



Research paper

Discussing controversial issues in the classroom: Exploring students' safety perceptions and their willingness to participate[☆]

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Students differed in whether they opposed or supported the controversial tradition of Black Pete.
- Higher perceived identity threat went together with a higher willingness to participate in a controversial issue discussion.
- With more agentic and more communal teacher behavior, students' personal characteristics, such as extraversion and identity threat, were less predictive of students' willingness to participate.
- Students said they were more willing to participate in a controversial issue discussion in classrooms with higher teacher communion and agency.
- We conclude that teachers can help to encourage student participation during controversial issue discussions by creating a safe classroom environment.

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ABSTRACT

Discussing controversial issues is an important means to support secondary school students' democratic citizenship. Using questionnaires, we investigated how students' (N = 284) willingness to participate in such discussions is associated with their safety perceptions (identity threat, classroom opinion climate, teacher interpersonal behavior) and personality traits (extraversion). We used the controversial Dutch tradition of Black Pete as a case. Exploratory network analysis showed that students' willingness to participate increased when they experienced identity threat. Our findings suggest that teachers can encourage student participation in discussions about controversial issues by creating a safe classroom environment.

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1. Introduction

The prevention of polarisation is an ongoing concern in diverse democratic societies (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). Over the past years, an appeal has been made to schools to address democratic citizenship, and specifically polarisation, by teaching youth how to deal with diverse and conflicting perspectives (Council of Europe, 2017; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). An important way to achieve this is to discuss controversial issues in the classroom, which allows

students to practise essential skills for citizenship (Avery et al., 2013; Hess, 2009, 2011), such as communication and interpersonal skills (Hess, 2002) and perspective taking (Johnson, 2015).

To fully benefit from classroom discussions, however, students need to be willing to participate by sharing their own views (Wansink, Patist, Zuiker, Savenije, & Janssenswillen, 2019; Wansink & Timmer, 2020; Caspi et al., 2008) and by open-mindedly listening to the perspectives of others (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Wade, 1994). Previous studies have indicated that feelings of safety and threat can play a crucial role in students' willingness to participate (Sheppard & Levy, 2019; Sætra, 2021). In particular, three factors have been pointed out as being connected to feelings of safety: identity threat (King, 2009), classroom opinion climate (Matthes et al., 2018), and interpersonal teacher behaviour (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Schuitema et al., 2018).

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So far, these safety factors have mostly been studied in isolation, which means that we lack knowledge about how these factors are interrelated with participation in classroom discussions in concert. Therefore, this exploratory study aimed to gain a deeper insight into how these factors are jointly associated with students' willingness to participate in classroom discussions about controversial issues. As it is well known that teachers can sometimes struggle with involving all students in discussing controversial issues, our results might help teachers to build a classroom environment which makes students' participation more likely (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Wansink et al., 2021). We conducted a questionnaire study and performed exploratory network analyses (Epskamp et al., 2018) to investigate the interconnectedness between participation and safety perceptions. The context of the study was the controversial Dutch tradition of "Black Pete", which involves actors painting their faces black and performing as the servants of a white male saint called Saint Nicholas. The study was conducted in history education classes in secondary vocational education schools. The ages of the students ranged from 13 to 17.

1.1. Willingness to participate in controversial issue discussions

Controversial issues can be defined as "those problems and disputes that divide society and for which significant groups within society offer conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative values" (Stradling et al., 1984, p. 2, as cited in McCully, 2006). Controversial issue discussions have been proposed as a didactic method (Goldberg & Savenije, 2018; Oulton et al., 2004) because they allow students to practise communication and interpersonal skills (Hess, 2002) and help students to understand and respect different perspectives (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Hess, 2009). Indeed, in a large-scale survey study, Johnson (2015) found a strong association between participating in discussions and the propensity for perspective taking. Controversial issue discussions also have the potential to improve critical thinking and argumentation skills (Reznitskaya et al., 2009), and an open classroom climate for discussion was found to be positively related to students' civic engagement and knowledge (Alivernini & Manganeli, 2011; Campbell, 2019).

To benefit from discussions about controversial issue, however, it is important that students are willing to participate. Participation includes, for example, sharing one's opinion, presenting arguments for a certain point or view, or responding to counterarguments (Caspi et al., 2008; Menzel & Carrell, 1999). Whether or not students participate verbally in controversial issue discussions during class may depend on several personal and classroom factors connected to perceived safety and threat.

1.2. Perceived safety

Previous studies suggest that students' willingness to participate is connected to perceptions of threat and safety (Russell et al., 2008; Sætra, 2021), in particular to perceived identity threat (Hand & Levinson, 2012; King, 2009), opinion climate (Matthes et al., 2018), and interpersonal teacher behaviour (Frisby & Martin, 2010).

1.2.1. Identity threat

Students may experience identity threat when discussing controversial issues in class if the ideas and feelings they have about these issues are connected to their identity or race (Goldberg, 2013). Identity threat can be defined as "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011, p. 644). Generally, people try to sustain their self-image and a positive self-concept (of themselves as good, morally adequate, competent, etc.) and tend to feel

threatened and get defensive when this self-concept is challenged (Burke & Stets, 2012; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Hornsey, 2005). Thus, being confronted with the perspective of someone with a different worldview can be experienced as threatening (Sassenrath et al., 2016). Controversial issue discussions also explicitly address identity sometimes (Journell, 2017; Payne & Journell, 2019), especially when issues of race or ethnicity are discussed (e.g., King, 2009; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012).

Experiencing identity threat may affect students' willingness to participate during discussions (Goldberg, 2013). In particular, when people feel like their identity is threatened, they can have a range of defensive responses (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Täuber & van Zomeren, 2013), such as derogating and distancing oneself from people who hold perspectives experienced as identity threatening (Cramwinckel et al., 2013, 2015; Monin, 2007) and being resistant to personal change (Murtagh et al., 2012). Indeed, in a qualitative study, King (2009) found that students disengaged from a controversial issue discussion to avoid critical self-reflection in order to protect their self-image and identity. Regarding students' willingness to participate verbally in the classroom, the literature suggests that students may either become quiet to protect their identity (White, 2011) or speak up to defend it (Petriglieri, 2011).

1.2.2. Opinion climate

The opinion climate in a classroom can be defined as the (perceived) opinion held by the majority of students in a class (Bălătescu, 2014). The opinion climate is connected to participation, in that people are less likely to express their view if they feel that it is opposed to the majority opinion, an effect that is also known as the spiral of silence (Matthes et al., 2018). This may be because of the threat of social rejection and isolation when expressing a viewpoint that diverges from the majority opinion. According to the spiral of silence theory, this effect leads to perceived majority opinions becoming more dominant and perceived minority opinions becoming silenced over time (Matthes, 2015). Similarly, Dickerson et al. (2004) argued that threats stemming from social evaluation or rejection result in shame and that shame is related to submission, withdrawal, and disengagement, which could affect participation. Indeed, Ladd et al. (2008) found that students who experienced rejection by peers were inhibited in their verbal class participation later on. Similarly, Hess and Posselt (2002) suggested that peers' judgements may provoke anxiety during discussions, especially if classmates are perceived as powerful. Furthermore, in a survey study, Frisby et al. (2014) found a relationship between perceived face threat (i.e. a threat to the way one is perceived by others) and student-participation apprehension. Regarding sociocultural divisions in the classroom based on race and class, Hemmings (2000) showed that minority students do not want to express their opinions if these are perceived to be different from the classroom majority, especially when the teacher fails to take hierarchies of status and authorities into account. Howard et al. (2006) found mixed results on the impact of students' race on participation in discussions. They found some evidence that white students participated more frequently, but under specific circumstances, such as discussions of racism, Black students became "experts" and participated at a greater rate.

Thus, during discussions about controversial issue, students may feel less safe to participate if they perceive their perspective to be different from that of the classroom majority, and these perceived difference can be further affected if sociocultural differences are present.

1.2.3. Interpersonal teacher behaviour

A third factor that previous studies found to be associated with

students' sense of safety, and thus potentially their willingness to participate during controversial issue discussions, is the teacher's interpersonal behaviour (van Tartwijk et al., 2014; Wubbels et al., 2006). In particular, students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behaviour in terms of communion (i.e. warmth and friendliness) and agency (i.e. social influence and dominance) have impact on the social climate in the classroom, as well as on the relationships that students have with their teacher, thus affecting how students feel and behave in class. For example, students who experience their teacher as high on agency and low on communion tend to be apprehensive and sometimes even anxious in class (van Tartwijk et al., 2014; Mainhard et al., 2018). Teachers who are perceived as showing high levels of communion, on the other hand, are warm and make students feel at ease, resulting in a friendly and safe classroom climate, in which students are also more willing to participate (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Menzel & Carrell, 1999). Along similar lines, some researchers have suggested that good student–teacher relationships help to create an open classroom climate for discussions (Maurissen et al., 2018). Teachers with a relatively high level of agency provide structure to classroom processes and are more respected by students. This helps to keep students engaged and to prevent student misbehaviour (van Tartwijk et al., 2014; Wubbels et al., 2006) and creates a safe environment for students to participate (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

1.3. The controversial topic of Black Pete

The controversial topic we used for this study is connected to a yearly tradition in the Netherlands in which Saint Nicholas (a white male saint with a mitre and red cape) arrives on a boat with Black servants called Black Petes to give presents and candy to children. The Black Petes are played by actors, who paint their face black and wear a wig with black curly hair. The tradition of Saint Nicholas and his Black Petes is a major festivity in the Netherlands, which most parents celebrate with their children. However, over the past years, there has been a heated societal debate about the figure of Black Pete (Wekker, 2016). Opponents of Black Pete connect the tradition to the Dutch history of colonialism and slavery and argue that the tradition is racist. Based on Hall (1997), they propose that Black Pete can be perceived as “ritualised humiliation” because Black Pete is seen as the ever “happy Black man”, who does not worry or think and is there to amuse white people. Proponents, on the other hand, say that it is an innocent children's festivity and that they have no racist intentions. Furthermore, they argue that Black Pete is a cultural tradition that should be protected. The tradition tends to trigger feelings of identity threat for people on both sides of the debate (Schols, 2019). Opponents of Black Pete can feel threatened in their identity and race due to the stereotypical image of Black people being slaves or servants that is reinforced by the Black Pete figures. On the other hand, proponents tend to feel a threat to their moral self-image because of the claim that Black Pete is racist, and they experience the critique of Black Pete as an attack on Dutch national identity (Wekker, 2016). The debate generally triggers strong emotions and has sometimes resulted in verbal, or even physical, violence (Schols, 2019).

Several researchers (e.g. Brown et al., 2017; Sosa, 2020) have pointed out that classroom discussions that address issues of race are rare and that by tacit agreement teachers and students often remain silent on the topic, eschewing conflict. In the Netherlands, race as such and the question of skin colour are only seldom part of the public debate but are, somewhat indirectly, addressed by acknowledging slavery as a dark period of Dutch colonial history. The vast majority of the Dutch population, including secondary school students, are aware of the Black Pete controversy.

1.4. Current study

Classroom discussions of controversial issues are viewed as a promising vehicle to decrease polarisation and to teach students essential democratic citizenship skills (Hess, 2002). Because students can practise these skills only if they participate in the discussion, it is important to understand what factors are connected to students' willingness to participate. Perceived safety has been put forward as a major determinant of participation in such discussions. Therefore, our explorative research question was the following: How are identity threat, the perceived classroom opinion climate, and teacher interpersonal behaviour associated with secondary school students' expectations about getting involved in a controversial issue discussion? Generally, we expected that, overall, students would be more willing to participate when they perceived the classroom as a safe environment and would experience less identity threat. To be able to investigate participation in relation to safety perceptions beyond students' habitual tendency to speak out, we took students' extraversion, as defined in the Big Five framework (John et al., 2008), into account in our analyses.

We add to existing studies by researching factors related to students' perceived safety together (i.e. identity threat, opinion climate, and interpersonal teacher behaviour) and by investigating how they are jointly associated with students' willingness to participate. For ethical and also practical reasons, we used a hypothetical rather than real classroom discussion on the controversy of Black Pete. The theme was introduced on paper and students' perceptions of the controversy and their expected participation in a classroom discussion was assessed via a questionnaire (self-report). To analyse the data, we used a relatively new method called network analysis, which estimates, based on partial correlations, how the study variables (perceptions of safety and threat, expected participation) are connected to each other in systems by drawing a network of associations (Epskamp et al., 2018). We label the current study as exploratory because we were primarily interested in the direction and the size of the associations between the study variables in the current sample in order to generate new directions for research on controversial issue discussions. Although we report *p*-values in our analyses, our ambition was not to generalise the findings to the population at this point.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 284 students (14 classes; 168 male, 106 female, and 10 pupils did not fill in their gender) in years 3 and 4 of Dutch secondary vocational education (vmbo-t). In the Netherlands, students in secondary education follow different tracks depending on their cognitive abilities: vocational education, higher general secondary education (havo), and pre-university education (vwo). Vocational education has the most ethnically diverse student population in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2022), which makes it suitable for studying identity-related questions in the context of the Black Pete discussion. The cultural backgrounds of participants included Dutch (77.4%), Surinamese (7.3%), Moroccan (6.5%), Turkish (2.3%), Antillean (1.1%), and others (14.2%).¹ In comparison to the diversity one would expect on average among vocational students, our sample seems to be acceptable. According to Statistics Netherlands (2022), 72% of

¹ Some participants have a mixed cultural background; therefore, the percentages do not add up to 100.

the students in years 3 and 4 of Dutch secondary vocational education have a Dutch cultural background. It is more difficult to compare the other cultural backgrounds as different categories are used. Statistics Netherlands states that 21% of the students have a non-Western background (i.e. including Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish, and Antillean students) and 6.7% have a Western migration background in years 3 and 4 of Dutch secondary vocational education. Furthermore, in terms of skin colour, 171 (65.5%) participants indicated that they were white, 40 (15.3%) were somewhat dark, and 16 (6.1%) were dark-skinned (see section 2.3.6 for an explanation of these categories). The ages of the students ranged from 13 to 17 ($M = 14.90$, $SD = 0.82$).

2.2. Data collection

History teachers who attended a conference on the Dutch secondary vocational education (vmbo-t) history exam were asked to participate with their students. In total, 11 teachers participated in the study with one or more classes, which means that the response rate was rather low. Some teachers explained that they did not want to participate in a study involving Black Pete because they felt that the topic was too controversial. Furthermore, during our data collection, schools closed in the Netherlands due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several teachers said they had to switch to online teaching and therefore had no more time to participate in this research or did not want to collect this sensitive data online.

2.3. Instruments

A questionnaire was used in the study, which included subscales targeting a controversial issue (Black Pete), students' estimate of their willingness to participate in a class discussion on this topic, identity threat, the classroom opinion climate, and perceived interpersonal teacher behaviour. Moreover, the questionnaire included questions on students' demographics to take students' general tendency to speak out in class into account.

2.3.1. Controversial issue

Questions to students were presented in the context of the controversial issue of Black Pete. To gauge whether the topic indeed triggered the expected reactions among students, we asked participants' opinions on Black Pete using a 7-point scale ranging from "Black Pete should be maintained" to "Black Pete should be abolished". This was followed by two questions related to how participants felt about the tradition. First, a picture of Black Pete was included, and participants were asked to indicate which emotions they experienced when looking at the picture by selecting as many emotions as they wanted from a list and/or adding other emotions. Second, participants were given four statements that are often made in debates about Black Pete (e.g. "Black Pete is racist", and "Black Pete is a children's festivity that should remain untouched") and were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed.

2.3.2. Willingness to participate and identity threat

We developed scales for assessing students' willingness to participate and identity threat in two rounds. First, items were formulated based on a review of the literature. In the second round, the scales were validated by experts and pilot tested with students. The expert validation involved one-on-one meetings with four experts on controversial issue discussions, identity, and diversity and learning. A think-aloud protocol was used (i.e. asking the experts to say anything that came to mind while going through the scales), followed by a semi-structured interview (i.e. asking specific questions about the methodological and substantive validity of the

scales). Furthermore, a qualitative pilot test of the scales was done with students, using a focus group method. Three focus groups were held with three students each. Students discussed the scales with the researcher and each other, giving their opinion on the scales and pointing out any issues they encountered.

Willingness to Participate Scale. The final willingness to participate scale included four items targeting participation (e.g. "if my history teacher would discuss Black Pete in class, I would be willing to say what my opinion is") with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". In this explorative study, we first tried to distinguish verbal participation from reflective participation. The reflective participation scale also consisted of four items (e.g. "if my history discussed Black Pete in class, I would want to understand other opinions"). Negatively formulated items were reversed, after which a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus version 8.3 was used to investigate the factor structure of the scale. The TYPE = COMPLEX command, which produces robust standard errors for nested data, was used to take into account that students were nested in classrooms. This two-factor structure (i.e. a model including a factor for verbal and reflective participation) did not produce an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(19) = 88.455$, $p < .001$, $RMSEA = 0.113$, $CFI = 0.771$, $TLI = 0.662$, $SRMR = 0.099$. Factor loadings and modification indices indicated problems with items 2, 6, and 8, which all concerned reflective participation (see Appendix A). As no theoretically sound modifications could be made based on the modification indices, it was decided to fit a one-factor model with only the verbal participation items. This model provided a good model fit: $\chi^2(2) = 1.635$, $p = .44$, $RMSEA = 0.000$, $CFI = 1.000$, $TLI = 1.000$, $SRMR = 0.016$. Reliability for this willingness to participate verbally scale was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$), and the ICC was 0.04. Thus, we carried on with a focus on verbal participation and its associations with perceived classroom safety.

Identity Threat Scale. The final identity threat scale included eight items (e.g. "the discussion about Black Pete makes me feel that people like me cannot be themselves") with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". A TYPE = COMPLEX CFA was also conducted for this scale. Initial model fit was not acceptable: $\chi^2(20) = 87.737$, $p < .001$, $RMSEA = 0.109$, $CFI = 0.917$, $TLI = 0.884$, $SRMR = 0.043$. Modification indices indicated that the residuals for item 1 ("the discussion about Black Pete makes me feel like people like me are being attacked") and item 2 ("the discussion about Black Pete makes me feel like people like me are not respected") were highly correlated. This may have been due to method effects (Brown, 2006), as the wording of these items was similarly extreme compared to that of the other items. As removing either item 1 or item 2 did not lead to an acceptable model fit, both items 1 and 2 were removed from the scale, leading to an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(9) = 32.254$, $p < .001$, $RMSEA = 0.095$, $CFI = 0.955$, $TLI = 0.925$, $SRMR = 0.029$ and good reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$. The ICC was <0.001 .

2.3.3. Opinion climate

Students' perceptions of the opinion climate in the classroom was measured with two questions. In the first question, students were asked to indicate to what extent they believed their teacher's opinion was different from, or similar to, their own opinion regarding Black Pete, on an 8-point scale ranging from "completely different than my opinion" to "completely the same as my opinion". The ICC for this variable was 0.07. In the second question, students had to indicate how many students in their classroom they thought had the same opinion about Black Pete as them, on an 8-point scale ranging from "most students have a different opinion than me" to "most students have the same opinion as me". The ICC for this variable was 0.05.

2.3.4. Interpersonal teacher behaviour

To measure student perceptions of their teachers' interpersonal behaviour, the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) was administered. The QTI is a validated scale which measures students' perceptions of their teacher's interpersonal behaviour along two dimensions: communion (i.e. warmth and friendliness, e.g. "this teacher is friendly") and agency (i.e. social influence and dominance, e.g. "this teacher is a good leader") (van Tartwijk et al., 2014; Wubbels et al., 2006). The scale is based on the interpersonal circle developed by Leary (1957). The QTI contains 24 items, which are measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability for agency (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.68 and 0.75 for communion. The ICC for agency was 0.27 and 0.23 for communion. Thus, to take the multilevel structure of the data into account, students' perceptions were group-mean centred. This means that a high score implies that the student perceived higher teacher communion or agency than students in that class did on average. Given the relatively small sample (14 teachers) and the fact that due to the specific circumstances of the study (i.e., the pandemic and the self-selection of teachers in response to the subject of the study which reduced variability in interpersonal teacher behaviors; see sections 2.2 and 4.4) we refer the reader to studies including larger and more diverse samples of teachers for the validity of the QTI version used in the current study (e.g., Mainhard, 2015).

2.3.5. Extraversion

Because students' extraversion may arguably affect their tendency to engage in classroom discussions and to speak out in class in general (Kaplan et al., 2015), we assessed students' extraversion with the item "I view myself as someone who is reluctant" (reverse coded) taken from the Dutch translation (Denissen et al., 2008) of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 2008). The ICC for this variable was <0.001.

2.3.6. Background variables

The questionnaire contained several questions on background variables, including gender, age, ethnicity, and skin colour. Skin colour was asked instead of race as race is rather controversial in the Netherlands and students are generally not used to answering questions about race. Students could choose from common categories for skin colour in the Netherlands, which translate into white (*wit*), somewhat dark (*licht getint*), and dark (*donker getint/zwart*). It is important to note that these are broad categories and that we do not intend to homogenise different racial and ethnic groups who may identify with the same category (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). They were only grouped for the purpose of the present study as the debate on Black Pete is closely related to the skin colour of the Pete. It was emphasised that students were not obliged to answer the question on skin colour, and 13% of students decided not to answer.

2.4. Procedure

Teachers who were willing to participate in the study received a package which contained a teacher protocol, a letter to inform the school director about the study, information letters for the students, information letters for the parents, student questionnaires, and a note-taking form that the teachers could use to inform the researchers about anything remarkable that happened while administering the questionnaire and about other things they felt were relevant for the study. No personal data were collected or stored. The study was approved by the Faculty Ethics Review Board of Utrecht University, nr. FETC19-048.

2.5. Analysis

To investigate the connections between willingness to participate and perceived identity threat, opinion climate and interpersonal teacher behaviour, a network analysis was conducted. Network analysis refers to a set of statistical methods that visualise how variables (referred to as nodes) are connected to each other in systems (called networks; Epskamp et al., 2018). It is considered especially useful for investigating social phenomena as these are usually not the outcome of one variable but rather of a complex interplay between several variables. In the present study, we performed network analysis based on the Gaussian Graphical Model (GGM) in R using the bootnet package (Epskamp et al., 2018). Unlike, for example, structural equation modelling, in network analysis, conditional dependencies (i.e. the relationship between two variables when taking all the other variables in the network into account, i.e. partial correlations) are calculated between all variables in the network. These relationships are referred to as edges. Spearman correlations were used to take non-normality into account. Pairwise deletion was used to deal with missing data (0.8% of values was missing). After calculating the networks, edge accuracy was investigated through bootstrapping. Typically, as in the current study, only significant edges ($p < .05$) are retained. Currently, no multilevel versions are available for network analysis. To make sure that the estimates in our analyses were not biased, we used within-class centering to cancel out between classroom variance. Thus, the results presented below refer to within-classroom associations.

The role of identity threat and perceived interpersonal teacher behaviour was explored in more depth through a comparison of a network of students who scored higher than the classroom average on a variable (e.g. identity threat) to the network of students who scored lower than average on that variable. Although we provide a Network Comparison Test (NCT) (Epskamp et al., 2018), comparing the edges that were significantly connected to willingness to participate verbally in one or both of the networks, we emphasise that this comparison was of an exploratory nature. Our primary goal was to generate ideas about how the connection between the study variables might look differently in different networks presenting various student perceptions and not so much to generalise our results to the population.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptives and preliminary analyses

3.1.1. The controversial nature of Black Pete

Analyses confirmed that the students' opinions on the topic were divided: 69% ($N = 197$) of the students thought that the tradition of Black Pete should continue, 19% ($N = 55$) felt that it should be abolished, and 11% ($N = 31$) were neutral about Black Pete. Proponents of Black Pete felt that Black Pete is a cultural tradition ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.77$) and that the children's festivity that should remain untouched ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.83$), while they strongly disagreed that Black Pete is racist ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.04$) and that Black Pete recalls slavery ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 0.90$). Overall, they mainly experienced positive emotions when looking at a picture of a Black Pete, such as happiness, coziness, cheerfulness, and pride, although emotions in relation to Black Pete differed depending on the combination of opinion and skin colour (see Appendix B).

Opponents, on the other hand, felt that Black Pete is racist ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.56$) and that it recalls slavery ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.97$), while strongly disagreeing that it is a cultural tradition ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.99$) and a children's festivity that should remain

untouched ($M = 2.02, SD = 1.10$). Overall, they mainly experienced negative emotions when looking at a picture of a Black Pete, such as anger, shame, sadness, and guilt. Which negative emotions opponents were most likely to experience was dependent on their skin colour; students with dark and somewhat dark skin were most likely to feel angry, while white students were most likely to feel guilty (see Appendix B). Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the level of identity threat experienced by proponents ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.27$) and opponents of Black Pete ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.09$), $t(250) = -0.957, p = .339$.

Lastly, students who were neutral about Black Pete mainly experienced positive emotions in relation to Black Pete, although their emotions were mixed (see Appendix B), and were on average more neutral about the statements that Black Pete is a cultural tradition ($M = 3.10, SD = 1.11$) and children's festivity that should remain untouched ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.99$), and that it is racist ($M = 3.10, SD = 0.83$) and recalls slavery ($M = 2.94, SD = 1.26$).

3.1.2. Skin colour

As may be expected, a significant difference was found between the opinions of participants with different skin colours ($p < .001$, Fisher's exact test). In total, 79.0% of white, 47.7% of somewhat dark, and, remarkably, 33.3% of dark-skinned participants felt that the tradition of Black Pete should continue. Furthermore, 11.8% of white, 40.9% of somewhat dark, and 55.6% of dark-skinned participants felt that the tradition of Black Pete should be abolished. Lastly, 9.1% of white, 11.4% of somewhat dark, and 11.1% of dark-skinned participants were neutral about Black Pete.

There was no significant difference between the perceived identity threat of dark ($M = 3.27, SD = 1.22$), somewhat dark ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.11$), and white participants ($M = 2.93, SD = 1.25$), F

(2, 246) = 0.70, $p = .500$. Also, no significant relationship was present between skin colour and willingness to participate verbally (dark: $M = 3.90, SD = 0.90$; somewhat dark: $M = 3.87, SD = 0.87$; white: $M = 3.79, SD = 0.93$), $F(2, 246) = 0.22, p = .807$.

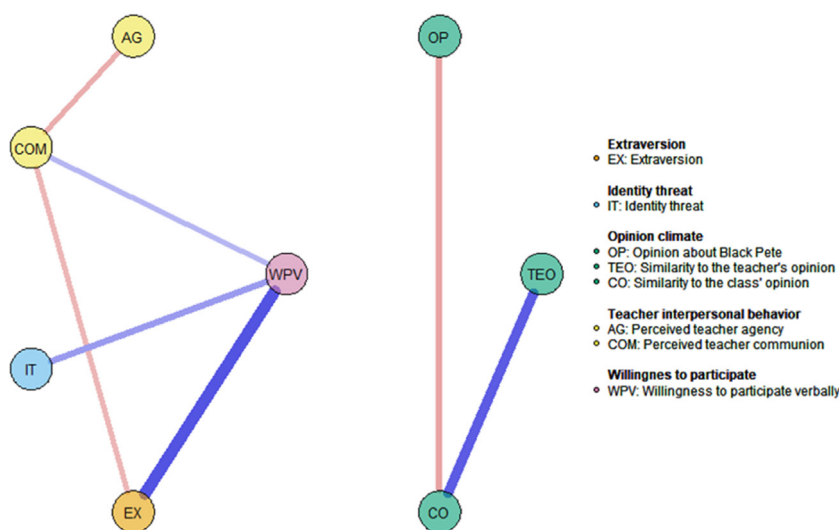
3.1.3. Gender

Male and female students did not differ significantly in their willingness to participate verbally (male: $M = 3.75, SD = 0.93$; female: $M = 3.79, SD = 0.98$; $t(272) = -0.41, p = .683$) and perceived identity threat (male: $M = 2.90, SD = 1.27$; female: $M = 3.01, SD = 1.17$; $t(272) = -0.70, p = .483$).

3.2. Network of willingness to participate

To provide a general overview, the network for the entire sample ($N = 284$), including all variables, is displayed in Fig. 1. Dots in the network represent variables (nodes), and lines represent statistically significant partial correlations (edges) between variables. Blue edges represent a positive association, whereas red edges represent negative associations. The thickness and opacity of the edges represent the strength of the association.

As shown in Fig. 1, students' willingness to participate verbally was more likely for students who experienced more identity threat than the class average (edge weight IT-WPV = .20). Willingness to participate verbally was not significantly related to the individual's opinion of Black Pete (edge weight OP-WPV = .05, NS), the similarity of a student's opinion to that of the teacher (edge weight TEO-WPV = -0.02, NS), nor the similarity of their opinion to that of their classmates (edge weight CO-WPV = .11, NS) relative to the class mean. Students who were more opposed to Black Pete than their peers also perceived less similarity between their opinion and that



Note. This diagram displays the full sample network analysis with willingness to participate verbally (WPV) at the centre of the network. Only statistically significant associations ($p < .05$) are included. The acronyms are defined in the legend on the right-hand side of Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Willingness to Participate, Note. This diagram displays the full sample network analysis with willingness to participate verbally (WPV) at the centre of the network. Only statistically significant associations ($p < .05$) are included. The acronyms are defined in the legend on the right-hand side of Fig. 1.

of their peers (edge weight OP-CO = -0.18). Students generally perceived the opinion of their teacher to be rather similar to that of their peers (edge weight CO-TEO = 0.32).

Students who perceived more teacher communion than the class average were somewhat more willing to participate verbally (edge weight COM-WPV = .14). There was no significant relation between students' perceptions of teacher agency and their willingness to participate (edge weight AG-WPV = -0.08, NS). Finally, as may be expected, extraverted students were clearly more willing to participate verbally (edge weight EX-WPV = .33).

3.3. Differences in perceived identity threat

To see whether the dynamics of willingness to participate differed with the level of students' identity threat ($M = 2.95$), we compared students who perceived more identity threat than

average (referred to as high-IT; $n = 168$, 22.6% opponents of Black Pete, 67.9% proponents of Black Pete, 9.5% neutral) to students who perceived less identity threat than the average (referred to as low-IT; $n = 116$, 14.7% opponents of Black Pete, 71.6% proponents of Black Pete, 12.9% neutral). The results are displayed in Figs. 2 and 3.

Both networks indicated that more extraverted students were more likely to participate verbally. Whereas high-IT students perceived more teacher communion than the class average made students relatively more likely to participate verbally, this was not, however, the case for low-IT students. On the other hand, low-IT students were relatively more likely to participate verbally if they perceived more similarity between their own opinion and the opinions of their classmates, which was not the case for high-IT students. None of these differences, however, were statistically significant using the NCT (see Table 1).

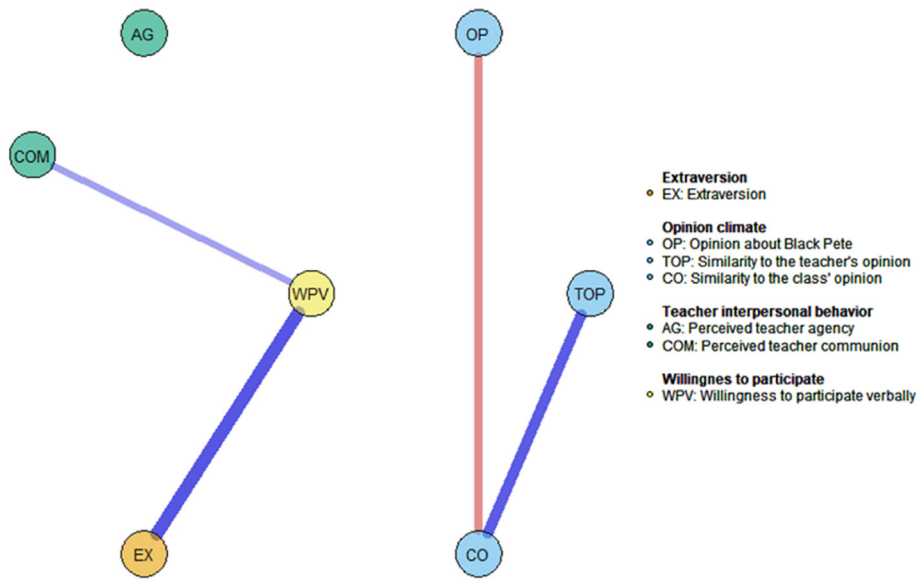


Fig. 2. Network for students with more identity threat than the average (High-IT).

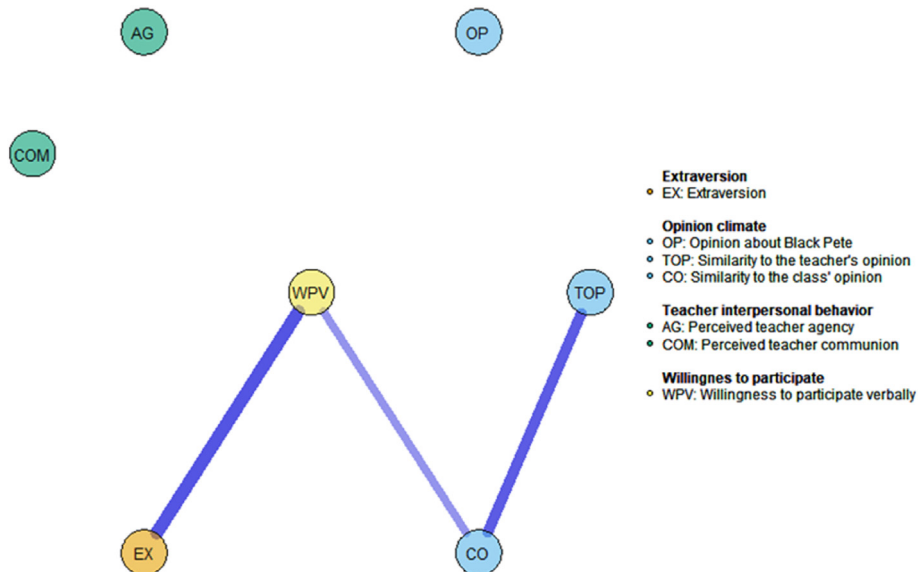


Fig. 3. Network for students with less identity threat than the average (Low-IT).

Table 1
Network comparison test for identity threat.

Edge	High-IT	Low-IT	NCT (<i>p</i> -value)
CO-WPV	.02	.21*	.14
EX-WPV	.33*	.33*	.99
COM-WPV	.18*	.08	.39

**p* < .05 within a network (two-tailed).

3.4. Differences in teachers' interpersonal communion

To gauge the role of teachers' interpersonal behaviour in class for students' willingness to participate verbally, we compared the network of students in classes with higher than sample average teacher communion (grand-mean centred; *n* = 149; 20.1% opponents of Black Pete, 66.4% proponents of Black Pete, 12.8% neutral) to that of students in classes of teachers with lower than average communion (*n* = 135; 18.5% opponents of Black Pete, 72.6% proponents of Black Pete, 8.9% neutral). The results are displayed in Figs. 4 and 5.

In classes of teachers with higher perceived communion, students who perceived even more communion than their peers were relatively more willing to participate verbally (edge weight COM-WPV = .26). This was not the case in classes of teachers with lower perceived communion (edge weight COM-WPV = .01). In this latter network, perceiving more or less communion than the classroom average was not related to students' willingness to participate. In both networks, students who were more extraverted relative to their classmates were more likely to participate verbally, although this was even more pronounced in the network with lower teacher communion classrooms. In both networks, students who experienced more identity threat were more likely to participate verbally (see Table 2) (see Table 3).

3.5. Differences in perceived teacher interpersonal agency

We also compared the network of students in classes of teachers

with higher than average perceived agency (*n* = 158; 18.4% opponents of Black Pete, 68.4% proponents of Black Pete, 13.3% neutral) to students in classes of teachers with lower than average perceived agency (*n* = 126; 20.6% opponents of Black Pete, 70.6% proponents of Black Pete, 7.9% neutral). The results are displayed in Figs. 6 and 7.

In both types of classrooms (relatively lower and higher teacher agency), students who were more extraverted than their classmates were more likely to participate verbally. Students in classes of teachers with high perceived agency were more likely to participate verbally if they perceived more identity threat than their classmates. This was not the case for students in classes of teachers with low perceived agency. For students in classes of teachers with low perceived agency, students who perceived more communion relative to their classmates were more likely to participate verbally. Again, this was not the case for students in classes of teachers with high perceived agency. The NCT indicated no statistically significant differences between the networks.

3.6. Differences in opinion on Black Pete

Finally, we compared the networks of students who were in favour of (*n* = 197) and against (*n* = 55) the tradition of Black Pete. The results are displayed in Figs. 8 and 9.

Both proponents and opponents of Black Pete were more likely to participate verbally if they were more extraverted than their classmates and if they experienced more identity threat than their classmates; this was, however, more pronounced for opponents. For the proponents, students were more likely to participate verbally if they perceived relatively more communion from their teacher than their classmates and if they felt their opinion on Black Pete was more similar to the opinion of their classmates. These latter two relationships were not found in the network for opponents of Black Pete. Perceiving relatively more agency from their teachers than their classmates, on the other hand, decreased willingness to participate verbally for proponents; this was not the case for opponents. No significant differences in relative willingness to

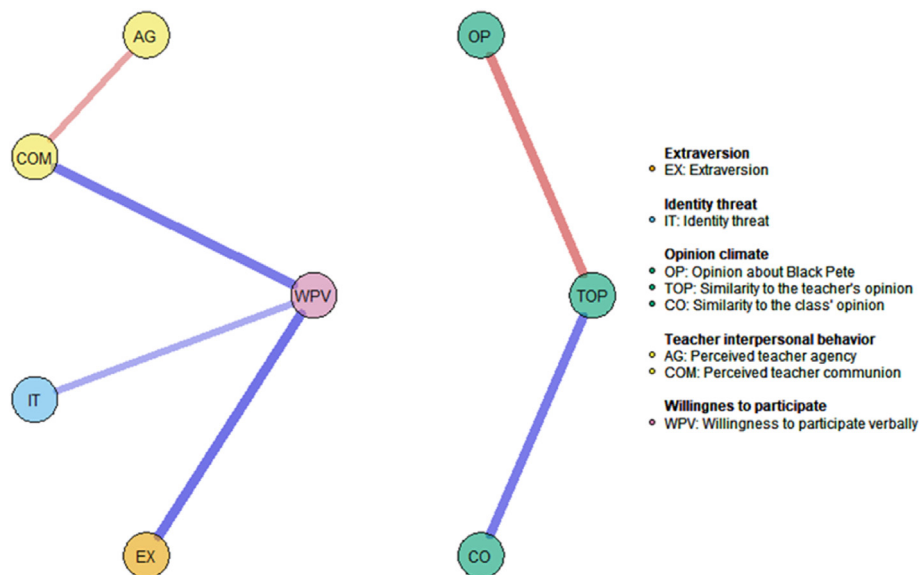


Fig. 4. Network for students in classes of teachers with higher perceived teacher communion than the sample average.

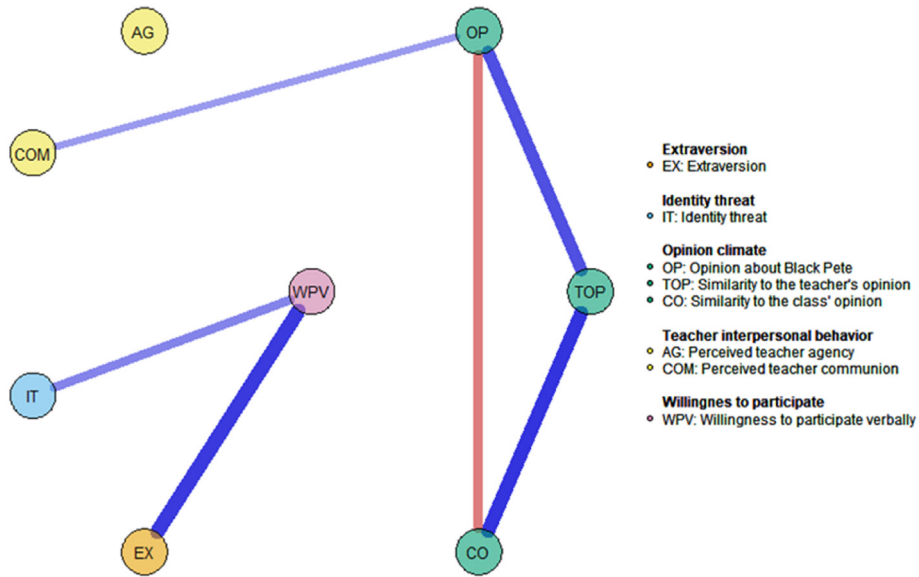


Fig. 5. Network for students in classes of teachers with lower perceived teacher communion than average.

Table 2
Network comparison test for teacher communion.

Edge	High Com.	Low Com.	NCT (P value)
EX-WPV	.27*	.39*	.33
IT-WPV	.17*	.24*	.48
COM-WPV	.26*	0.01	.04*

*p < .05 (two-tailed).

Table 3
Network comparison test for teacher agency.

Edge	High Ag.	Low Ag.	NCT (P value)
COM-WPV	.07	.19*	.32
IT-WPV	.15*	.09	.20
EX-WPV	.30*	.41*	.34

*p < .05 (two-tailed).

participate were found between proponents and opponents of Black Pete (see Table 4).

4. Discussion

Discussing controversial issues has been viewed as an opportunity for students to practise a range of essential skills for citizenship in a diverse democratic society (Avery et al., 2013; Hess, 2009, 2011). To fully benefit from such discussions, it is important that students feel safe to participate. We explored the connection between students' safety perceptions (in terms of identity threat, opinion climate, and interpersonal teacher behaviour) and willingness to participate during classroom discussions on a controversial topic. The Dutch tradition of Black Pete, which has been the subject of a heated societal debate in the Netherlands over the past years, was used as a case (Wekker, 2016).

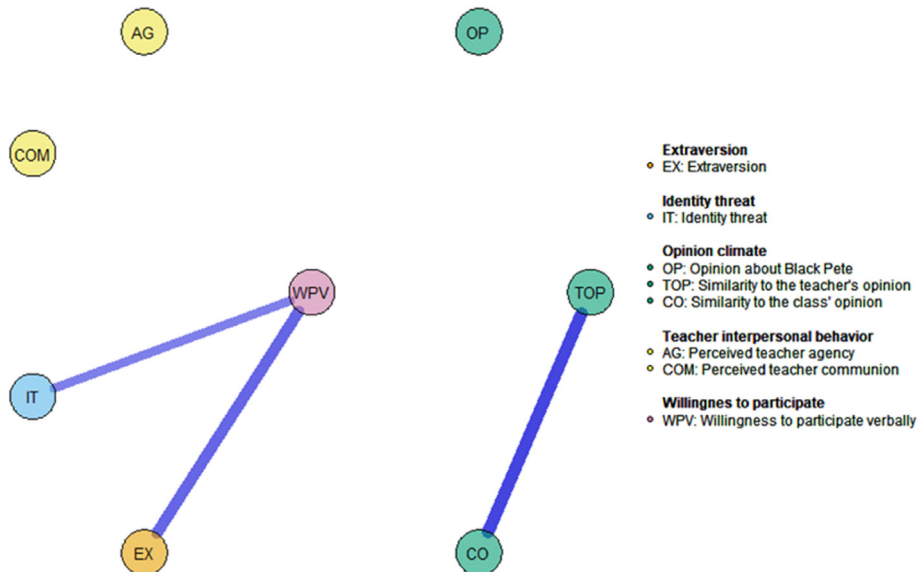


Fig. 6. Network for students in classes of teachers with higher perceived teacher agency than average.

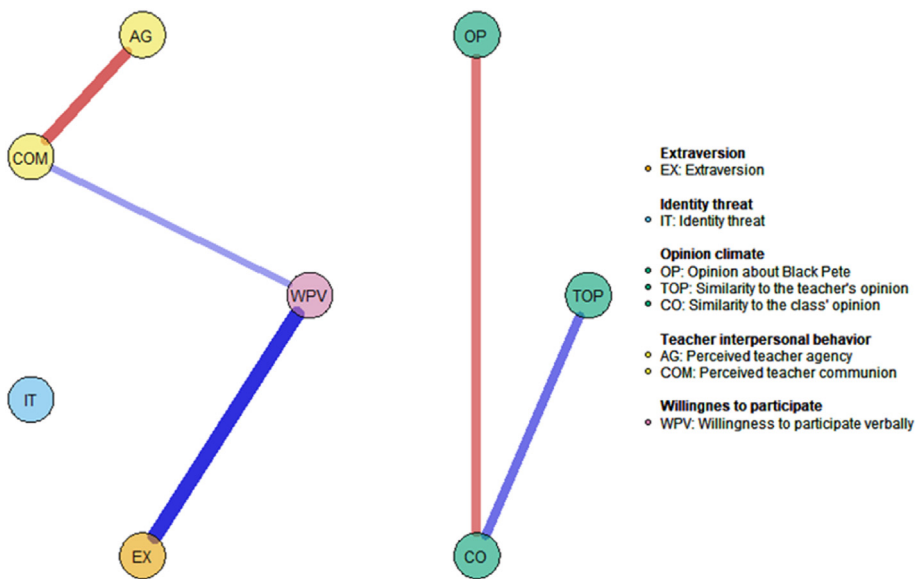


Fig. 7. Network for students in classes of teachers with lower perceived teacher agency than average.

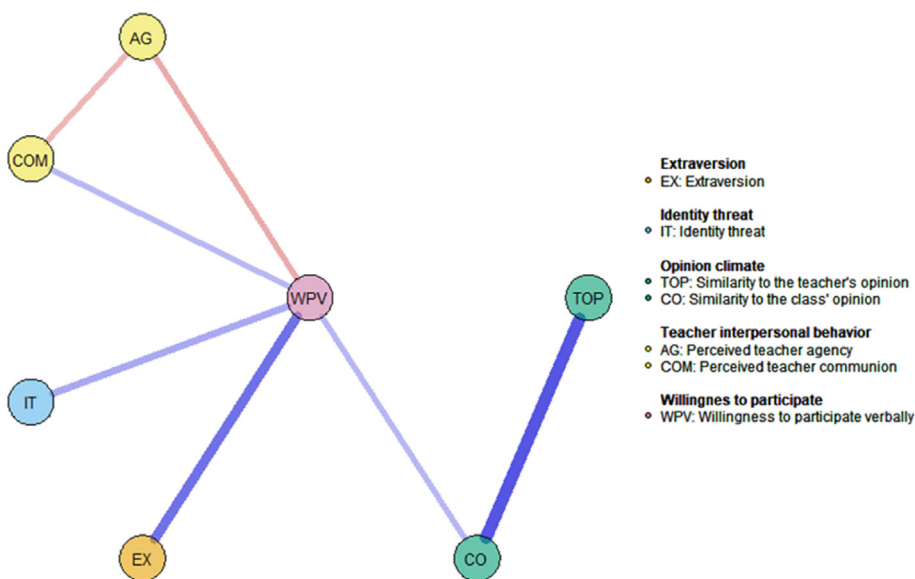


Fig. 8. Network for proponents of black pete.

Our descriptive analyses showed that students clearly differed in how they valued the tradition of Black Pete, indicating the sensitivity of the topic, as there are students who experience the tradition as racist. Interestingly, there was no significant relationship between skin colour, gender, or opinion in relation to willingness to participate, which can be regarded as positive from the point of view of equal participation in controversial issue discussions.

Nonetheless, when looking more closely at safety perceptions, the network analyses indicated that some classroom contexts in our sample seemed to make the participation of all students more likely; in those classrooms, the importance of personal characteristics, such as extraversion and identity threat, was mitigated by the teachers' interpersonal behaviour. Further, in our exploratory study,

higher perceived identity threat went together with a higher willingness to participate. Moreover, all students were more willing to participate in classrooms with higher teacher communion and agency.

Finally, we think that using network analysis helped us to generate ideas about how classroom safety perceptions of students interrelate with their willingness to participate in controversial issue discussions. Network analyses could be an interesting tool for future research in this area. Below, we discuss our findings in more detail.

4.1. The sensitive nature of Black Pete

The results confirmed the sensitivity of the Black Pete tradition

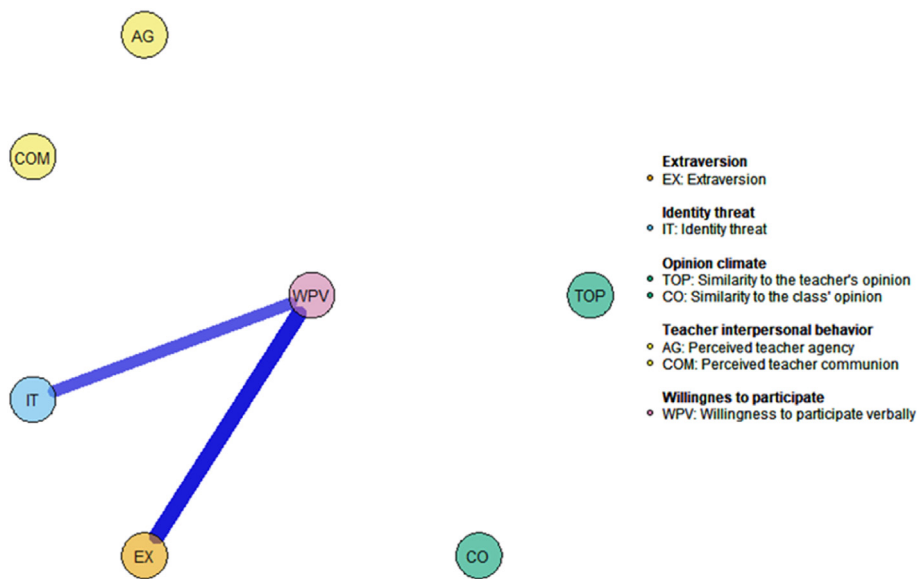


Fig. 9. Network for opponents of black pete.

Table 4
Network comparison test for opinion on black pete.

Edge	Proponent	Opponent	NCT (P value)
COM-WPV	.14*	.11	.88
IT-WPV	.17*	.33*	.27
EX-WPV	.28*	.45*	.25
CO-WPV	.14*	-.12	.13
AG-WPV	-.16	-.04	.41

*p < .05 (two-tailed).

(Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). The majority of students were proponents of the tradition and connected Black Pete with positive emotions, such as happiness and pride. Most of the proponents were white students, but also some students of colour experienced positive emotions in relation to the tradition. Our findings seem to echo that proponents consider Black Pete to be a joyful heritage and see no wrongdoing or racism (Schols, 2019; Wekker, 2016). Further, our findings seem to contrast research done in 2020 among 2300 adults, showing that only 39% of this group were proponents of Black Pete (van Engeland & Kanne, 2020). In this research it were relatively older participants that were most in favour of keeping Black Pete. 44% of the respondents above 65 years wanted to keep Black Pete, whereas 33% of the participants between 18 and 34 years wanted to keep Black Pete. It was thus contrary to our expectations that we found a relatively large group of young students to be in favour of the tradition. This could be due to the specific group of students that we invited to participate. The participants of our study consisted of students who were enrolled in secondary vocational education. The study of vanEngeland and Kanne showed that in their study participants that attended vocational education were more in favour of Black Pete (i.e. 50% in favour) than participants that attended pre-university education (i.e. 26% in favour). It also could be that our questionnaire was not nuanced enough as we did not ask if the students would be in favour of *changing* the tradition, for example giving the Black Petes all kinds of colours.

However, students of colour who opposed the tradition experienced negative feelings, such as sadness and anger. This is in line

with Slepian and Jacoby-Senghor (2021), who found that sadness and anger are related to feelings of exclusion based on one's identity. We found that the white students who were against the tradition mainly experienced feelings of shame and connected the tradition with a history of slavery and racism (cf. Wekker, 2016). In a classroom, these groups have to be brought together, which poses challenges for students and teachers: our findings indicated that both opponents and proponents can experience identity threat. Moreover, the topic is sensitive because it is related to racism according to most of the minority group students in our sample, which puts them in a potentially marginalised and vulnerable position because the topic of Black Pete is not perceived as racism by most members of the majority group. However, for the group that is in favour of Black Pete, the topic is also sensitive as they could fear that a joyful tradition will cease to exist.

4.2. Identity threat

Previous research has pointed out that students' willingness to participate in a discussion when perceiving identity threat can go in two directions: either they might stay quiet to protect their identity (White, 2011), or they speak out to defend it (Petriglierli, 2011). We found that the students in our sample were more willing to participate if they perceived more identity threat. This was the case for both proponents and opponents of Black Pete, although this was more pronounced for opponents. This finding was contrary to our expectations, and we propose that these students apparently felt the urge to be heard and stick up for their identity (Petriglierli, 2011). Moreover, they may think that by participating verbally they can change the attitudes of other students with identity-threatening views. This result might be related to the specific sample of students who participated in this research. It would be interesting to further investigate whether this is typical, especially for students of secondary vocational education, or not. We hypothesise that students on other educational tracks might be less vocal and more influenced by identity threat. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate other controversial issues. For example, students might feel different degrees of threat when the topic has a

larger impact on the whole society and for a longer period, such as COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, or climate change.

4.3. Perceived opinion climate

Generally, people are less likely to express their view if they feel it is opposed to the majority opinion (Matthes et al., 2018); thus, we expected that also the perceived opinion climate in a classroom may impact students' willingness to participate in discussions. In our sample, opponents of Black Pete perceived less similarity with the opinion of their classmates than proponents. Strikingly, their willingness to participate was not, however, related to how they perceived the opinion of their peers or the teacher. This is surprising as for opponents speaking out against Black Pete in the Netherlands can lead to distortion, rejection, and aggressive reactions (Wekker, 2016). One explanation might be in line with that of Howard et al. (2006) that in discussions of racism, students of colour can be more inclined to participate as it hits closer to home. Another explanation is that in our sample, as compared to other samples (cf. Wubbels et al., 2006), most teachers were able to create a rather safe classroom environment, and therefore opponents felt safe enough to defend their position. Thus, in samples with more variability in teacher interpersonal behaviour (i.e. including teachers with lower levels of agency and communion), findings might be more aligned with the spiral of silence theory, indicating that majority opinions are becoming more dominant and perceived minority opinions are being silenced over time (Matthes, 2015). In addition, for students experiencing low identity threat, their willingness to contribute to a discussion was more likely if their own opinion was more aligned with how they perceived the general classroom opinion. We expect that these students feel safe enough to speak out if they think that most students share their opinion.

4.4. Interpersonal teacher behaviour

In our study, teachers' interpersonal behaviour seemed to be important for students' willingness to participate in a classroom discussion about a controversial issue. First, students who perceived more teacher communion as compared to their classmates were more inclined to participate verbally. This is in line with prior research that suggests that students who perceive high teacher communion feel safer and more at ease in class, which also encourages participation (Dallimore et al., 2004). Second, several studies have indicated the importance of teacher agency for student participation (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Schuitema et al., 2018).

In line with the literature, our general network showed an overall positive relationship between extraversion and class participation, (e.g. Chew & Ng, 2016; Gronostay, 2019). Noteworthy is that teacher agency seemed to make extraversion less important for students' willingness to speak out. In addition, we found that students with high identity threat were more likely to speak out when they experienced the teacher as high in agency.

All these findings might indicate that students who are a minority in the classroom or who experience high identity threat dare to speak out in the classroom because they might feel that they will be protected by the teacher, who is high in agency and communion. This is in line with previous research that shows that high teacher agency and communion can help to prevent, for example, student misbehaviour (van Tartwijk et al., 2014; Wubbels et al., 2006). Therefore, we want to highlight the importance of teachers'

interpersonal behavior as the teacher is the central actor during discussions about controversial issue (Wansink et al., 2017, 2021; Campbell, 2008; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Like any pedagogical activity, the use of class discussion can be either effective or ineffective based upon the students in the class, interactions between students and teachers, and the classroom culture (White, 2011). It is teachers who can help to create the conditions so that more students can participate during classroom discussions despite their personal characteristics (i.e. identity threat and extraversion) or perspectives on the controversial issue (i.e. proponent and opponent).

4.5. Practical recommendations

What do our results suggest for teachers' actual practices? First, teachers should understand that specific groups of students can experience different feelings and emotions when discussing a controversial topic. Therefore, teachers could start by trying to learn about their students' position in society and their backgrounds and how these might influence their perspectives (Banks, 2008).

Second, our research shows that in the classes we investigated, most proponents and opponents were willing to speak out. Still, we want to note that the positions of the students are different as the proponents speak out about the tradition with very positive associations, while opponents speak out about a tradition which they associate with very negative emotions and feelings of racism. This difference in perspective, and possibly power, may put opponents in a more vulnerable position during a discussion. Also, if both proponents and opponents are inclined to speak out, the teacher may need to more actively manage and structure the discussion (i.e. be more agentic) while showing respect for various classroom opinions (i.e. communion, connect with students). This latter point, however, is also connected to more normative issues (see below).

Third, there is an ongoing discussion between scholars, and also policymakers, about the extent to which teachers via their own normative position should also influence the discussion and especially the feelings of safety of a potentially traumatised or marginalised group (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Pace, 2021; Parra et al., 2022; Savenije et al., 2022). Teachers could either take a neutral position or discuss different perspectives as equal by focusing on, for example, tolerance. However, many scholars recommend that teachers should take a social justice and equity perspective by pointing out that there is a group that feels marginalised, in our case by the tradition of Black Pete, and thus this should help students to understand that there are larger systemic inequities that could lead to discrimination (e.g. Martell & Stevens, 2017; Parker & Bickmore, 2020; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

4.6. Limitations

The questionnaire included only one controversial issue (Black Pete) as a case. Although all controversial issues have common aspects (e.g. their connection to values and identity), more research is needed to establish whether the role of safety is similar across different topics. For example, the topic of Black Pete includes skin colour and identity explicitly, so future research could investigate the role of identity threat when discussing topics in which identity threat is more implicit.

Second, new scales about classroom participation were developed for the purpose of this study, and several items targeting

reflective participation had to be removed to improve the validity and reliability of the scale. More work is needed to create an acceptable scale in relation to reflective participation. As Hand and Levinson (2012) put it, based on the work of Bridges (1979), “participating in discussion involves attending to multiple points of view, being receptive or responsive to opinions other than one’s own, and being concerned to develop one’s knowledge or understanding” (p. 626). Therefore, the availability of such a scale could bring more nuance to investigating classroom discussions about sensitive topics.

Third, the method used relied on a hypothetical case and thereby asked for a substantial amount of self-insight as students had to predict how they would feel during the discussion of a controversial issue. Therefore, students’ answers may not accurately reflect how they would actually behave and feel if the issue of Black Pete were discussed in class. Future research could therefore combine different research methods (e.g. questionnaire research with class observations or interviews). Actually organising classroom discussions on controversial issues is, however, also ethically challenging as the reluctance of several teachers we approached already indicated. Related to this, the sample size at the classroom level was relatively small. This may partially have been due to the controversial nature of the topic: several teachers indicated that they could not let their students participate because of the topic of Black Pete.

Finally, our study was an exploratory one, and in addition the sample size and the specific characteristics of the students prevent a generalisation to vocational secondary students in years 3 and 4. Also, network analysis is not as yet able to take the nestedness of students within classes into account. Therefore, we worked with class-mean-centred data. Although, for example, there was only

relative limited variability in teacher interpersonal behaviour between teachers according to students, differences between classes are most likely important too and could be even more pronounced in other samples, study designs, and analyses.

5. Conclusion

Overall, we conclude that the classroom context related to students’ safety perceptions could be an important determinant of the effectiveness of controversial issue discussions to develop students’ democratic citizenship. Aspects of (classroom) safety as perceived by students (e.g. identity threat, the opinion of others, how the teacher behaves interpersonally) as well as students’ extraversion are potentially associated with students’ participation and thus the effectiveness of such a discussion. We think that these safety features deserve teachers’ close attention because it is active participation of both pro- and opponents, as well as minority and majority students, which can make controversial issue discussions a fruitful base for democratic citizenship development.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Appendix A

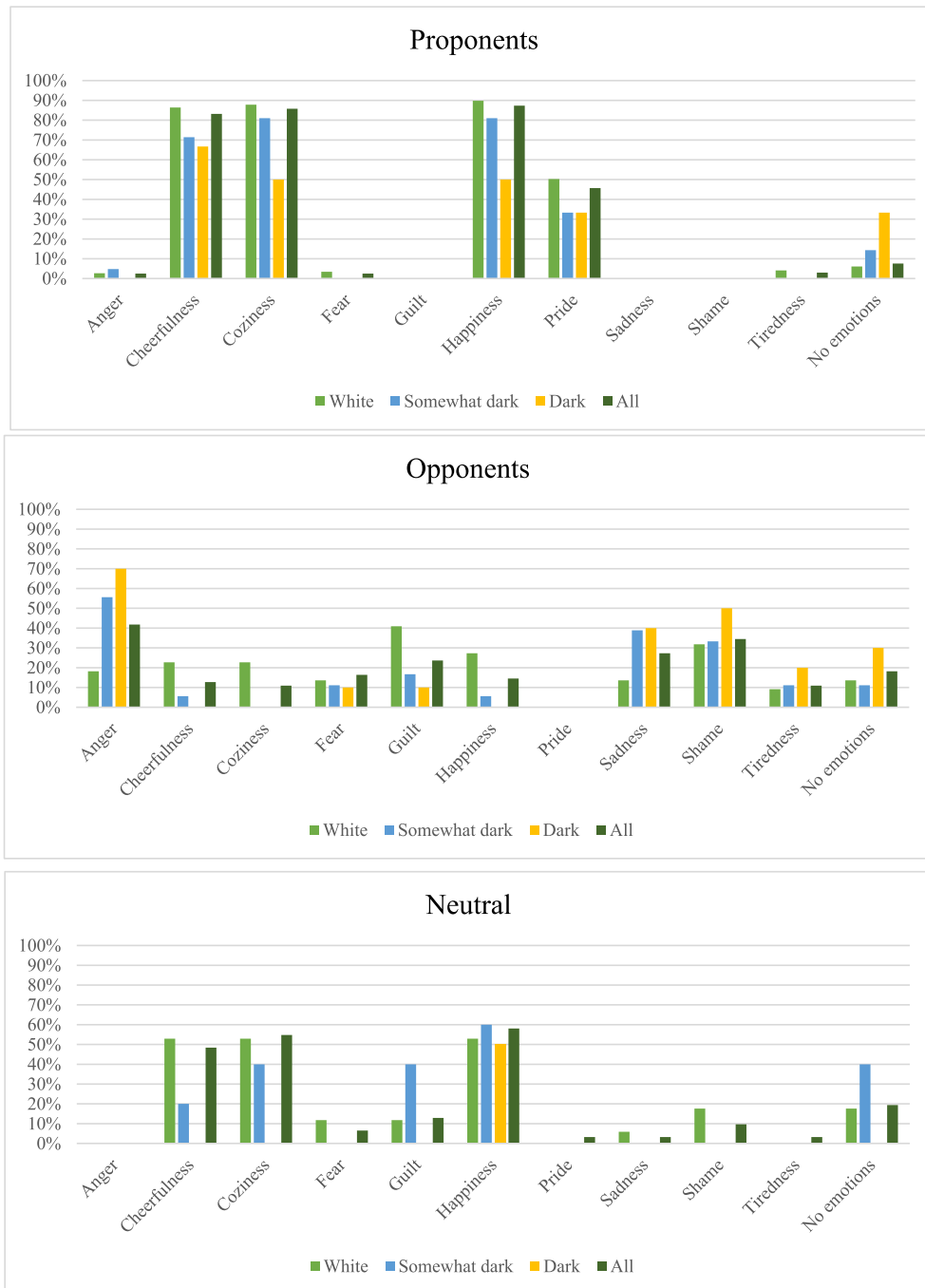
Verbal and reflective participation Scales. Factor loadings are based on a CFA distinguishing between verbal (factor 1) and reflective (factor 2) participation and on the original Dutch items (also see Section 2.3.2).

English translation	Original item	F1/ verbal	F2/ reflective
... I would like to say what my opinion is	... zou ik willen zeggen wat mijn mening is	0.839	
... I would like to keep to myself what I think about it (R)	... zou houden zou ik voor mezelf willen houden hoe ik erover denk (R)	0.493	
... I would want to defend my opinion	... zou ik mijn mening willen verdedigen	0.575	
... I would want to say little (R)	... zou ik weinig willen zeggen (R)	0.678	
... I would be curious about the reasons of people who think differently than me	.. Zou ik benieuwd zijn naar de redenen van mensen die iets anders vinden dan ik		0.352
... I would be willing to reflect on my opinion	... zou ik bereid zijn om opnieuw over mijn mening na te denken		0.471
... I would want to understand other opinions	... zou ik andere meningen willen begrijpen		1.079
... I would hold the same opinion no matter what others said (R)	... zou ik precies dezelfde mening houden, wat anderen ook zeggen (R)		-0.038

Note. The correlation between the factors was $r = -0.12$. The results are for the standardised solution. The item stem was “Als mijn geschiedenisdocent in de les een discussie over Zwarte Piet zou houden ...”, or in English “If my history teacher would discuss Black Pete with us during the lesson ...”.

Appendix B

Opinions and emotions regarding Black Pete.



Appendix C

This is the translated complete questionnaire.

1. What do you think of your history teacher? We used the QTI here (van Tartwijk et al., 2014).
2. Black Pete

The questions in this section are about Black Pete. What is your opinion about Black Pete? Colour the bullet that matches your opinion.

Black Pete should stay Black Pete should be abolished

Do you think your teacher has the same opinion as you or a different opinion? My teacher's opinion on Black Pete is ...

Completely different from my opinion Completely the same as my opinion

How many students in your class have the same opinion about Black Pete as you?

Most pupils find something different from what I find Most pupils find the same as me

What emotions does this picture evoke in you? Tick all the boxes that apply to you.

*Image of Black Pete, which we cannot share due copyright. Please check link for the image:
<https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/2259021/de-grote-zwarte-piet-controverse-hoe-het-allemaal-begon>

Happiness Anger
 Sadness Fun
 Shame Pride
 Fatigue Guilt
 Anxiety Cheerfulness
 Other:
 This image does not evoke any emotion in me

Below you read statements made by pupils about Black Pete. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

The discussion about Black Pete makes me feel that people like me ...

	Totally disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Totally agree
... Are being attacked	0	0	0	0	0
... Are being disrespected	0	0	0	0	0
... Are misunderstood	0	0	0	0	0
... Cannot be themselves	0	0	0	0	0
... Have to defend themselves all the time	0	0	0	0	0
... Are put down badly	0	0	0	0	0
... Are not allowed to do what they want to do	0	0	0	0	0
... Always need to adapt	0	0	0	0	0

If my history teacher had a discussion about Black Pete in class ...

	Totally disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Totally agree
... I would like to say what my opinion is	0	0	0	0	0
... I would be curious to know the reasons of people who find something different than me	0	0	0	0	0
... I would like to keep my opinion to myself	0	0	0	0	0
... I would be willing to rethink my opinion	0	0	0	0	0
... I would want to defend my opinion	0	0	0	0	0
... I would want to understand other opinions	0	0	0	0	0
... I wouldn't want to say much about it	0	0	0	0	0
... I would keep exactly the same opinion no matter what others say	0	0	0	0	0

	Totally disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Totally agree
Black Pete is racist.	0	0	0	0	0
Black Pete is a children's festival you should stay away from	0	0	0	0	0
Black Pete looks like a slave from the white St. Nicholas.	0	0	0	0	0
Black Pete is our tradition and it should not be taken away from us.	0	0	0	0	0

3. About you

How well do the following statements describe your personality?

I see myself as someone who ...	Totally disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Totally agree
... is reluctant	0	0	0	0	0
... generally trusts people	0	0	0	0	0
... tends to be lazy	0	0	0	0	0
... is relaxed, copes well with stress	0	0	0	0	0
... has little interest in art	0	0	0	0	0
... is warm-hearted, and a companionable person	0	0	0	0	0
... tends to criticise other	0	0	0	0	0
... works thoroughly	0	0	0	0	0
... gets nervous easily	0	0	0	0	0
... has a vivid imagination	0	0	0	0	0
... is considerate and kind to almost everyone	0	0	0	0	0

Circle all the words below that describe your identity. If you prefer not to answer this question, you may skip it.

Man	Black	Dark-skinned person
Light-skinned person	Women	White
Surinamese	Dutch	Moroccan
Turkish	Other: _____	
Antillean	Other: _____	

What is your age?
Thank you for participating!

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