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EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Ethnic Identity in Diverse Schools: Preadolescents' Private Regard and Introjection in relation to Classroom Norms and Composition

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Abstract
Ethnic identity plays a key role in the normative development of children and adolescents, and efforts to provide a positive and safe environment for ethnic identity benefit from an understanding of its context-dependency. Following the social identity perspective, we add to research on ethnic identity by considering the role of the classroom context and by conceptualizing ethnic identity in terms of two key dimensions. Specifically, the present study aims to investigate the role of the classroom context for *ethnic private regard* (positive ethnic self-feelings) and for the under-researched construct of *ethnic introjection* (subjective self-group merging). These two dimensions of ethnic identity were examined in 51 Dutch school classes among grade 4–6 students ($N = 573$; $M_{age} = 10.77$, SD = 1.02; 54% girls) of Dutch, Turkish and Moroccan ethnic background. We focused on teachers' multicultural norms and classmates' evaluation of the ethnic in-group (peer group norms) in combination with the ethnic class composition. It was found that ethnic introjection was empirically distinct from ethnic private regard, and that the former dimension depended on the classroom context more than the latter. Multicultural teacher norms affected minority preadolescents' private regard positively, but only when the share of in-group classmates was low. Positive peer group norms of in-group classmates strengthened students' introjection, while those of out-group classmates lowered it. The findings indicate that ethnic identity research will be enhanced by more fully considering the conceptual and contextual implications of the social identity perspective.

Keywords Class composition · Ethnic introjection · Ethnic private regard · Multicultural education · Peer norms · Teacher norms.

Introduction

Ethnic identity is seen as an essential consideration for the normative development of many children and adolescents (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014). As a result, the number of studies on the development and contextual dependency of ethnic identity continues to grow. In the developmental literature, different conceptualizations of ethnic identity have been proposed and although scholars do not necessarily agree on the specific dimensions of ethnic identity, there is consensus that it must be viewed as a multidimensional construct (Ashmore et al. 2004; Umaña-Taylor et al. 2014). In addition to this, it has been argued that ethnic identity research will be enhanced by more fully considering the implications of the non-developmental social identity perspective (Verkuyten 2016). These implications include the conceptualization of ethnic identity and systematic ways for considering the critical role of the situational context.

The current research examines the distinctiveness of ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection as two key facets of ethnic identity. Youth might have positive feelings about their ethnic group membership (e.g., "I am proud to be Chinese"), without necessarily having a sense of interconnectedness with the group and its members ("being Chinese does not evoke a sense of 'us Chinese' in me"). Thus, positive self-feelings (i.e., ethnic identity private regard) do not have to imply a subjective self-group

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merging (i.e., ethnic identity introjection). Based on the social identity perspective (Reicher et al. 2010; Spears 2011) we expected these two dimensions to be empirically distinct and differently related to classroom norms and the ethnic composition within the school context. With regard to norms, we focus on children's perception of the prescriptive multicultural norms of their teacher as well as on descriptive peer group norms in terms of classmates' (aggregated) attitudes about the student's ethnic in-group (Cialdini et al. 1991). Ethnic composition is operationalized as the proportion of ethnic in-group classmates. Importantly and in contrast to existing research (e.g., Brown and Chu 2012; Nishina et al. 2010; Verkuyten and Thijs 2004), we do not examine norms and ethnic composition separately but are especially interested in the question whether the role of classroom norms for ethnic identity depends on, or is moderated by, classroom composition.

Our research was conducted among ethnic majority and minority grade 4–6 students ($M_{age} = 10.77$; SD = 1.02) in the Netherlands. Like many European countries, the Netherlands has a quasi-mono ethnic composition, which means that a dominant majority group is accompanied by a number of different ethnic minority groups (Schaeffer 2014). In the present study, we included children from the Dutch majority group as well as children of Moroccan or Turkish descent. Turks and Moroccans constitute the two largest non-Western minority groups in Dutch society (both around 2.5% of the population). They are socially devalued, have the lowest socioeconomic status, and face relatively high prejudice and discrimination (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016). Their presence in the Netherlands is mainly due to large-scale labor immigration in the 1960s, which means that most Moroccan and Turkish children in the country are third (or second) generation immigrants. Research has shown that these children experience more ethnic discrimination compared to other ethnic minority groups (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002).

Ethnic Private Regard and Ethnic Introjection

Developmental researchers examine ethnic identity as an internal structure that gradually develops within the self-concept. The interest is in the ways in which ethnic group membership comes to be represented as an integral part of a developing sense of self. The focus is on "identification of the self *as* a certain kind of person" (Thoits and Virshup 1997, p. 106). Ethnic private regard is one of the most salient and important features of youth's ethnic identity (Ruble et al. 2004). Children and adolescents with high private regard feel good about their ethnic group membership and this is consistently found to be related to positive youth outcomes, including psychological wellbeing and academic investment (e.g., Fuligni et al. 2009; Rivas-Drake et al. 2014).

When studying ethnic identity, developmental research often refers to the social identity perspective (Reicher et al. 2010; Spears 2011). However, the main focus of this perspective is not on the ways in which an ethnic group membership is incorporated into a sense of self and represented as an integral part of one's self-concept (see Verkuyten 2016). Rather, the emphasis of the social identity perspective is on the process whereby the self is considered similar to the ethnic or racial group. The focus is on "identification of the self *with* a group or category as a whole" (Thoits and Virshup 1997, p. 106), whereby the self extends beyond the individual person to the shared ethnic category (a sense of "us"). The emphasis is on processes involved in thinking about "we as a group" rather than "'I as a group member".

This means that feeling positive about being an ethnic group member is not necessarily equivalent to ethnic identity as conceived within the social identity perspective (Sani and Bennett 2004; Verkuyten 2016). Self-feelings such as "I am proud to be a Mexican American" or "I feel positive about being Turkish Dutch" should additionally connote a sense of "we" and "us" to constitute an ethnic identity. An extension of the self to the ethnic group is required, which in his research on minority group children Rosenberg 1979 calls ethnic introjection (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997; Share-Pour 1999). Thinking about "us" Mexican-Americans or "us" Turkish-Dutch implies a merging of self and group whereby "the distinction between my group and me is unclear; the fate of the group is experienced as fate of the self" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 179). The implication is that with introjection aspects of self-perception result not from one's own actions or experiences but from those of others who share one's social identity. For example, children can feel compromised by the wrongdoings of unknown in-group members (Bennett et al. 1998), can feel personally affected when unknown members of their in-group are rejected or discriminated (Verkuyten 2002), and can feel that negative messages about their ethnic group communicate something about themselves (Rosenberg 1979).

It is important to study ethnic introjection as a dimension of ethnic identity in preadolescents, because older children are increasingly able to redraw the boundaries of the self in order to include other group members within the self (Sani and Bennett 2004). Furthermore, they become increasingly aware of the extent to which their ethnic group is socially valued and thereby more easily feel personally addressed by messages about their group. Following social identity theory, we expected that introjection is empirically distinct from private regard as another key aspect of children's ethnic identity. Additionally, we expected a stronger ethnic identity among ethnic minority than majority children, and, thus, higher ethnic private regard and higher ethnic

introjection among the former compared to the latter group of children. Since the ethnic background of minorities is what distinguishes them from the majority in society, both aspects of ethnic identity can be expected to be more salient and important for minority than majority group members (e.g., Cokley et al. 2011; Verkuyten 2002).

The School Context

An increasing number of studies examines the importance of the social context for ethnic identity (see Seaton et al. 2017). The social identity perspective emphasizes the critical importance of the social context for the salience and meaning of a specific social identity. In addition to the broader societal context, the interest is in the situational context (Reicher et al. 2010). The social identity perspective argues that the importance and meaning of a social identity is determined by situational normative expectations (e.g., classroom norms) together with the numerical composition of comparative others (e.g., classroom composition). The construct of ethnic introjection fits better with the social identity perspective than the construct of ethnic private regard. In general, and from quite early on, children are taught to feel proud of their ethnic heritage, and private regard has been found to be positive among most ethnic groups and to be relatively stable among ethnic and racial minority youth (Hughes et al. 2011; Seaton et al. 2009). In contrast, a sense of ethnic self-group merging ("us") might depend more on the situational context (Turner et al. 1987). Thus, although we anticipated effects of the school context on ethnic private regard, we expected ethnic introjection to be more dependent on it. Furthermore and following the social identity perspective, we focused on two aspects of the school context to try to explain this dependency: normative expectations and numerical composition. For the normative context we examined perceived prescriptive multicultural teacher norms and descriptive peer group norms, and for the numerical composition we focused on the proportion of ethnic in-group classmates.

Prescriptive Multicultural Norms and Ethnic Classroom Composition

Schools and teachers can differ considerably in their endorsement of multicultural education. Multicultural education has many goals (Banks 2004), but a core aim is to teach the prescriptive norm that all cultures deserve recognition and respect and that discrimination is wrong (Verkuyten and Thijs 2013). As such, it can increase the recognition and value of ethnic identities, and reduce ethnic discrimination and peer victimization at school (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). Thus, perceived multicultural school norms have the potential to create a positive environment for students to personally feel good about their ethnic group membership. A large-scale multilevel study showed that both majority and minority preadolescents in the Netherlands had higher ethnic private regard in classes where the teacher paid more attention to multicultural issues (Verkuyten and Thijs 2004). And in a research among African-American youth, it was found that a higher number of teachers showing equal respect for students of different races was associated with more positive private regard (Byrd and Chavous 2011). Hence, we expected that children who perceive a stronger multicultural norm from their teacher will have higher ethnic private regard. This is especially likely for ethnic minority children who more often face ethnic derogation and exclusion, also in the Netherlands (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). However, the effectiveness of normative multiculturalism might depend on the share of ethnic in-group members in the class. Minority students who have many ethnic in-group classmates are more likely to receive cultural recognition and support in their classroom and have less reason to fear ethnicity-related peer discrimination or exclusion (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). In such a setting, multicultural teacher norms may be less important for feeling positive about one's ethnic group membership. Therefore, we expected the positive associations between the perceived teacher norms and ethnic private regard to be less pronounced for minority students with more co-ethnic classmates. Thus for ethnic minority students we expected an interaction effect between multicultural norms and classroom composition.

Multicultural education emphasizes equal respect and the value of cultural differences and is not about stimulating self-group merging (a sense of ethnic "us") or feeling personally affected by what happens to one's ethnic group. Therefore, we did not expect perceived multicultural norms to be associated with ethnic introjection for the ethnic majority and minority students. However, it might be the case that the ethnic classroom composition matters. Students might have a stronger sense of "us" when the proportion of ethnic in-group classmates is higher. The reason is that the social identity perspective argues that within a particular context individuals are more likely to think in terms of their group membership when the average similarity with their in-group, compared to their out-group, is larger (Turner et al. 1987). Co-ethnic classmates tend to be seen as more similar to the self and a larger proportion of co-ethnic classmates implies a larger average similarity. In turn, perceived similarity, in addition to actual interactions, stimulates a sense of "us", especially among minority group children who generally have fewer ethnic in-group classmates than majority students and who are more vulnerable due to their minority status.

Descriptive Peer Group Norms and Ethnic Class Composition

Children become increasingly aware of and preoccupied with the perceptions of their peers, and peer feedback may be perceived by youth as a highly credible source of information for one's ethnic identity (Brown and Larson 2009). Peers are important for setting group norms in the classroom and classmates form an important social reference group for children (Aboud and Fenwick 1999; Thijs and Verkuyten 2013). In line with the normative function of reference groups (Turner 1991), preadolescents' ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection might be affected by the predominant classroom attitude toward their ethnic in-group. Children might come to adopt and internalize classmates' evaluations of their in-group and use them as a basis for their ethnic private regard.

However, this might also depend on the share of co-ethnic students in class. Following the social identity perspective (Turner et al. 1987), classmates are more likely to function as a social reference group when children regard them as more similar to the self and perceived similarity underlies the development of a sense of "us". Further, the higher the share of co-ethnic students the more likely it is that children feel that they "fit in" and belong to the class (Benner and Crosnoe 2011). We therefore expected that a positive peer group norm toward the in-group is associated with higher ethnic private regard, and that this relation will be more pronounced in classrooms with a higher share of ethnic in-group students. We did not have clear expectations for how positive peer group norms in combination with classroom composition might affect ethnic introjection and therefore explored this question.

The Current Study

Using the social identity perspective, we examined the role of the classroom context for *ethnic private regard* (positive ethnic self-feelings) and for the under-researched construct of *ethnic introjection* (subjective self-group merging). We first expected that the analysis will support the empirical distinction between ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection as two key facets of ethnic identity proposed by the social identity perspective. Consistent with research showing that ethnic identity is in general more salient and central for minority than majority group members, we, moreover, expected ethnic minority children to have higher ethnic private regard and stronger ethnic introjection than ethnic majority children. Furthermore, we viewed ethnic private regard (known to gradually develop over time) as a more stable aspect of ethnic identity than ethnic introjection—in terms of an actual sense of ethnic "us"—and expected the latter, compared to the former, to be more strongly dependent on the classroom context. With regard to the classroom context, we argued that the teacher's endorsement of multicultural norms can create a more positive and safer environment for students to feel good about their ethnic group membership; hence, we expected perceived prescriptive multicultural norms of the teacher to be positively associated with ethnic private regard in particular among the more vulnerable ethnic minority children and when there are relatively few co-ethnic peers in class. However, because multicultural norms are not about stimulating self-group merging, we did not expect them to be associated with a sense of ethnic "us" (ethnic introjection). Furthermore, peers form an important social reference group for children—in particular when the perceived similarity of the peer group to the self is high. Therefore, we expected a more positive peer group norm—in terms of classmates' positive evaluation of the ethnic in-group—to be associated with higher ethnic private regard and that this relation will be more pronounced in classrooms with a higher share of ethnic in-group students. Additionally, we explored the role of positive peer group norms for students' ethnic introjection.

Methods

Data and Participants

We used data from the year 2011 collected in 17 ethnically diverse primary schools across the Netherlands. As the original aim for this data was to compare Turkish to ethnic Dutch students, a large number of schools was approached in areas with a substantial Turkish population. However, a substantial part of the students in the participating schools appeared to have a Moroccan background (Thijs et al. 2012). Within these schools, a questionnaire in Dutch was completed by 830 students in 51 classrooms (grades 4–6). All students in each class took part in the survey, which they individually and anonymously completed in the classroom while supervised by a teacher or a research assistant. We obtained passive parental consent, participation was voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed. Respondents' ethnic group membership was identified based on students' self-reports of their own ethnicity as well as the ethnic backgrounds of their parents. Approximately 36% of the students identified themselves together with their parents as in origin Dutch, 14% as Turkish, 22% as Moroccan and the remaining 28% as mixed heritage or members of a wide range of other ethnic groups (each, however, making up less than 2.1% of the full sample). In the present study, information provided by all students (i.e., all classmates, $N = 830$) was used for the computation of

two of our contextual classroom variables (namely, *positive peer group norms* and *share of ethnic in-group classmates*). However, the analysis focused on Dutch, Moroccan and Turkish ethnic origin students, since in our data corresponding information on classmates' attitudes towards these three well-represented ethnic groups was available. After selecting Dutch ethnic majority and Turkish or Moroccan ethnic minority children, 27 further cases were dropped due to missing values on ethnic private regard, ethnic introjection, perceived multicultural norms of the teacher and/or age.[1] Hence, our final sample ($N = 573$) consisted of 287 Dutch ethnic majority, 173 Moroccan ethnic minority and 113 Turkish ethnic minority students. The age of the preadolescents in the final sample ranged from 8 to 13 years ($M_{age} = 10.77$; SD = 1.02), and 54% were girls. On average, the 51 classrooms of these children contained 33% Dutch majority (SD = 34), 16% Turkish minority (SD = 15) and 24% Moroccan minority students (SD = 18). Unfortunately, no information was available about students' socioeconomic status. Teacher data were available for 44 of the 51 participating classrooms. These 44 teachers had a mean teaching experience of 15.25 years (SD = 11.49) and 30 of them were female. Thirty-six of them (81.5%) were in origin Dutch, whereas two teachers were Turkish (4.5%), five teachers were Surinamese (11.4%), and one teacher was Moroccan (2.3%). These data were not included in the analyses.

Measures

Ethnic identity

The two dimensions of ethnic identity, ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection, were measured with a total of five questions presented on a single page. Following Phinney 1992 and previous research in the Netherlands (e.g., Verkuyten and Thijs 2004, 2006) the students were first presented with a short introduction: "Different groups of people live in the Netherlands. Some of those people and their families originate from various countries. There are for example Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese but also native Dutch and many more. Please fill in to which group you consider yourself to belong. 'I am …'." Subsequently the students were asked to use their ethnic self-label for answering the next five questions. The first three questions assessing students' ethnic private regard were: (1) "Do you find it nice that you are {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish}", (2) "Are you proud to be {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish}", and (3) "Do you find it important that you are {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish}?". These three items were adopted from Luhtanen and Crocker's 1992 scale of Collective Self-Esteem (CSE), and have been used in previous research among preadolescents in the Netherlands (e.g., Verkuyten and Thijs 2006). The two questions measuring students' ethnic introjection were based on the work of Rosenberg 1979 and adopted from Kinket and Verkuyten 1997, and were: (1)"Would you feel bothered if someone said something mean about people who are {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish}?, and (2) "Would you feel bothered if people did something mean to people who are {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish}?". For each of these five questions, students were asked to first fill in their respective ethnic group and to then respond on a scale ranging from 1 (No, definitely not!) to 5 (Yes, definitely!).

Multicultural norms of the teacher

Perceived multicultural norms of the teacher were measured with three items that have been successfully used in previous research in the Netherlands (e.g., Thijs and Verkuyten 2012, 2013). Students were asked, on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often), whether their teacher ever says (1) that they should respect all cultures, (2) that they should not discriminate, and (3) that people from all cultures are equal.

Peer group norms

To obtain measures of descriptive positive peer group norms, we first measured the individual ethnic attitudes of all students in the classroom. That is to say, all participating students (including those of other or mixed ethnicities) used the "seven faces" response scale (Yee and Brown 1992) to respond to the questions "What do you think of {Dutch/ Moroccan/ Turkish} people?". This scale ranges from a very happy smiley (coded as 7) to a very sad smiley (coded as 1) and has been successfully used in previous research on ethnic attitudes in preadolescents (e.g., Thijs and Verkuyten 2012). Next, for each of our final participants we calculated how their respective ethnic in-group was evaluated by their classmates on average ($((\text{mean(class evaluation)} \times N_{class} - \text{own evaluation}) / (N_{class} - 1))$). It is important to note that this peer evaluation of the ethnic in-group did not include children's own in-group evaluation.

Analyses

To account for the nested data structure we tested our hypotheses with multilevel analyses in Mplus (version 7; Muthén and Muthén 1998-2012). All models were

[1] Mplus was unable to deal with missing values in the dependent variables. 16 of the 27 cases were excluded primarily due to missing values on ethnic private regard and/ or ethnic introjection. FIML estimation to deal with missing values in only the remaining 11 cases would have complicated our models unnecessarily. Little's MCAR test indicated that missing values on items were completely at random ($\chi^2(90) = 59.739$, $p = 0.994$).

estimated using Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors (thereby accounting for skewness in our measures), and relative model improvement was assessed by comparing the fit (deviance) of nested models using the Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi^2 difference test (Satorra and Bentler 2001). In the analyses, we specified a Level 1 to denote individual students, and a Level 2 for the different classes. Given sample size restrictions (Kline 2011), all measures were treated as observed rather than latent variables. We used contrasts to compare minority students (i.e., in origin Turkish and Moroccan students combined) to majority students (coded '0.5'and '−0.5', respectively), and to control for possible differences between Moroccan and Turkish origin students ('0.5' for Turkish, '−0.5' for Moroccan, and '0'for Dutch origin students). We also controlled for age (using a contrast coded '0.5' for 11–13 year-olds and '−0.5' for 8–10 year-olds) because socio-cognitive theories suggest that students' understanding of ethnicity increases significantly from age 10 onward (Marks et al. 2007; Ruble et al. 2004). To facilitate the interpretation of our results we standardized all continuous variables at the individual level. Moreover, given a substantial difference in share of ethnic in-group classmates for ethnic majority versus minority preadolescents (67% vs. 32%, respectively), this variable was separately standardized within both groups to avoid collinearity with our minority-majority contrast.

Results

Preliminary Results

Prior to running our descriptive analysis and testing our hypotheses we examined the factor structure of the two ethnic identification measures and the measure for perceived multicultural norms of the teacher. We conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in Mplus using Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors, while correcting for the nested structure of our data by specifying classes as clusters. Model fit indices are presented in Table 1. The items for ethnic private regard, ethnic introjection and perceived multicultural norms (teacher) all formed empirically distinct constructs (Model 1a). A two-factor measurement model (Model 1b) in which the items representing ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection were made to load on a common factor yielded a worse fit than Model 1a. The sum scores of the three items for ethnic private regard, the two items for ethnic introjection and the three items for perceived multicultural norms (teacher) formed reliable scales (0.73, 0.72 and 0.74, respectively; Raykov 1997).

Additionally, measurement invariance was assessed across ethnic majority and minority students. As shown in Table 1, we found that metric invariance holds across these two groups (Model 2b). Although the model representing scalar invariance (Model 2c) also yielded a reasonable model fit, this model fitted the data significantly worse than metric invariance. This means that group differences in mean scores partly reflect group specific responses. Still, the metric invariance of our measures means that associations for majority and minority students can be meaningfully compared.

Ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection were positively related in the total sample and in the subsample of minority children ($r = 0.28$, and $r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) but unrelated in the majority subsample ($r = 0.07$, *ns*). These findings confirm our expectation that there is an empirical distinction between private regard and introjection as two separate dimensions of ethnic identity.

Descriptive Results

The mean score of students' ethnic private regard was close to the high end of the 5-point scale ($M = 4.29$, SD = 0.76)

Table 1 Measurement models ($N = 573$)

	Chi^2(*df*)	SB ΔChi^2(*df*)	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Confirmatory Factor Analysis					
Model 1a: 3-Factor Model	48.356 (17)***		0.057	0.965	0.943
Model 1b: 2-Factor Model (ethnic private regard with ethnic introjection)	207.438 (19)***	88.328 (2)***	0.132	0.792	0.693
Measurement invariance- Minority vs. majority					
Model 2a: configural	45.286 (35)		0.032	0.984	0.975
Model 2b: metric	48.567 (39)	3.762 (4)	0.029	0.985	0.979
Model 2c: scalar	79.600 (44)***	27.667 (5)***	0.053	0.945	0.930

Measurement models were estimated using Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors to account for the negative skewness of our items on ethnic identification. We also corrected for the nested structure of our data by specifying classes as clusters

SB Satorra-Bentler

***$p < 0.001$

indicating that on average students felt good about their ethnic identity, while the mean score of ethnic introjection was somewhat lower ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.02$). As expected, both ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection were on average significantly higher for minority ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.56$, and $M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.98$, respectively) than majority students ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.76$, and $M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.93$, respectively), as indicated by mean comparisons across minority and majority children: ethnic private regard $t\ (571) = -13.20$, $p < 0.001$, and ethnic introjection $t\ (571) = -8.64$, $p < 0.001$.

The average perception of multicultural norms was 2.87 ($SD = 1.04$), and significantly below the midpoint of its 5-point scale, $t\ (572) = -2.93$, $p = 0.004$. Furthermore, multilevel analysis (model not shown) revealed that a significant share of the variance in the perceived multicultural norms of the teacher (21.6%, $p < 0.001$) could be explained by differences between classrooms. This indicates that perceptions of teachers' multicultural norms were relatively similar among students in the same classroom.

Finally, the mean score of positive peer group norms was close to the positive end of its 7-point scale ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 0.60$) suggesting rather favorable attitudes of classmates towards the students' ethnic groups. However, a significant independent *t*-test showed that the mean score of positive peer group norms was significantly higher for in origin Dutch majority students ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 0.41$) than for the in origin Turkish or Moroccan minority students ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 0.64$), $t\ (571) = 12.33$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that on average classmates had a somewhat more favorable attitude towards majority than minority students.

Main Analysis

As a first step in our multilevel analyses, we specified two "intercept-only" models to examine the variance proportions of ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection at the class level (Level 2). As shown in Table 2, significant shares of variance could be attributed to differences between classrooms. The class-level variance of ethnic private regard was 18.4%, while for ethnic introjection it was 17.4%.

Next, we added (1) the main effects of the (standardized) continuous classroom measures (perceived multicultural norms of the teacher, positive peer group norms, and share of ethnic in-group classmates) and the minority-majority contrast, (2) the two-way interactions of perceived multicultural norms of the teacher and positive peer groups norms with share of ethnic in-group classmates, and (3) the (two- and three-way) interactions of the minority-majority contrast with the aforementioned continuous measures and two-way interactions. We also controlled for the difference between Turkish versus Moroccan origin children and age (contrast). Results are shown in Table 3.

Ethnic private regard

For ethnic private regard, there were no main or two-way interaction effects for the continuous classroom measures. However, there was a significant three-way interaction between perceived multicultural norms of the teacher, share of ethnic in-group classmates, and the minority-majority contrast. Further inspection showed that the interaction between perceived multicultural norms of the teacher and share of ethnic in-group classmates significantly differed for minority versus majority students. Swapping the minority-majority contrast with dummy variables (0 = majority, 1 = minority and vice versa; models not shown) revealed that the effect of perceived multicultural norms of the teacher depended on the share of ethnic in-group classmates only for minority students. To further examine this interaction for minority students, we conducted simple slope analysis (Aiken and West 1991). We examined the effect of perceived multicultural norms of the teacher on minority students' ethnic private regard under three conditions: low (1 SD < M), average, and high (1 SD > M) share of ethnic in-group classmates. As shown in Fig. 1, minority students had higher ethnic private regard when they perceived their teacher to endorse multicultural norms more strongly, but only when there was a low share of ethnic in-group classmates ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.002$). No significant effects were found when the share of co-ethnic peers in class was average or high.

Table 2 Results of "intercept-only models" with ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection as the dependent variables ($N = 573$)

"Intercept-only" models	Variance		
	Total	Individual-level	Class-level
Ethnic private regard	0.586	0.478 (81.6%)	0.108 (18.4%)***
Ethnic introjection	1.031	0.852 (82.6%)	0.179 (17.4%)***

Multi-level models were estimated using Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors. Percentage of variance at the individual-level and the class-level are shown in brackets

***$p < 0.001$

Table 3 Results of multi-level regression models ($N = 573$)

	Ethnic Private Regard	Ethnic Introjection
Perceived multicultural norms (teacher)	0.009	0.071
Positive peer group norms	0.003	0.051
Share of ethnic in-group classmates	0.002	0.030
Minority vs. majority	0.737***	0.807***
2-way interaction terms		
Perceived multicultural norms (teacher) × Minority vs. majority	0.066	0.155
Positive peer group norms × Minority vs. majority	0.019	−0.064
Share of ethnic in-group classmates × Minority vs. majority	−0.007	0.317**
Perceived multicultural norms (teacher) × Share of ethnic in-group classmates	−0.006	−0.030
Positive peer group norms × Share of ethnic in-group classmates	0.037	0.190***
3-way interaction terms		
Perceived multicultural norms (teacher) × Share of ethnic in-group classmates × Minority vs. majority	−0.164**	0.013
Positive peer group norms × Share of ethnic in-group classmates × Minority vs. majority	−0.064	−0.134
Controls		
Turkish versus Moroccan	−0.149	0.464**
Age (11–13 vs 8–10 year olds)	0.097	−0.035
Variance (% explained)		
Individual-level	0.428 (10.5%)	0.784 (8.0%)
Class-level	0.002 (98.1%)	0.067 (62.6%)
Model statistic		
*Δ*df	13	13
SB ΔChi^2	95.39**	126.67***

Standardized coefficients presented. Multi-level models were estimated using Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors

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*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$

Ethnic introjection

In the model for ethnic introjection there were two significant two-way interactions that involved the share of ethnic in-group classmates. First, this variable interacted with the minority-majority contrast indicating that its effect differed for minority versus majority students. Further inspection revealed that a higher share of ethnic in-group classmates was associated with stronger ethnic introjection among minority students ($\beta = 0.189$, $p = 0.008$) but with less ethnic introjection among majority students ($\beta = -0.128$, $p = 0.042$). Next, there was a significant positive interaction between positive peer group norms and share of ethnic in-group classmates which appeared to be similar for minority and majority respondents (no three-way interaction). We examined this interaction further by conducting simple slope analysis, this time calculating the effect of positive peer group norms on students' ethnic introjection under the conditions of low (1 SD < M), average, and high (1 SD > M) share of ethnic in-group classmates. Fig. 2 shows that the impact of positive peer group norms ranged from a positive effect ($\beta = 0.240$, $p = 0.018$) when the share of the ethnic in-group peers in the class was high to a negative effect ($\beta = -0.139$, $p = 0.025$) when the share of ethnic in-group peers was low.

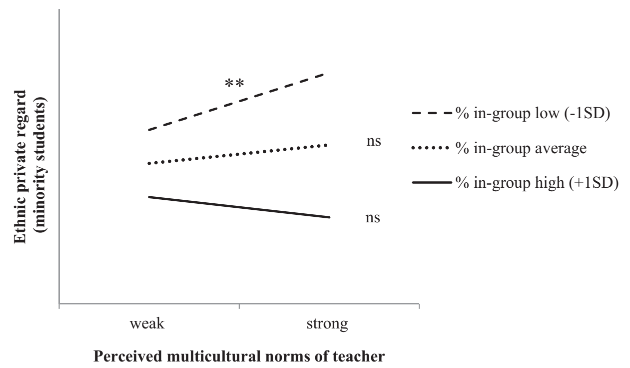

Fig. 1 Effects of perceived multicultural norms of teacher on *minority* students' ethnic private regard dependent on the share of ethnic in-group classmates. Standardized coefficients presented. ns = not significant. **$p < 0.01$

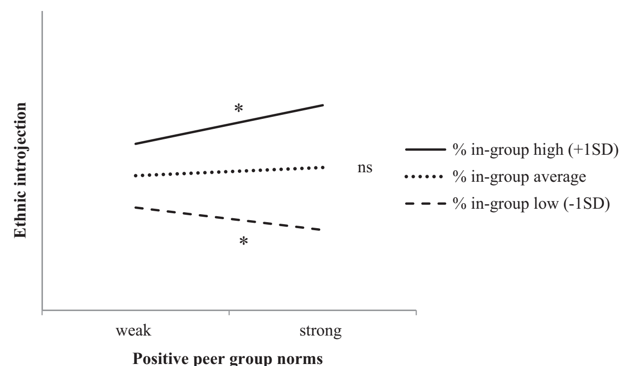

Fig. 2 Effects of positive peer group norms on students' ethnic introjection dependent on the share of ethnic in-group classmates. Standardized coefficients presented. ns = not significant.*$p < 0.05$

Additional Analyses

Our decision to include the share of ethnic in-group peers in our analyses was based on the theoretical notion that this proportion would increase the reference value of the classmate peer group. However, the results for ethnic introjection indicated that the effects of the peer norms were reversed rather than absent for students with few (versus many) co-ethnic classmates. This suggests that the norms of in-group classmates (sharing the participant's ethnicity) could have different results than the norms of out-group classmates (not sharing the participant's ethnicity). To test this possibility, we calculated these norms and included both of them as predictors of children's ethnic introjection. Please note that, for this analysis, we had to drop 16 cases as they had no in-group classmates.

Results (full tables available on request) showed that the norms of the in-group increased students' ethnic introjection when the share of ethnic in-group peers was average or high (1 SD > M) ($\beta = 0.156$, $p = 0.002$ and $\beta = 0.301$, $p < 0.001$, respectively), while no significant effect was found when the share of co-ethnic peers was low. By contrast, the norms of the out-group peers were associated with less ethnic introjection, albeit only significantly when the share of ethnic in-group classmates was low (1 SD < M) ($\beta = -0.244$, $p < 0.001$). These results were found to hold for minority and majority students alike.

Discussion

There is a growing research literature on the importance of contextual characteristics for children's and adolescents' ethnic identity (Seaton et al. 2017), and on the role of school or classroom factors in particular (e.g., Cheon et al. 2018; Leszczensky et al. 2017). The present study adds to this literature by, first, investigating ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection as two central aspects of ethnic identity, and, second, by examining the role of norms of peers and teachers in combination with ethnic class composition among both ethnic minority and majority preadolescents. Previous research has not systematically considered ethnic introjection and the combined role of classroom norms and classroom composition. Yet, the focus on ethnic introjection in addition to ethnic private regard and in relation to the classroom context, provides a more detailed understanding of what is involved in developing a sense of ethnic group belonging and the situational conditions that matter for this development.

A first main conclusion is that ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection are separate dimensions of ethnic identity. The children made an empirical distinction between the two and, importantly, both were differently affected by the classroom context. For both ethnic private regard and ethnic introjection around 18% percent of the variance was at the classroom level, suggesting that ethnic identity is not only determined by individual features but by contextual characteristics as well. However, for ethnic private regard almost all of this variance was explained by individual-level variables (indicating composition effects), whereas a large part of the variance (37%) remained unexplained for ethnic introjection. This indicates that ethnic private regard is less dependent on the classroom context than ethnic introjection. One likely reason is that, similar to personal self-esteem (Trzesniewski et al. 2003), positive ethnic self-feeling is a more stable characteristic that strongly depends on family ethnic socialization and messages of significant others in one's ethnic community (Hughes et al. 2006). In contrast, a sense of subjective self-group merging ("us") is more situational and depends on what in the social environment is communicated about one's ethnic group and other ethnic in-group members (Reicher et al. 2010). Ethnic introjection is an important but understudied aspect of ethnic identity because it refers to a sense of interconnection between the self and the ethnic group (Ashmore et al. 2004; Rosenberg 1979). It is, for example, more close to how children feel about and connect with their ethnic group than public regard that is more often studied in research on ethnic minority identity (e.g., Douglass and Umaña-Taylor 2017; Hughes et al. 2011). Introjection implies identification which makes the distinction between one's group and oneself unclear, whereas public regard does not have to involve identification because it refers to the more complex meta-perceptions about what others think about the group to which one belongs (Frey and Tropp 2006).

A second main conclusion is that different classroom norms can play specific roles for the two aspects of ethnic identity depending on student's own ethnic background and the proportion of co-ethnic classmates. Perceived multicultural norms of the teacher were positively related to ethnic private regard among minority students, but only when their ethnic in-group was not strongly present in the classroom. This finding is partly consistent with our expectations as it indicates that positive teacher norms allow minority children to feel good about their ethnicity, and this is especially important when there are relatively few ethnic in-group peers in the classroom. However, this effect was not obtained in more mixed classrooms, and we did not find evidence that teachers' multicultural norms strengthen the ethnic private regard of majority students. The latter finding suggests that majority students have less need for a multicultural environment to feel positive about their ethnic identity. However, it may also indicate that teachers' multicultural norms are perceived as predominantly supporting the identities and culture of ethnic minorities (see Verkuyten and Thijs 2013).

Different from ethnic private regard, ethnic introjection was unrelated to perceived multicultural norms of the teacher. However, ethnic introjection appeared to depend on positive peer group norms in combination with the proportion of in-group classmates, and in combination with students' ethnicity. The effects of the peer group norms were opposite for children with many versus few in-group classmates. These norms were associated with stronger introjection in the former classrooms, but with less introjection in the latter classrooms. Our additional analyses revealed that this interaction could be attributed to the differential meanings of in-group versus out-group peer norms. Thus it mattered who was positive about the in-group. Both minority and majority children felt personally *more* affected by what their ethnic group members experience when their group was positively evaluated by their in-group classmates, but *less* so when their out-group classmates were positive. Both effects were most pronounced when the proportions of in-group or out-group classmates, respectively, were relatively large. Apparently, when there are relatively many out-group classmates who are positive about one's ethnic group, children indicate a weaker sense of "us". The positive out-group attitude in the class seems to lower a sense of in-group interconnectedness and this might be because in such a safe environment there is less need for "sticking together" (Spears 2011). In contrast, being in a classroom with relatively many in-group classmates who are positive about one's in-group seems to increase children's sense of ethnic belonging and interconnectedness.

Interestingly, the moderating role of ethnic class composition was similar for minority and majority children, but its main effect was not. A higher share of ethnic in-group classmates appeared to increase ethnic introjection in minority students, but to reduce it in majority children. Minority children are typically aware of the societal stereotypes and prejudices towards their ethnic group and how this might affect them (e.g., Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). This awareness might be stronger when there are more in-group peers with similar perceptions and experiences and can contribute to a sense of ethnic "us". In contrast, for majority children a class with more in-group peers might mean that children feel less need to stick together.

The present findings should be considered in the light of some limitations and qualifications. First, we relied on cross-sectional data and therefore cannot provide evidence for causality. We analyzed perceptions of teachers' multicultural norms and positive peer group norms as predictors of preadolescents' ethnic identity, but there could be reciprocal influences. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to replicate our findings. Second, we could not model the school level in our analyses because some schools were represented by one classroom only, and because we did not have information on school characteristics. It could be, however, that students' ethnic identity is also affected by factors like the ethnic composition of the school, school size and multicultural school policy. Furthermore, a substantial part of the contextual variance in ethnic introjection was left unexplained and this could reflect the impact of other classroom characteristics such as the behaviors of teachers and peers. Such additional factors should be included in future research. Additionally and following Rosenberg 1979, we measured ethnic introjection with items asking about negative experiences of co-ethnics. Future studies might consider to also include positive items (e.g., feeling personally addressed by praise of co-ethnics). Moreover, we assessed teacher's overt endorsement of multiculturalism ("Does you teacher ever say …"); but, teachers may convey their views about multiculturalism also in less explicit forms or through their behavior. Hence, future research should also try to assess more subtle forms in which teachers communicate their views about multiculturalism. Finally, our study was conducted in the context of the Netherlands where primary school children tend to have one or two single teachers the whole year round. This means that the role of teachers might be different in other countries with other primary school systems.

Still, the results of our study have some practical implications. While the explicit aim of multicultural education is to improve intergroup relations (Verkuyten and Thijs 2013), our findings suggest that its prescriptive, normative aspect can also protect the ethnic private regard of minority students, especially when there are few co-ethnic peers in class. Thus, it is important that teachers stress the value of diversity and the problems of prejudice and discrimination. However, the lack of a comparable effect for majority children suggests that teachers should focus on all groups in their diversity teachings and not (implicitly) communicate that multiculturalism is for minority children only. Majority children might feel excluded if they perceive that multiculturalism is predominantly focused on ethnic minority groups, and this could decrease their positivity to ethnic out-groups (see Plaut et al. 2011).

Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that peer group norms and class composition matter. The practical implication is that teachers should be sensitive to the group dynamics in the classroom and how these dynamics depend on the composition of the class. Whether and how students' ethnic identity, in terms of a sense of ethnic "us", differs between classrooms depends on what ethnic in-group and out-group classmates think about their ethnic group and how many in-group and out-group classmates are present. This means that there is a rather complex interplay between different factors and teachers should not expect that there is

one best approach for stimulating children's ethnic identity development that is appropriate for all classes.

Conclusion

Ethnic identity plays a key role for the normative development of children and adolescents (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014), and efforts to provide children and youth with a positive and safe environment to develop different aspects of their ethnic identity can benefit from a better understanding of its context-dependency. Our study demonstrates that social norms in the classroom in combination with ethnic class composition play a role for how ethnic minority and majority preadolescents feel and think about their ethnic group membership and ethnic group. In particular two findings stand out. First, the results of our study highlight that the roles of teachers' multicultural norms and peer group norms for ethnic identity depend on the ethnic class composition. This indicates that in future studies it is important to examine classroom norms in *combination* with ethnic class composition, rather than investigating one or the other separately. Second, especially ethnic introjection was found to vary as a function of classroom features. Ethnic introjection is a specific and understudied dimension of ethnic identity, which is central to the social identity perspective (Verkuyten 2016). Future research should therefore systematically investigate the role of the school class for majority and minority children's ethnic introjection further. Furthermore and importantly, our findings indicate that ethnic identity research will be enhanced by more fully considering the conceptual and contextual implications of the social identity perspective.

Authors' Contributions All authors developed the study concept, participated in its design and were involved in drafting the manuscript. N.G. performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first full drafts of the manuscript; J.T. supervised the data collection, participated in the statistical analysis, and provided input on the drafts; M.V. re-worked the theoretical introduction and parts of the discussion. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Sharing and Declaration The dataset generated and the analysis of the current study are not publicly available but are deposited at the safe storage facility of the University and they are available from the second author on request.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Passive parental consent was obtained, and all students included in the study participated voluntarily.

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