations and parent-mediation.

Mourad (11 years) and Alisa (11 years) play soccer on the streets. Eda and Mehmet approach them and say they want to join the game. Mourad and Alisa don't want this and they say Eda and Mehmet should leave. There is an argument.

Q4: what do you think will happen next?

Examples of clarifying/follow-up questions:

Q4.1: If there was a parent nearby, would that make a difference?

Q4.2: If the parent would approach the children and offer help, would that help?

Q4.3: If the parent would say: I'm a parent-mediator and can help you solve the conflict. What do you think would happen?

Q4.4: There are two streets: in one street there are only children, in the other street there are children and parents. In which street do you think are more conflict situations?