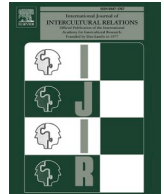




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# Explaining the relationship between socio-economic status and interethnic friendships: The mediating role of preferences, opportunities, and third parties

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## ABSTRACT

Interethnic contact is important for social cohesion and has been shown to vary with people's socio-economic status (SES). There is some evidence that SES has opposite effects on interethnic contact for non-Western ethnic minorities and for majority members in Western countries. Whereas minority members with a higher SES tend to have more contact with natives, natives with a higher SES tend to have less inter-ethnic contact. To replicate and further understand these contrasting findings, we focused on interethnic *friendships* in particular and tested simultaneously for majority and minority members whether preferences for cultural similarity, opportunities to meet ethnic others, and disapproval of third parties, mediate the relationship between SES and having interethnic friendships. Analyses of 368 natives and 267 non-Western ethnic minority members in the Netherlands confirmed the contrasting effects of SES on interethnic friendships for these two groups. Importantly, we found that for minority members higher SES was related to more friendships with natives through more meeting opportunities. For natives, higher SES was related to fewer friendships with ethnic minorities, however, this relationship could not be explained by lower meeting opportunities. Preferences for cultural similarity and third-party disapproval did not explain the link between SES and interethnic friendships for any of the two groups.

## Introduction

A large proportion of immigrant-origin minority members in Europe have a non-Western background, and for them, life in the host country is often accompanied by questions of integration and acceptance by the majority population. Whereas integration policies in Western Europe historically used to focus more on structural integration (e.g., labor market opportunities and educational attainment), in the past decade, there has been a switch to additionally stimulating socio-cultural integration of immigrants (i.e., interethnic cohesion) (Collet & Petrovic, 2014).

An important indicator of social integration of immigrants is their social contact with the native population. This contact has been found to be beneficial for successful integration of minorities in the economic and cultural spheres (Heath, Rothon, & Kilpi, 2008),

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being advantageous when it comes to employment (Kanas & van Tubergen, 2009) and language acquisition (Chiswick & Miller, 2001). Moreover, for both majority and minority members, interethnic contact can promote intergroup acceptance. Hundreds of studies have been conducted on such consequences of interethnic contact (for a meta-analysis see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Yet, open questions remain about the determinants of interethnic contact among both majority and minority group members.

Socio-economic status (SES), reflected in education and occupational status, has been identified as an important determinant of interethnic contact, but, interestingly, with opposite effects for non-Western ethnic minorities and native majority members. Whereas ethnic minority members with a higher SES have been shown to have more contact with natives (e.g., Martinović, van Tubergen, & Maas, 2011; Vervoort & Dagevos, 2011), native majority members with a higher SES tend to have less contact with ethnic minority members (Briggs, 2007; Martinović, 2013; Völker, Pinkster, & Flap, 2008). To date, this contrasting effect of SES on interethnic contact has not been studied thoroughly.

To understand the contrasting role of SES, the framework of preferences, opportunities and third parties (Kalmijn, 1998), might offer useful insights. This framework posits that people engage in interethnic contact if they want to (preferences), if they have the chance to meet ethnically different individuals (opportunities), and if relevant others (third parties) approve of such contact. Though these three mechanisms have mostly been regarded as complementary elements of a single framework, they have rarely been examined simultaneously as mediating mechanisms. Some studies on determinants of interethnic contact focussed solely on preferences, demonstrating that, in general, most people prefer to engage in close contact with members of their own ethnic group (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2011; Muttarak, 2014; Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). Other studies isolated the effect of opportunities, showing that interethnic contact in terms of friendships increases with ethnic diversity in neighbourhoods (Vervoort, 2012), or the workplace (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, & Gilljam, 2015). Yet others have measured the role of third parties, indicating that family and friends can have an impact on close intergroup relations (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Munniksma, Flache, Verkuyten, & Veenstra, 2012; Smith, Maas, & van Tubergen, 2015).

Furthermore, a few studies have zoomed in on the role of SES in determining interethnic contact. Some show that the association between ethnic composition in the neighborhood (opportunities) and interethnic contact was moderated by SES for minority members; high-SES immigrants living around more natives had more interethnic contact than low-SES immigrants (Kruse, 2017; Laan Bouma-Doff, 2007). Other studies identified SES as a predictor of interethnic contact (Martinović, van Tubergen, & Maas, 2009, Martinović et al., 2015) and theorized about the three mediating mechanisms but did not empirically test them side by side. The exception is a paper by Smith (2018) who did examine all three mechanisms but studied same- instead of interethnic friendships, exclusively in the context of school classes.

Building on Smith's work (2018), the present research focuses specifically on *interethnic friendships* among adults, which are a stronger form of social relationship than casual interethnic contact (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). The aim is to explain the contrasting relation between SES and interethnic friendships for native majority and non-Western ethnic minority members simultaneously. We do so by considering in parallel the three potentially underlying mechanisms: preferences, opportunities, and third parties. We focus on the Netherlands and go beyond earlier research by examining whether these mechanisms work differently for members of the Dutch ethnic majority group and for members of the four largest non-Western ethnic minority groups; those of Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish or Moroccan origin (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000).

With increasingly ethnically diverse Western societies, it is important to understand when and why some people are more likely to have interethnic friendships than others. The finding that high SES can promote interethnic contact for some groups but not for others implies there is no one-fits-all solution to foster social cohesion and inclusion. Our research on the underlying mechanisms between the SES – friendship association among majority and minority group members may provide guidance to practitioners and policy makers for developing interventions tailored toward the relevant target group.

## Theoretical framework

### *The role of preferences*

The homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) states that individuals prefer friends similar to themselves on a variety of characteristics, such as social status, gender, age and ethnic background. This is particularly true for educational homophily (i.e. connecting with others who have a similar educational level), because education is strongly related to income and status, but also to taste, values and lifestyle (Kalmijn, 1991). Similar arguments can be made for ethnic homophily, which is strongly related to preferences for cultural similarity (Kalmijn, 1998). These preferences for cultural similarity can be explained by the fact that people who share origin, customs and values tend to show more understanding for each other, i.e. same-ethnic friends can provide social comfort (Shrum, Cheek, & MacD, 1988). Since we focus on interethnic friendships, we concentrate on preference for cultural rather than socio-economic similarity because we assume cultural similarity is more important in the development of interethnic friendships.

Research on interethnic friendships among different populations and across contexts has consistently confirmed the importance of preferences. For instance, studies in schools show that students are more likely to become friends with members of their own ethnic group than with members of other ethnic groups (Massey et al., 2011; Stearns et al., 2009). Furthermore, a study by Muttarak (2014) on a representative sample of ethnic minorities in England showed that, although the association weakened across generations, ethnically homogeneous friendships were the most common among all ethnic minority groups. Preference for culturally similar friends thus seems to be general. Within groups, people may, however, care about cultural similarity to a different extent. We expect that the more one values cultural similarity, the less likely one will engage in interethnic friendships.

These preferences can be guided by SES as people with a higher SES presumably have a more individualistic and open attitude than

people with a lower SES (Kalmijn, 1998). Besides, high SES people have been found to have a greater cognitive flexibility, which is why they are more likely to have a nuanced understanding of the ingroup culture and see it as less ethnically bounded (Verkuyten, Martinović, Smeekes, & Kros, 2016). This means that people with a higher SES could be less prejudiced towards other ethnic groups and attribute less importance to the ethnic background of the people they interact with (Martinović, 2013). As a result, both natives and ethnic minority members with a higher SES should be more open to contact with dissimilar people, resulting in less homophily (Kalmijn, 1998). Following the preference argument, it can be expected for non-Western ethnic minority members and natives alike, that those with a higher SES have less preference for cultural similarity, and therefore, more interethnic friendships (H1).

### *The role of opportunities*

While preferences are an important driver in the formation of interethnic friendships, it is also important that one gets the opportunity to meet individuals with preferred characteristics. These *opportunities* can be defined as the chance for members of different ethnic groups to meet and interact (Kalmijn, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Opportunities are largely context-dependent. Whether interethnic friendships can be developed depends on the size of a person's ethnic ingroup and the outgroup in a given context, as well as the degree of ethnic segregation (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). Whereas people who belong to large and more locally clustered ethnic groups have higher chances of meeting ingroup members, members of smaller and more geographically distributed groups are more likely to meet ethnic others (Briggs, 2007). Due to the dependence on group size, ethnic minority members are much more likely to meet natives than the other way around.

Previous studies have provided evidence for the link between opportunities and casual interethnic contact as well as friendships. For instance, the percentage of natives in the neighborhood is positively related to the amount of contact (Martinović et al., 2009; Semyonov & Glikman, 2009), or friendships (Vervoort, 2012), minority members have with majority members. Moreover, an ethnically diverse workplace increases the chance of having inter-ethnic contact (Martinović, van Tubergen, & Maas, 2015; Roth, Seidel, Ma, & Lo, 2012) or friendships (Kokkonen et al., 2015) outside the work environment.

SES might have opposite effects on the opportunity to meet outgroup members for ethnic majority and non-Western minority members. Most members of non-Western ethnic minority groups tend to have a relatively low SES which places them in contexts (work, neighborhood) where they are particularly likely to meet fellow minority members. However, ethnic minority members with a higher SES will more often be exposed to settings where they can meet natives with an equally high status (Briggs, 2007; Martinović, 2013). The reasoning is opposite for natives with high SES since fewer ethnic minority members are present in these contexts (Ojaveer & Bloemendal, 2016). Natives with a high SES are thus less likely to meet ethnic minority members, for example, because of the places they work in and the fact that they might live in more expensive neighbourhoods (Semyonov & Glikman, 2009). In line with this, it has been found that higher-educated immigrants have more (Martinović et al., 2011; Vervoort & Dagevos, 2011), and higher-educated natives fewer interethnic contact (Briggs, 2007; Martinović, 2013). This leads to two contrasting hypotheses: non-Western ethnic minority members with a higher SES are expected to have more opportunities to meet natives and, via higher opportunities, more interethnic friendships (H2a), while natives with a higher SES are expected to have fewer opportunities to meet non-Western ethnic minority members, and therefore have fewer interethnic friendships (H2b).

### *The role of third parties*

In addition to preferences and opportunities, the influence of *third parties* has proven to be of importance in the formation of interethnic friendships. Third parties, such as parents, friends, or siblings, can encourage or discourage contact within and outside people's own ethnic group (Kalmijn, 1998). This idea of third parties' influence follows general social norm theories concerned with the influence of social groups on individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviours (Simmel, 2011; Weber, 1978). The more value one attaches to the opinions of relevant others, the more likely one will be to conform to those values. Greater importance of the ingroup in one's life can thus create demands for conformity and group solidarity (Galster, 2008; Vervoort & Dagevos, 2011).

It has been demonstrated that third parties can have an influence on outgroup attitudes, and on close intergroup relations in particular (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Munniksma et al., 2012). Studies on partner choice (Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004; Tolsma, Lubbers, & Coenders, 2008; van Zantvliet, Kalmijn, & Verbakel, 2012) and friendships (Carol, 2014; Smith et al., 2015) showed that parents often disapprove of their children engaging in close contact with ethnic others, affecting the social network of the child.

SES can play a role in third party disapproval since SES can be transmitted within families (Kloosterman, Ruiters, de Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2009). Smith et al. (2015) have found that immigrants with parents of high SES are more likely to enrol in higher educational tracks and subsequently also hold a higher SES later in life. To understand limits to structural integration, Heath et al. (2008) showed that more than half of the educational disadvantage of adolescents/children can be explained by social background, and in turn the disadvantages in the labor market can in part be explained by educational attainment.

Due to this intergenerational transmission of status, we argue that parents and siblings of high SES people would likewise have a high SES. In line with our argumentation above, these third parties with a high SES will not have a strong preference for cultural similarity and thus will be more open to contact with non-similar others. Accordingly, these high SES third parties will be less likely to disapprove of their relevant others' interactions across ethnic lines than third parties with lower SES. For instance, van Zantvliet et al. (2012) showed that lower-educated parents were more involved in the partner choice of their children than higher-educated parents. As such, it is expected that for both non-Western ethnic minority members and natives, the higher their SES, the less third-party disapproval they will encounter, resulting in more interethnic friendships (H3).

In sum, we expect non-Western ethnic minority members with a higher SES to have *more* interethnic friendships with native Dutch

due to lower preference for co-ethnics, lower third-party disapproval, and higher chances to meet Dutch natives. Dutch natives with a higher SES are also expected to have more interethnic friendships with non-Western minorities via lower preference for co-ethnics and lower disapproval by third parties. However, their lower opportunity to meet non-Western minorities could have a contrasting effect and reduce the incidence of interethnic friendships. Assuming the three mechanisms weigh equally, we can expect that for Dutch natives the total effect of SES on interethnic friendships is less positive than for non-Western ethnic minority members (H4a), and if opportunities weigh more than preferences and third parties, the overall relationship between SES and interethnic friendships could even be negative for Dutch natives (H4b).

#### Data and methods

This analysis was based on data of the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands). The LISS panel consisted of a demographically diverse sample of Dutch natives and ethnic minority members who took part in monthly Internet surveys. The LISS panel was based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register (Scherpenzeel & Das, 2010).

For this study, the module on ‘The development of interethnic contacts’ was used, collected in June 2013 (available via: <https://www.lissdata.nl/>). In total, 1372 respondents completed this survey. The current study focused on Dutch natives and members of the four largest non-Western minority groups in the Netherlands; Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000). Respondents with another ethnic background were excluded. These were mostly Western minorities ( $N = 537$ ), and thus did not belong to our population of interest. There was also an overarching category “other non-Western” ( $N = 102$ ) in which people from less represented non-Western minorities in the Netherlands were lumped together. Theoretically, we could have included these, but for practical reasons (i.e. no clear measures of intergroup contact for this diverse group and no measures of contact with them for the Dutch participants), we had to focus on the four largest groups for whom all relevant measures were available. Furthermore, one respondent with a missing value on the dependent variable and all respondents who indicated to have no friends at all were excluded ( $N = 69$ ). Consequently, the final sample consisted of 635 respondents: 368 native Dutch and 267 non-Western ethnic minority members. The minority sample consisted of people of Turkish ( $N = 74$ ), Moroccan ( $N = 70$ ), Surinamese ( $N = 67$ ), and Antillean origin ( $N = 56$ ). The age of the respondents ranged from 16 to 87 years ( $M = 45.4$ ,  $SD = 15.3$ ), and 54 % were female. Among the ethnic minority members, 40 % belonged to the second generation.

#### Measures

To measure *interethnic friendships*, respondents were asked to think about their close friends living in the Netherlands (partners excluded) and indicate the number of friends from each group (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans, Eastern-Europeans, Western-Europeans, and native Dutch) on a scale from 0 to 100 friends. The numbers of friendships with people of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean origin were added up for Dutch natives. For non-Western minority members, only the friendships with Dutch natives were used. To correct for differences in sociability, we created a relative measure of interethnic friendships by dividing these by the total of co-ethnic and interethnic friendships. This variable ranged from 0 to 100, with a higher score indicating a higher percentage of interethnic friends. Note that our measure refers specifically to friendships with natives for the minority participants and to friendships with the four largest non-Western minorities for natives. Interethnic friendships with other groups (e.g., Dutch natives with Germans, or Turks with Moroccans), were not considered.

SES was measured by a combination of the educational level and the occupational status of the respondent. Respondents were divided into educational levels based on categories by Statistics Netherlands (CBS): (1) primary school (2) vocational education (3) higher secondary and pre-university education (4) senior secondary vocational education (5) higher professional education and (6) university education. Furthermore, their current (or if unemployed or retired, their last) occupational status was recorded using the following categories: (1) higher intellectual or free profession, (2) higher management profession, (3) secondary intellectual or professional, (4) middle management or commercial profession, (5) other executive professions, (6) skilled managerial and manual labor, (7) semi-skilled manual labor, (8) unskilled and skilled manual labor and (9) agricultural labor (see ISCO-08: Ganzeboom (2010)). The occupational status variable was reversed so that a higher score equalled a higher occupational status. Before averaging the two variables into one SES construct, we first standardized both variables to ensure comparable scales. These two standardized variables were strongly positively correlated ( $r = .560$ ). Three respondents had a missing value for this combined construct.

*Preference for cultural similarity* was a latent variable measured by two items: ‘It is important to me that my friends live according to the same cultural values that I endorse’ and ‘It is important to me that my friends respect the same cultural traditions as I do’, answered on a 5-point agreement scale. A higher score indicated a stronger preference for cultural similarity ( $r = .593$ ).

*Perceived opportunities* for contact were measured by three items indicating the perceived percentages of ethnic others in several contexts; ‘What percentage of your colleagues or classmates would you say is [if respondent Dutch: ethnic minority / if respondent non-native Dutch: native Dutch]?’ The same question was asked about opportunities in social clubs and in the neighborhood. Those who were not active in work/school or clubs had a missing value on opportunities in that particular context. The items were highly reliable ( $\alpha = .854$ , calculated among participants active in all three contexts). The average score of the three items was taken to capture total perceived opportunities, ranging from 0 to 100 percent, with a higher score indicating more perceived opportunities to meet ethnic others. Only opportunities within those contexts one was active in were included. So, for those who were not active in work/school or clubs, their opportunities consist of those in the neighborhood.

*Third-party disapproval* was a latent variable assessed by two items: ‘There are people in my circle of family and relatives who would

disapprove of me having many [if Dutch: ethnic minority / if non-native Dutch: native Dutch] friends' and 'If I was to spend a lot of time with [native Dutch / ethnic minority] friends, my [my co-ethnic / native Dutch] friends would distance themselves from me', answered on a 5-point agreement scale. A higher score indicated stronger third-party disapproval ( $r = .779$ ). The term used to refer to ethnic minorities in the items measuring both opportunities and third-party disapproval was 'allochtonen', which in the Netherlands primarily refers to Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans – the four largest non-Western groups. Western immigrants (e.g. Germans) would very likely not be considered when answering these questions.

Finally, to better understand the associations and to account for possible other reasons that might influence the expected associations, we controlled for gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and age. Additionally, among the non-Western minority members, we controlled for migration generation (0 = first, 1 = second) and ethnicity (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean origin).

### Method of analysis

To test the hypotheses structural equation modelling (SEM) was used (Mplus version 7.3). The SEM framework integrates simultaneous equation models and confirmatory factor analytical models (CFA) (Kline, 2010) which allows us to test mediation hypotheses with latent variables among multiple groups. Models were fitted using robust maximum likelihood estimation (MLR), which is robust against non-normal distribution of the variables. Missing values were handled by using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML).

## Results

### The measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that a two-factor model in which preference for cultural similarity (2 items) and third-party disapproval (2 items) loaded on separate latent factors fitted the data better than a one-factor model in which all items loaded on the same latent factor ( $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1070.930, p < .001$ ). This suggests that preference for cultural similarity and third-party disapproval represent two empirically distinct constructs. All items loaded highly on the designated factor, with loadings ranging from .595 to .995 and no significant cross-loadings. The composite scales for both latent variables – preferences for cultural similarity ( $\rho = .833$ ) and third-party disapproval ( $\rho = .800$ ) – were reliable (Raykov, 2004). Thus, a model with two latent variables was retained.

We tested for measurement invariance to check whether the two factors were measured in the same way for natives and non-Western minority members (see Table 1). We found that the model with partial scalar invariance in which we freed the intercept of the first third-party disapproval item while keeping the factor loadings and all other intercepts equal across groups, provided a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2(9) = 14.967, p = 0.091, CFI = .987, TLI = .983, RMSEA = .046$ ). This allows us to compare the effects of these two variables for natives and minority members.

### Descriptive findings

Non-Western minority members in the Netherlands had on average more friendships with Dutch natives than that Dutch natives had with people from these four groups,  $t(633) = -11.90, p < .001$  (see Table 2 for the means). Furthermore, compared to non-Western minority members, Dutch natives had a higher SES,  $t(630) = 6.29, p < .001$ , and found it more important that their friends shared the same cultural values,  $t(633) = 2.61, p < .01$ . No significant mean difference between the groups was found for sharing the same cultural traditions,  $t(633) = 0.18, p = .861$ . On average, non-Western minority members perceived more opportunities to meet natives than the other way around,  $t(633) = -26.75, p < .001$ . Also, Dutch natives experienced significantly more third-party disapproval of interethnic friendships than non-Western minority members did from both family,  $t(633) = 8.33, p < .001$  and co-ethnic friends,  $t(633) = 5.76, p < .001$ .

Table 3 shows the correlations between the core constructs for the two groups. The correlation between SES and interethnic friendships was negative for Dutch natives and positive for non-Western minority members. For both groups there was a positive correlation between opportunities and interethnic friendships, as well as a negative correlation between SES and third-party disapproval. For minority members, all the remaining associations were significant and in the expected direction, but these were not

**Table 1**

Fit indices for a two-factor multi-group model with different levels of measurement invariance ( $N_{\text{native}} = 368, N_{\text{nonWestern}} = 267$ ).

	$\chi^2$ (df)	$\Delta \chi^2$	CFI	RMSEA	AIC
Configural invariance	10.084 (6)		0.991	0.046 (0.000–0.094)	6104.335
Metric invariance	10.501 (8)	0.849 (2)	0.995	0.031 (0.000–0.077)	6101.377
Scalar invariance	54.768 (10)***	52.343 (2)***	0.902	0.119 (0.089–0.150)	6141.530
Partial scalar invariance	14.967 (9)	4.8152 (1)*	0.987	0.046 (0.000–0.085)	6103.864

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).

Notes: estimator MLR;  $\Delta \chi^2$ : Sattora-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square Difference Test. CFI = Comparative Fit Index;

RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion. The first item (disapproval of family) of the third-party disapproval factor is treated as metrically invariant.

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis.

	Range	Dutch natives(N = 368)		non-Western minorities(N = 267)	
		Mean/Proportion	SD	Mean/Proportion	SD
<i>Interethnic friendships</i>	0–100	17.22 <sup>a</sup>	28.32	45.69 <sup>b</sup>	31.62
<i>Socio-economic status (std)</i>	–1.99–1.59	0.14 <sup>a</sup>	0.89	–0.31 <sup>b</sup>	0.9
Educational level	1–6	3.84 <sup>a</sup>	1.52	3.32 <sup>b</sup>	1.48
Occupational status	1–9	6.08 <sup>a</sup>	1.95	5.01 <sup>b</sup>	2.09
<i>Preferences (LV)</i>					
Values	1–5	2.76 <sup>a</sup>	0.98	2.55 <sup>b</sup>	1.11
Traditions	1–5	2.99	1.05	3.01	1.19
<i>Opportunities</i>	0–100	15.92 <sup>a</sup>	15.9	57.61 <sup>b</sup>	23.36
<i>Third parties (LV)</i>					
Family	1–5	2.29 <sup>a</sup>	1	1.67 <sup>b</sup>	0.82
Co-ethnics	1–5	2.10 <sup>a</sup>	0.82	1.71 <sup>b</sup>	0.84
<i>Control variables</i>					
Gender (female)	0/1	53.50%		53.90 %	
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
Native Dutch	0/1				
Turkish	0/1			27.70 %	
Moroccan	0/1			26.20 %	
Surinamese	0/1			25.10 %	
Antillean	0/1			21.00 %	
<i>Generation</i>					
First	0/1			59.60 %	
Second	0/1			40.40 %	
Age	16–87	49.5	15.3	39.8	13.5

Notes: Statistics for SES show the mean score of the two standardized variables and were presented for a smaller sample due to missing values ( $N = 632$ ). Educational level and occupational status show descriptives for the original range of these variables before standardization. LV indicates latent variables. <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Superscripts indicate significant mean differences across the groups for the respective row obtained from independent-sample t-tests.

**Table 3**  
Correlations between the main constructs, Dutch natives ( $N = 368$ ) above the diagonal and non-Western minority members ( $N = 267$ ) below the diagonal.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Interethnic friendships	–	–0.169***	–0.085	0.243***	0.047
2. Socio-economic status	0.152*	–	–0.025	–0.077	–0.210***
3. Preference for cultural similarity	–0.224***	–0.208**	–	–0.111	0.295***
4. Perceived opportunities	0.333***	0.221***	–0.179*	–	–0.120*
5. Third-party disapproval	–0.175**	–0.275***	0.252**	–0.161**	–

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).

Notes: Preference for cultural similarity and third-party disapproval are latent constructs.

significant for Dutch natives. Perceived opportunities, even though self-reported, did not correlate strongly with preferences and third-party disapproval, suggesting that this measure did capture to some extent the objective opportunity structure.

### Explaining differences in interethnic friendships

A multi-group structural equation model was estimated with SES as an independent predictor of interethnic friendships, and preference for cultural similarity, perceived opportunities and third-party disapproval as mediators of this relationship. Majority status was included as the grouping variable to facilitate comparison between Dutch majority and non-Western minority members. Gender, age, migration generation, and ethnicity were controlled for in relation to the dependent variable. The variables migration generation and ethnicity were only meaningful in the minority sample, which is why we assigned random values to these variables for the Dutch natives and fixed the effect to zero in the analysis to be able to test these in the multi-group model. The mediators and residuals between the mediators were allowed to be correlated.

We first checked whether the direct effects differed across groups by comparing a structurally constrained with an unconstrained model. In the constrained model, the path coefficients and residual variances were set to be equal for Dutch natives and non-Western minority members, whereas in the unconstrained model the path coefficients and residual variances were free to vary across the groups. A Sattora-Bentler chi-2 test indicated that the direct effects in the model significantly differed across the two groups (SB:  $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 25.407, p < .001$ ).

Since there were significant group differences, we tested partially constrained models to see which paths differed across the groups. As we only hypothesized that the path from SES to perceived opportunities would differ between the two groups, we first freed only

this path. This model fitted the data significantly better than the constrained model (SB:  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 12.373, p < .001$ ), which indicates the path varies across groups. However, this model was still not as good as the fully unconstrained model, so we also had to additionally free the path from SES to interethnic friendships. The model in which these two paths were allowed to vary across the groups fitted the data equally well as the model in which all paths were allowed to vary (SB:  $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 5.646, p = 0.342$ ). As this was the most parsimonious model, we decided to continue with this partially unconstrained structural model. The full multi-group model including control variables fitted the data well ( $\chi^2(78) = 101.744, p = 0.037, CFI = .977, TLI = .966, RMSEA = .031$ ). The findings related to the hypothesized paths are presented in Fig. 1.

For Dutch natives, the total effect of SES on interethnic friendships was negative and significant ( $B = -5.137, SE = 1.640, p = 0.002$ ), while for non-Western ethnic minority members the total effect was positive but not significant ( $B = 2.764, SE = 2.019, p = 0.171$ ). These total effects significantly differed from each other (Wald test (1) =  $-4.130, p < .001$ ), confirming hypothesis 4a and 4b.

Regarding the mediators, a higher SES was related to higher perceived opportunities to meet ethnic others only for non-Western ethnic minority members, yet it was related to less third-party disapproval for both groups (Fig. 1). SES was not related to preferences for cultural similarity for any of the groups. Furthermore, preference for cultural similarity was related to fewer interethnic friendships, and more perceived opportunities were related to more interethnic friendships among both groups. Third-party disapproval was not related to interethnic friendships for any of the groups.

None of the three mechanisms mediated the effect of SES on intergroup friendships among Dutch natives. The indirect effects through preferences ( $B = .169, SE = .146, p = 0.246$ , opportunities ( $B = -.386, SE = .343, p = 0.260$ ), and third-party disapproval ( $B = -.131, SE = .323, p = 0.684$ ) were all not significant. We thereby have to reject H1, H2b, and H3 for this group. A direct negative effect of SES on interethnic friendships remained after the mediators were accounted for.

For non-Western minority members, however, the effect of SES on interethnic friendships was mediated by higher perceived opportunities (indirect effect:  $B = 1.747, SE = .695, p = 0.012$ ), which is in line with H2a. The indirect paths through preferences ( $B = .169, SE = .146, p = 0.246$ ) and third-party disapproval ( $B = -.131, SE = .232, p = 0.684$ ) were not significant for non-Western minority members, thereby rejecting H1 and H3.

We also detected some ethnic differences. Participants of Surinamese and Antillean (compared to Moroccan and Turkish) origin had more interethnic friendships, and participants of Surinamese origin also experienced less third-party disapproval. For a complete overview of the results of the control variables, see Online Appendix 1.

Alternative analyses

We checked whether our findings held when 1) only the original variable for educational level or occupational status was used as the indicator of SES, and 2) the dependent variable was measured as the absolute number of interethnic friends (rather than a percentage), that is, without correcting for in-group friends.

When using only educational level as a proxy for SES we replicated the results from the main analysis (Online Appendix 2, Figure A). The model with occupational status as the sole indicator of SES also yielded largely the same results (Figure B), the only exception was that the total and direct effect of occupational status on intergroup friendships were not significant for Dutch natives, even though the coefficients were still negative. This suggests that the negative association between SES and interethnic friendships for Dutch natives is driven more by educational level than by occupational status.

When using the absolute number of interethnic friends rather than the percentage as the dependent variable (Online Appendix 3, Figure C), we also found no significant total or direct effect of SES on friendships for Dutch natives. Another interesting difference was that preference for cultural similarity and interethnic friendships were no longer related for any of the two groups. Apparently, preferences matter for the relative but not absolute number of interethnic friends. The remaining paths were similar to those in the main analysis.

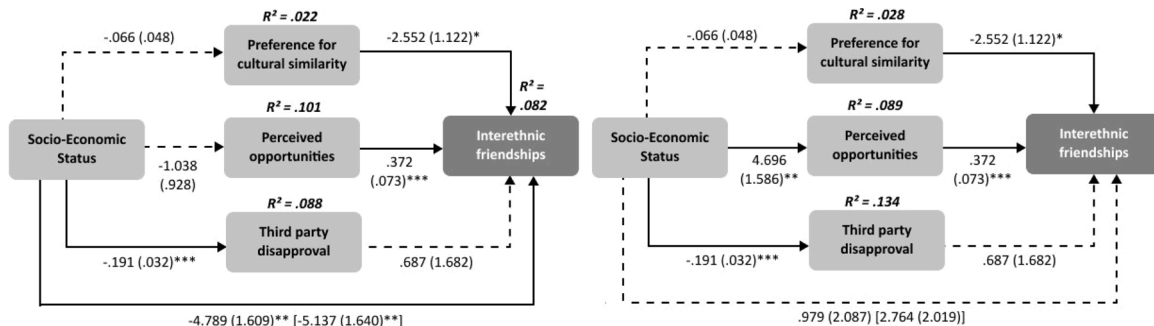


Fig. 1. A multi-group path model explaining the relationship between SES and interethnic friendships for Dutch natives (left) and non-Western minority members (right), (N = 635).

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in the parenthesis, total effect in square brackets. Paths from the control variables gender, age, ethnicity and generation were accounted for in the model but not reported in the figure. Nonsignificant paths are presented as dashed lines.

## Discussion and conclusion

Previous research has indicated that a higher socio-economic status (SES) is conducive to more contact with natives for non-Western minority members (Martinović et al., 2011; Vervoort & Dagevos, 2011), whereas it presents a barrier for natives' contact with non-Westerners (Briggs, 2007; Martinović, 2013; Völker et al., 2008). In this study we focused on interethnic friendships and contributed to the literature in three ways: (1) we theorized about preferences, opportunities, and third-party disapproval being possible explanatory mechanisms behind the link between SES and interethnic friendships, (2) we simultaneously examined the role of these three mechanisms as mediating variables among adults, and (3) we compared the processes for the ethnic majority and non-Western ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.

We found a negative overall effect of SES on interethnic friendships for Dutch natives, and a positive (though not significant) relation for non-Western ethnic minority members, which is in line with our expectation that the association between SES and intergroup friendships would be less positive for Dutch natives, as well as with previous findings that showed a negative effect of SES for natives (Briggs, 2007; Martinović, 2013; Völker et al., 2008). Also, additional analyses suggested that, among native Dutch, education was a stronger driver of interethnic friendships than occupational status.

To explain the contrasting relationship between SES and interethnic friendships for the two groups, we considered the three mechanisms proposed by Kalmijn (1998). Starting with the association between these mechanisms and interethnic friendships, we found that the more Dutch natives and non-Western ethnic minority members preferred cultural similarity, the fewer interethnic friendships they had, confirming the principle of homophily (McPherson et al., 2001). Interestingly, preferences only mattered for the relative but not the absolute number of interethnic friendships. This makes sense, however, because preferences include a comparison by definition: people who prefer cultural similarity will have relatively fewer interethnic friendships compared to co-ethnic friendships, but these preferences do not matter as much for the absolute number of interethnic friendships. Next to preferences, those who perceived more opportunities to meet ethnic others had more interethnic friendships. While these two mechanisms were confirmed to be relevant predictors of interethnic friendships, third party disapproval did not play a role.

There are two plausible explanations for the absence of third-party influence. First, Kalmijn's framework (1998) initially focused on intermarriage, which could be more strongly affected by third party disapproval than interethnic friendships. Parents might want to enhance cultural preservation, which could be more important in serious relationships than in comparatively looser ones like friendships (Carol, 2014; Miller et al., 2004; Tolsma et al., 2008; van Zantvliet et al., 2012). Second, our questions were on perceived third-party influence, yet people might unknowingly be influenced by third parties. After all, the argument is two-fold: third parties can sanction undesirable behaviour, but they can also make one internalize their norms and values (Simmel, 2011; Weber, 1978). Internalizing these norms and values means they become one's own preferences and one might not be aware of the role third parties had in this. Perhaps this explains why self-reported third-party disapproval did not yield expected results.

Two of the mechanisms were also consistently related to SES. Both Dutch natives and non-Western ethnic minority members with a higher SES perceived less third-party disapproval. Moreover, as expected, a contrasting effect was found for perceived opportunities: while Dutch natives with a higher SES perceived fewer opportunities to meet ethnic others, non-Western minority members with a higher SES perceived higher opportunities to meet natives, but this effect was only significant for non-Western minority members. SES and preferences were not associated with each other.

While none of the mechanisms could explain the relationship between SES and interethnic friendships for Dutch natives, there was a significant indirect path from SES to interethnic friendships through higher perceived opportunities for non-Western ethnic minority members. After accounting for opportunities, the direct path for non-Western ethnic minority members became significantly more negative (though not significantly different from zero), thereby resembling more the negative association of SES with interethnic friendships of Dutch natives. Preferences and third parties did not explain the relationships between SES and interethnic friendships among either of the groups.

For non-Western ethnic minority members, the relationship between SES and interethnic friendships was thus explained by higher perceived opportunities. That we did not find a similar effect for Dutch natives could possibly be explained by the fact that increasing minority size does not only equal more meeting opportunity but also more potential for conflict due to ethnic competition. While natives with a lower SES are more likely exposed to contexts where they can meet outgroup members, they may also more actively avoid outgroup members because of perceived competition or threat (Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002). Another explanation could be methodological. Perceived opportunities were more broadly measured for Dutch natives than for non-Western ethnic minority members. The outgroup included in the questions for Dutch natives were 'non-Western minorities' in general, while the question for non-Western ethnic minority members specifically focussed on the Dutch natives as the outgroup. This could perhaps explain why there was a weaker link between SES and opportunities for natives than for minorities. More specific measures of opportunities for contact with non-Westerners from the included outgroups, may result in a stronger negative link between SES and meeting opportunities for natives with respect to the lower status out-groups.

Another limitation of the opportunity measure is that it was based on the subjective perception of the presence of ethnic others. This could be of influence since respondents' actual opportunities might differ from the perceived ones. There is the possibility that natives overestimated the opportunities since it is not socially desirable to live in a homogeneous environment or underestimate their opportunities because they do not want to seem biased. The correlation between opportunities and preferences was, however, found to be rather low among natives and therefore this subjective measure might be less worrying. Furthermore, we only included three types of context in which participants could have the opportunity to meet ethnic others, which could also result in underestimation since opportunities for contact can arise in different contexts than included here. For future research, it would be interesting to take actual opportunities into account by gaining information on the ethnic composition of neighborhoods, which could be accessed through



register data. Data on the ethnic composition of workplaces and clubs might be more difficult to find, but future studies could also focus on this.

Interestingly, the relation between SES and interethnic friendships was not explained by any of the mediating constructs for Dutch natives, suggesting that other mediators need to be considered in the future. One candidate could be preference for socio-economic similarity, which has been argued to be a barrier to interethnic friendships (Kalmijn, 1998). Higher SES people likely value friends with an equally high status because they can pursue the same activities and interests, and non-Western minorities might not fit this criterion. Another candidate could be perceived threat: even though natives with a lower SES would have more opportunities to meet ethnic others they might actively avoid them due to perceived ethnic competition.

We tested our model simultaneously for majority and ethnic minority members, but it is important to note there are differences between the four ethnic minority groups. We found more interethnic friendships among participants of Surinamese and Antillean origin as compared to those of Moroccan and Turkish origin. This is in line with previous research showing friendships with Dutch natives are more common for people from the former Dutch colonies (e.g., Martinović et al., 2009). Participant of Surinamese origin also seem to encounter less third-party disapproval than all three other groups, which could be due to smaller cultural differences. Particularly the contrast with people of Turkish and Moroccan origin is meaningful because these differ more pronouncedly, for example with respect to religion and language (Huijnk et al., 2015). Interestingly, holding other variables constant, the four groups did not differ in terms of perceived preferences or perceived opportunities.

Our small sample sizes in the four ethnic minority groups did not permit exploring group differences with multi-group analysis. Perhaps some of the insignificant paths in our study would be significant for particular groups. For example, third-party disapproval could prevent interethnic friendships in groups that are more communal and cohesive (such as Turks, see Fennema & Tillie, 1999), whereas in less communal groups, this disapproval might be less important. Similarly, the paths from opportunities to contact could be stronger among groups that are more accepted by the Dutch society. For interethnic contact to be established, both sides need to be willing to interact (Martinović, 2013), and whereas we show that people of Turkish and Moroccan origin do not have less opportunity compared to those of Surinamese and Antillean origin, it could be that their opportunities to meet Dutch are met by lower preferences of the Dutch to befriend them. Future research could focus on exploring these potential group differences in the pattern of associations.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of our data is a limitation. Even though our expectations about the relations are derived from theories, the nature of these relationships is often unclear. Partly, these relationships can be reciprocal. For example, while high SES might very well promote interethnic friendships, other studies show that interethnic ties contribute to labor market integration (Heath et al., 2008; Kanas & van Tubergen, 2009). Thus, some caution is required when interpreting the associations as we cannot draw strong conclusions regarding causality.

In conclusion, the strength of our study was that we confirmed the important – yet contrasting – role of SES in the development of interethnic friendships among natives and non-Western minorities in the Netherlands. The opposing effect of SES points at the importance of taking both majority and minority perspective into account in future studies, as mechanisms might work differently among different groups. Though we only found significant paths for two out of the three mechanisms, these findings can provide important guidance to practitioners and policymakers aiming to improve social cohesion and inclusion. Our results indicate that different mechanisms underlie the development of interethnic friendships for both majority and ethnic minority members and thus different integration approaches are needed in both groups. Given that more than half of the Dutch natives in our sample did not have any non-Western minority friends, and that particularly higher status Dutch natives tended to have fewer of such friendships, our findings suggest that social integration policies should target particularly high SES natives. Regarding non-Western minorities, opportunities were found to be the key explanation in the relationship between SES and interethnic friendships with natives, which means governments could invest in fostering meeting opportunities by creating ethnically mixed contexts such as mixed neighbourhoods. Since high-SES natives had fewer interethnic friendships than natives with a lower SES, projects attempting to reduce residential segregation may be particularly effective in high-SES neighbourhoods. Moreover, as we found that minority members with a higher status end up having more opportunities for contact with natives, this highlights the importance of stimulating education and professional development of minority members.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.11.005>.

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