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# School attitude:
# The role of parents and peers for western and non-western adolescents

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# School attitude:

# The role of parents and peers for western and non-western adolescents

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**Abstract**

*In this article, the influence of parents and friends in class on adolescents' school attitude was compared. Additionally, a moderating effect of identification with a non-western culture in susceptibility to parental influence was examined. Data from the Dutch first wave of the nationally representative survey 'Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in Four European Countries' CILS4EU (2010–2011) were analyzed (N = 2898). Results of multilevel analyses show that, in line with theories of socialization, both parental support and school attitude of friends within class have an effect on school attitude of adolescents. Supporting the argument that peers become increasingly important in adolescence, friends within class are more influential than parents. No difference was found in susceptibility to parental influence between adolescents who identify with a non-western culture and those who do not. However, those who do identify with a non-western culture were found to have a more negative school attitude.*

**Keywords**: School attitude, peer influence, socialization, adolescence, cultural identification

## Introduction

In modern society, an educational degree is a necessity for successful participation in the labor market. However, there are still students who drop out of school without a diploma. In western societies with a history of immigration from non-western countries, this problem is stratified along lines of ethnical background. Non-western immigrants have a higher drop out rate than natives and are underrepresented in higher education (Heath, Rothon & Kilpi, 2008; Kao & Thompson, 2003). Part of this difference can be explained by the disadvantageous socio-economic status non-western immigrant families often have. But even when this is taken into account, the difference remains. Therefore, research into other determinants of educational outcomes and possible cultural differences in the matter requires examination.

The attitude a student has towards school has been found to be an important predictor of educational outcomes: Compared to students with a positive school attitude, students with a negative school attitude are more likely to drop out of school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) and

are more likely to perform on an educational level that is below their actual abilities (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Therefore, factors affecting school attitude have received much attention in the literature (Şeker, 2011). Following theories of socialization, the people who surround the student are substantial determinants of educational development by transmitting their attitude to the student (Dika & Singh, 2002). Prior research has focused on the influence of the people who are most important to an adolescent, referred to as *significant others*, because these people are expected to be most influential (Rothon, Arephin, Klineberg, Cattell & Stansfeld, 2011).

Studies into the importance of these significant others seem to have followed two lines: One line of research focuses on parental influence and the other on peer influence. Both are usually explained by the process of socialization. Studies on parental influence often emphasize imitation and being taught by parents (Rothon et al., 2011; Khattab, 2003), while studies on peer influence often emphasize the urge to "fit in" and being accepted (Ryan, 2001; Geven et al., 2013). However, comparison of these two perspectives has hardly ever taken place. Commonly, schools turn to parents when a student has a negative school attitude. Yet, if peers are more influential, this may not be sufficient. With insight into the relative strength of the influence of peers and parents, policy aiming at improvement of educational outcomes can be targeted more accurate.

Nonetheless, students from different cultures may need to be approached differently. Adolescence, the life-stage high school students are in, is theorized to encompass a transition from parent-dependent childhood to independent adulthood in which the relation with parents becomes decreasingly close (Spera, 2005). However, this transition may be culturally bound. In non-western cultures, which are interdependent in nature, staying closely attached to family in adulthood is more common than in western cultures, which are independent in nature (Berry et al., 2011; Kagitcibasi, 2005). Therefore, one might expect that the relation adolescents have with their parents differs between western and non-western cultures. Adolescents who identify with a non-western culture may be more susceptible to parental influence than adolescents who do not.

The aim of the present study is to answer the following questions: (1) *To what extent can a student's school attitude be explained with socialization by parents and to what extent with socialization by peers?* and (2) *what is the role of identification with a non-western culture in a student's susceptibility to socialization by parents?*

## Context of the study

To answer these questions, this study will focus on the Netherlands. The Netherlands has an ethnically diverse population. Currently, non-western immigrants make up approximately one-tenth of the population (CBS, 2013). Immigrants are considered non-western when they originate from a country situated in Africa, South-America, or Asia (in exception of Indonesia and Japan) and when originating from Turkey (CBS, 2012). This study, like most educational studies, will mainly focus on second-generation immigrants. These are immigrant children who were born in the Netherlands or migrated at a very young age (Van Ours & Veenman, 2003). Second-generation immigrants make up more than five percent of the Dutch population. Approximately 70 percent of these second-generation non-western immigrants have Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or (former) Dutch Antillean backgrounds. The other 30 percent consists of smaller groups of other ethnic backgrounds. The parents of second-generation immigrants are diverse in their motives to migrate. They include, for example, immigrants from former Dutch colonies, war-refugees, and immigrant-workers.

Concerning their educational careers, non-western immigrant-children in the Netherlands match the image given by most studies into the educational careers of immigrants. They are disadvantaged compared to native Dutch children, the four largest groups in particular (Gijsberts et al., 2011; Van Ours & Veenman, 2003). Even though there has been some improvement in the past two decades, in 2011 the percentage of non-western immigrant students leaving school without a start qualification was still almost twice that of native Dutch students, they are underrepresented in higher education, and end up with lower educational achievements than native Dutch students (Gijsberts et al., 2011).

Data on native and non-western immigrant students in the Netherlands will be analyzed, obtained with the first wave (2010-2011) of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in four European Countries (CILS4EU; Kalter et al., 2013).

# Theory

## School attitude

Before expectations can be derived about the determinants of school attitude, it is important to explicitly define the concept. In social psychology, *attitude* is described as ‘a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor’ (Eagly and Chaiken as cited in Şeker, 2011). It is theorized to consist of three components: Cognition, affect and behavior (or behavioral intentions) (Şeker, 2011; Cheng and Chan, 2003). Applied to school attitude, the *cognitive* component consists of a student’s

*beliefs* and *perceptions* of the academic self, school, teachers, and other students whereas the *affective* component consists of the *feelings* (positive or negative) about these subjects. The *behavioral* component consists of the actions and performance (or intentions) related to school (Jimerson, Campos & Greif, 2003; Cheng & Chan, 2003). In educational literature though, these components are often measured apart from each other, under different names like school engagement or school bonding (Şeker, 2011; Cheng & Chan, 2003; Jimerson et al., 2003). Most often, the behavioral component is measured apart from the affective and cognitive component in the form of grades, skipping classes or doing homework. It can be considered as a result of school attitude (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Including behavior in the measure of attitude would lead to making assumptions about a relation between attitude and behavior within one concept. To avoid making such an assumption, in the present study school-attitude will only be defined in terms of the cognitive and the affective component, that is, the psychological part of the concept. Following McCoach and Siegle (2003, p. 67) we therefore define school attitude as "the student's self-reported interest in and affect towards school".

**Socialization by parents**

Adolescents are subject to socialization by their social environment. In the process of socialization, values, norms, skills and attitudes are transmitted to an individual, intentionally or unintentionally (Knecht, 2008; Spera, 2005; Glass, Bengtson & Dunham, 1986). This is theorized to take place in tight relationships in particular (Khattab, 2003). In early childhood, a child is highly dependent on its caregivers and spends a large amount of time with them (Jeynes, 2003). This makes it likely that a child develops strong ties with its parents being its caregivers. Therefore, parents can be argued to play an important role in the socialization of a child (Rothon et al., 2011; Spera, 2005; Khattab, 2003; Dika & Singh, 2002). In educational literature, parents are theorized to influence their child by transmitting their own ideas and norms about education through encouragement of the child and expression of expectations. (Spera, 2005; Dika & Singh, 2002; Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). This idea is supported by research on educational aspirations (Rothon et al., 2011), academic achievement (Israel et al., 2001), and school-attitude (Şeker, 2011; Flouri et al., 2002). When parents have a positive attitude towards school and believe education is important, they are likely to express this attitude in terms of support and encouragement towards their child. This way, the parental attitude can be transmitted to the child both by direct teaching and through indirect observation (Glass et al., 1986). The child is directly taught that education is important when

parents show support and encouragement concerning their child's education. At the same time, the child can observe the attitude of the parents through their behavior and imitate; thus, adjust its own attitude to it. To illustrate, by showing interest in their child's school results, sanction low results and reward good results, parents express that they think school results are important. This way, the child is directly taught by sanctioning and rewarding, but at the same time, the child can imitate their behaviour of actively monitoring school results, and the positive and negative reactions they express in return to certain results. This leads to the first hypothesis:

> *(1) The more supporting the student's parents are concerning school, the more positive the school attitude of the student.*

**Socialization by peers**

In adolescence, an increasing amount of time is spent with peers, which makes acceptance and success among peers of great importance to an adolescent (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Therefore, the adolescent tends to conform to the norms, attitudes and behavior of his or her peers (Geven et al., 2013; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Knecht 2008). Peers, in addition to the parents, can thus be considered important socializing actors in a student's life. In the present study, the term 'peers' refers to the people a student considers friends within the class. This is because these are the people the student spends a lot of time with and at the same time, considers to be closer to him or her than just a classmate, which entails that they are trusted and significant to the student and therefore, influential (Berndt, 1999).

In the educational context, influence of peers has been found in relation to problematic behavior like homework inactivity and inattentiveness in class (Geven et al., 2013), school motivation (Ryan, 2001), and academic achievement (Lin, 2010; Ryan, 2001). Socialization by peers can take both a direct and an indirect form (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009; Ryan, 2001). Peers may react negatively to the expression of a school attitude that does not match their own. For example, when peers have a negative school attitude, they may laugh at a friend who worries about grades. Because adolescents want to be accepted and appreciated by peers, they may adjust the own school attitude in order to receive positive reaction (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009; Knecht, 2008). In a more indirect manner, a friend with a certain school attitude may serve as a role model, especially when the relationship is tight and positive (Bandura, 1977). Thus, when a friend expresses a negative school attitude, for example, by skipping classes, a student may copy this attitude. This leads to the second hypothesis:

(2) *The more positive the school attitude of the peers, the more positive the school attitude of the student.*

**Socialization by parents and peers compared**

Following the expectations formulated thus far, a student can be expected to be subject to socialization of both parents and peers. This entails that the student can experience conflicting influences. As mentioned earlier, there is hardly any literature with reference to comparison of these two influences. However, the life stage of adolescence, where high school students are in, gives reason to expect a difference. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) each individual develops a *self*, trying to fulfill three psychological needs as the basis for psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). These needs, explicitly described by Ryan and Deci (2002), are *competence*, which is the feeling to have and express capacities, *relatedness*, which is the feeling of belongingness to others and the feeling to care and to be taken care of, and *autonomy*, which is the feeling to be the source of one's own behavior. The transitional period of adolescence is characterized by defining this *self*, independent from the parents (Spera, 2005; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This is supported by the finding that time spent with parents and closeness of the parent-child relation decreases, while time spent with peers increases during adolescence (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In the process of defining a *self*, the peers become increasingly important to the adolescent because of their function as a valued reference category (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Therefore, an adolescent may seek the need for relatedness more among peers than among his or her parents. This makes it likely that an adolescent will attach more value to social acceptance in the peer-group than to fulfillment of the parents' norms and expectations and is therefore more likely to adopt the attitudes of the peers than that of the parents. This leads to the third hypothesis:

(3) *The school attitude of peers has stronger effect on the school attitude of the student than parental support.*

**Cultural identification**

Even though the psychological needs as stated in SDT are argued to be culturally universal (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Chirkov et al., 2003), the extent to which a person develops a *self* that is dependent on others is found to differ cross-culturally (Berry et al., 2011; Kagitcibasi, 2005). This difference is intertwined with the independent-interdependent distinction that is made between non-western (defined as non-Euro-American) cultures and western (defined as Euro-American) cultures (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni & Maynard, 2003). The

concept of *independence* is not to be confused with the psychological need of *autonomy*. Being independent refers to not relying on others for help, support or supplies (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003): A person can make the perfectly autonomous decision to engage in dependent behavior. Independency is found in western, urban, individualistic societies in which intergenerational dependency is uncommon: Grown-up children do not need to take care of their parents. Therefore, children are raised to be independent and self-sufficient, which reinforces a family culture of independence (Abrams & Hogg, 2011; Kagitcibasi, 2005).

However, in non-western societies an emphasis on interdependency is found, in which intergenerational interdependency is perceived as necessary for well-being (Kagitcibasi, 2005). In these cultures, children are expected to take care of their parents when they become unable to take care of themselves. Therefore, children are raised as dependent on their family, because an independent, self-sufficient child could leave and thereby harm chances of survival of the family (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Because of this interdependency between the child and the family, a non-western student is likely to value the norms of the parents more than western students do. This idea is supported by Fuligni (1998), who shows that non-western immigrant students in the United States have a stronger tendency to conform to the parental authority and emphasize the importance of independence less than European American students.

In the context of the present study, the Netherlands, non-western immigrant students are exposed to both a culture that emphasizes family dependency and the Dutch, western culture that emphasizes independence. In this situation of acculturation, students can identify with both the Dutch culture and with the culture of their country of origin (Berry et al., 2011). The identification with a group entails categorization of oneself as a member of this group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). The stronger one identifies with a group, the more one behaves as a member of this group, and hence, the more one behaves according to the group values (Berry et al. 2011;). Therefore, students who identify more with a non-western culture are expected to behave according to non-western cultural values. Given the idea that non-western cultures value the norms of parents more than western cultures, identification with a non-western culture is expected to be associated with higher levels of conformity to parental norms. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

> *(4) The effect of parental support on a student's school-attitude is stronger for students who identify with a non-western culture than for students who do not.*

## Data

### Participants and procedure

The data for this study was obtained with the first wave of the longitudinal 'Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in Four European Countries' (CILS4EU; Kalter et al., 2013) that was collected in the academic year 2010-2011. This project focuses on intergenerational integration of immigrant children in four European countries: The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The sample contains both immigrant children and native children, but the former were oversampled to be able to make minority-majority comparisons more accurate. The present study focuses on the interesting context of the Netherlands. It is not concerned with a cross-cultural comparison. Therefore, only the data collected in the Netherlands will be analysed.

For the first wave, the target population consisted of 14-year old students. In the Netherlands, this age group is in the 3rd grade of secondary school. A strength of this project is that in addition to the students, the parents were surveyed. This way, objective information from the parents was obtained instead of only the student's perceptions, which reduces bias resulting from problems with recalling information on the parents.

The students were selected using a school-based sampling procedure. This stratified sample was drawn in three stages: In the first stage with the schools as sampling-units, in the second stage with the classes within these schools as sampling-units and in the third stage the students within these classes as sampling-units. In order to obtain enough immigrant respondents, schools with a high immigrant proportion were oversampled. In each school, two classes were sampled, but due to low response on the school level in the Netherlands, this number was extended to three classes in a few cases.

The students completed a main questionnaire about themselves and a short questionnaire about their relationship to their classmates, in which the student indicated e.g. who are his/her friends and which classmates he/she considers popular. With this design, the information on the student can be linked to the information on the classmates who are indicated as being the student's friends. This means that the information on the classmates is a direct report of the classmates themselves instead of a reflection of the student's perception on its classmates. With the use of the classmates' self-reported information instead of perceptions of the students, over-estimation of influence is avoided given that people tend to overestimate the similarities between their friends and themselves (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The students who completed the questionnaire were asked to provide one of their parents/guardians with a questionnaire, without specification whether to let the father or the

mother complete it. These questionnaires were also available in several languages other than Dutch. When the parents did not respond, a reminder was sent and if necessary, the parents were contacted by phone.

The questionnaire was completed by 4.363 students in 100 schools and 3.248 parents participated by phone or by sending in the questionnaire. Response rates are 33% on school level, 91% on student level and 71% on parent level. However, the response rate of parents with a non-western migrant background was lower than the response rate of native Dutch parents: 58% and 84% respectively. This relatively low response could lead to a selection of students with a non-western background who have parents who are actively involved with school. Regarding the fact that the aim of this study is not to make estimates on parental support or school attitude but to examine its relation, it was not considered to problematically bias the results. Further discussion of missing values will take place after description of the variables. After selection of the students with a completed parental questionnaire and with an indication of at least one friend in class, 2926 cases remained for analysis.

Of these students, 23% was enrolled in the school type of VWO, 21% in HAVO, 55% in VMBO or LWOO and 1% in a general first year of high school. This distribution over the school types is in correspondence with the Dutch 3rd grade population of the educational year 2010/2011 (CBS, 2014), with a slight overrepresentation of students enrolled in VWO and slight underrepresentation of VMBO and LWOO. 27% of the students had a non-western migrant background, 6% a western migrant background, and 67% were native Dutch. Comparison with the background of the population of 3rd grade students (16%, 6% and 78% respectively (CBS, 2014)) showed that students with a non-western migrant background are overrepresented, which is in line with the sampling aim of the study.

## Method

### Dependent variable

*School attitude* was constructed using three statements on school: (1) “I think it is important to get high grades”, (2) “I really try my best in school”, and (3) “Education is really important to have a good life in the future”. These statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. With these statements, both the intentions of the students (with the statement of ‘trying my best’) and the attitude towards the importance of good results and education in general are measured. This is in line with the validated scale of attitude toward school as examined by Cheng and Chan (2003). The items are slightly negatively skewed, which is commonly found in items on school attitude (Cheng

& Chan, 2003). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to examine the construct validity of the measure. The EFA revealed one factor explaining 60.47% of the variance on which all three items load at least .454 (Appendix). Factor-scores were saved to serve as a scale with a higher score meaning a more positive school attitude. Reliability analysis showed that the items form an acceptably high internal consistent scale (Cronbach's alpha = .664). This could be slightly improved to .686 by leaving item 3 out, but because of the small number of items it was decided to keep this item in.

**Independent variables**

*School attitude of the peers* was measured as the mean school attitude (measured as described above) of the classmates who were indicated by the students as friends. This information was obtained with the questionnaire on relations within the class with the question "Who are your best friends in this class?". The student could report a minimum of zero and a maximum of five numbers corresponding to classmates. This particular question to locate the peers was used for two reasons: Firstly, since the students are free to report no friends at all, it is likely that the classmates they report are really considered friends and not just classmates they like most. Secondly, for the more practical reason that this procedure allows matching the self-reported information of the friends to the students. When just asking for friends in general, no self-reported information on friends outside the class is available. Classmates were considered friends when reported as such by the respondent in question. Students who did not report any friends were left out of the analysis and for students who only reported one friend; the school attitude of this friend was used.

*Parental support* was measured by three statements: (1) "I show a lot of interest in my child's grades and progress in school", (2) "I tell my child that I am proud when he/she does well in school", and (3) "I encourage my child to work hard for school". These statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. With these statements, both rewarding (in 'I tell my child I am proud') and expression of importance of school (by showing interest and encouragement) was measured. An EFA revealed one factor explaining 66.83% of the variance on which all three items load at least .730 (Appendix). Factor-scores were saved to serve as a scale with a higher score meaning more support. The items formed an internally consistent scale (Cronbach's alpha = .749).

*Identification with a non-western culture* was measured with the question "Some people feel like they belong to more than one group. To which of the following groups do you feel to belong to?". This question was positioned after the question "How strongly do you feel

Dutch?", which activated thinking about identification with ethnic groups, instead of other subgroups like gender- or age groups. The student was given the option to report not to belong to any other group than the Dutch, thirteen options containing the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands (based on ethnicity, not nationality), and the opportunity to fill in a group that was not yet defined. The students were given the opportunity to report more than one group. Students who reported one or more non-western groups (following the definition given by CBS, 2012) are considered to identify with a non-western culture. Following this first question, the students who reported to feel to belong to another group were asked the question: "How strongly do you feel that you belong to this group?", which could be answered on a 4-point scale ranging from *very strongly* to *not at all strongly*. Students who reported to identify with more than one group were asked to answer this question referring to the group they identify most strongly with. Initially, this second question was used to construct a scale for the extent of identification, with students who did not report to identify with a non-western culture at the minimum of the scale. However, this scale was highly positively skewed because of the large group that did not identify with a non-western culture, which would disturb the outcomes of the analyses. Therefore, it was decided to leave the question on the extent of identification aside. A dichotomous variable was constructed for identification with a non-western culture with students who reported not to feel that they belong to any other group than the Dutch or reported to feel that they belong to a group other than the Dutch but a only a western one as the reference category.

**Control variables**

The following variables will be controlled for in the analysis.

*Education of the parent*, which was measured as the highest educational level completed, reported in the parent questionnaire. The scale contained the options *no education, primary school, secondary school, lower vocational education, higher vocational education* and *university*. In order to simplify interpretation, education of the parent was included as a continuous variable after similar outcomes with the use of dichotomous variables for each separate level were verified.

*Non-western migrant background,* a dichotomous variable with students without a migrant background and students with a western migrant background as the reference category. When the student, and/or one or both of the parents and/or one or both of the grandparents were born in a non-western country (following the definition given by CBS, 2012), the student was considered to have a non-western migrant background.

*Female,* a dichotomous variable with males as the reference category.

*School type,* containing the different high school levels of Dutch educational system: *VMBO-b, VMBO-t, HAVO* and *VWO* (in order of lower secondary education to higher secondary education). 28 students indicated to be in bridge year, an introductory year of high school in which students are not classified in different educational levels yet. These students are not included in the analysis because of the inability to determine the school type of these students. In order to ease interpretation, the variable was included as a continuous variable after verification of similar outcomes with the use of dichotomous variables for each separate level. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis.

Table 1
*Descriptive statistics of the variables in the regression models (N = 2898)*

| Variables | M/prop. | SD | Min. | Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School attitude[a] | 0.04 | 0.87 | -1.24 | 4.20 |
| School attitude friends[a] | 0.03 | 0.54 | -1.24 | 2.65 |
| Parental support[a] | 0.01 | 0.87 | -1.10 | 6.16 |
| Identification non-western culture | | | | |
| *Yes* | 0.15 | | | |
| *No* | 0.85 | | | |
| Non-western migrant background | | | | |
| *Yes* | 0.27 | | | |
| *No* | 0.73 | | | |
| Sex | | | | |
| *Male* | 0.49 | | | |
| *Female* | 0.51 | | | |
| Parent's education | | | | |
| *No education* | 0.01 | | | |
| *Primary school* | 0.02 | | | |
| *Secondary school* | 0.30 | | | |
| *Lower vocational education* | 0.34 | | | |
| *Higher vocational education* | 0.25 | | | |
| *University* | 0.08 | | | |
| School type | | | | |
| *VMBO-b* | 0.20 | | | |
| *VMBO-t* | 0.36 | | | |
| *HAVO* | 0.21 | | | |
| *VWO* | 0.23 | | | |

[a]Factor score

**Missing data**

As mentioned earlier, a relatively large amount of cases, approximately 25%, was not included in the analysis because of the absence of a completed parental questionnaire. The cases with a parental questionnaire were compared to the cases without a parental questionnaire in order to assess the severity of this problem. A logistic regression analysis was performed, which reveals the relation between certain variables and the likelihood to have no completed questionnaire. The results (Table 2) are split up by ethnic background and show that within the group of students with a non-western background, the school attitude and the school attitude of the friends is significantly lower for students without a completed parental questionnaire than for students with a completed one. For the students with a western background, i.e. the native Dutch students and the western migrants, no significant differences were found. In terms of relevance, the differences within the group of students with a non-western migrant background are relatively small: 0.22 for the student's school attitude and 0.18 for the friends' school attitude. As in line with the difference in response rates among the parents, the results (Table 2, 'Total') show that students with a non-western migrant background are more likely to have no completed parental questionnaire than students with a western background. It should be kept in mind that the students with a non-western migrant background who are analysed in this study are a selection of students with a relatively high school attitude. However, the differences are small and were not considered to lead to problematic bias in estimating effects on school attitude.

Table 2

*Examination of missing distribution: Logistic regression on having a completed parental questionnaire*

| | Non-western background | | Western background | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | B | SE | B | SE | B | SE |
| School attitude | 0.210 ** | 0.063 | -0.092 | 0.062 | 0.061 | 0.044 |
| School attitude friends | 0.503 ** | 0.095 | -0.109 | 0.102 | 0.234 ** | 0.069 |
| Non-western migrant background | - | | - | | -1.284 ** | 0.079 |
| Constant | 0.502 ** | 0.059 | 1.739 ** | 0.056 | 1.698 ** | 0.055 |
| N | 1445 | | 2625 | | 4070 | |

*Note.* Dependent variable: value '1' is 'completed parental questionnaire'; value '2' is 'parental questionnaire missing'.

** Significant at $p < .01$.

## Analyses

The data have a multilevel structure; the students are clustered in classes. This could entail that the cases within classes show more similarity than they would have in a completely random sample because of possible context effects. For example, students in a class with a certain tutor may show some similarity in their school attitude because of the interaction with this tutor. In order to make inferences on population level, the multilevel structure was accounted for by performing multilevel linear regression analyses.

Four models were estimated. In de first model, parental support, along with the control variables, was regressed on the student's school attitude. In the second model, parental support was replaced by school attitude of the friends. The third model compares the effects of the parents and the peers by including them both in the model. A Wald test of parameter constraints was performed to test the difference between these effects. In the fourth model, both identification with a non-western culture and its interaction with parental support were added to the model as independent variables. Collinearity diagnostics revealed no problems in any combination of variables included in the models. As an additional analysis, the fourth model was estimated with an interaction term of parental influence with non-western migrant background instead of cultural identification in order to exclude a spurious effect of cultural identification on parental influence.

# Results

## Parents

Table 3 shows the results of the multilevel linear regression on the student's school attitude. As can be seen in Model 1, parental support has a significant, positive effect on the school attitude of the child ($B$ = 0.096, $p$ < .001), keeping the control variables constant. These findings support the hypothesis (1) that the more supporting the parents are, the more positive the school attitude of the child is. In terms of relevance, this effect can be considered to be moderately small. If parental support increases by one standard deviation (0.87), the student's school attitude increases with (0.096*0.87) 0.086, which is (0.086/0.87) 0.096 standard deviation. Along with this finding, girls were found to have a less positive school attitude than boys ($B$ = -0.118, $p$ < .001), students with a non-western migrant background were found to have a less positive school attitude than students with a western background ($B$ = -0.244, $p$ < .001). This difference, (-0.244/0.87) 0.257 standard deviation, can be considered quite apparent. Education of the parent and school type do not have a significant effect on school attitude of the student.

Table 3
*Results of multilevel linear regression on student's school attitude (N = 2898)*

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variables | B | | SE | B | | SE | B | | SE | B | | SE |
| Parental support | 0.096 | ** | 0.018 | - | | | 0.093 | ** | 0.018 | 0.086 | ** | 0.020 |
| School attitude peers | - | | | 0.202 | ** | 0.030 | 0.198 | ** | 0.030 | 0.192 | ** | 0.030 |
| Identification with a non-western culture | - | | | - | | | - | | | -0.127 | * | 0.053 |
| Parental support*identification | - | | | - | | | - | | | -0.041 | | 0.047 |
| Parent's education | 0.009 | | 0.016 | 0.005 | | 0.016 | 0.004 | | 0.016 | 0.001 | | 0.016 |
| Non-western migrant[a] | -0.244 | ** | 0.036 | -0.230 | ** | 0.036 | -0.222 | ** | 0.036 | -0.164 | ** | 0.043 |
| Female | -0.118 | ** | 0.032 | -0.102 | ** | 0.032 | -0.097 | ** | 0.032 | -0.094 | ** | 0.032 |
| School type | 0.002 | | 0.017 | 0.001 | | 0.016 | 0.001 | | 0.016 | 0.001 | | 0.016 |
| Constant | 0.130 | * | 0.072 | 0.132 | * | 0.070 | 0.129 | | 0.070 | 0.149 | * | 0.070 |
| Log likelihood | -3657.847 | | | -3649.228 | | | -3636.196 | | | -3632.868 | | |
| Wald $\chi^2$ | 94.75 | ** | | 116.09 | ** | | 143.38 | ** | | 150.31 | ** | |
| $R^2$ | 0.022 | | | 0.020 | | | 0.029 | | | 0.032 | | |

*Note*. Data: CILS4EU 2010-2011. [a]Model 4 was also estimated without the variable *non-western migrant*, which did not have any remarkable consequences. * Significant at $p < 0.05$ ** Significant at $p < 0.01$.

**Peers**

The results of Model 2 (Table 3) show that the school attitude of the peers has a significant, positive effect on the school attitude of the student ($B$ = 0.202, $p$ < .001), keeping the control variables constant. These findings support the hypothesis (2) that the more positive the school attitude of the peers is, the more positive the school attitude of the student is. To illustrate, if the school attitude of peers increases with one standard deviation (0.54), the student's school attitude increases with (0.54*0.202) 0.109, which is (0.109/0.87) 0.125 standard deviation.

**Peers and parents**

Comparison of the effects of parental support ($B$ = 0.093, $p$ < .001) and school attitude of friends ($B$ = 0.198, $p$ > .001) in Model 3 (Table 3) suggests that the influence of friends is stronger than the influence of parents. In terms of the standardized effects, the difference is small but existent. The increase in school attitude in standard deviations that is accompanied by an increase of one standard deviation is 0.029. A Wald test of the difference between these effects shows that school attitude of friends has indeed a significantly stronger effect on a student's school attitude than parental support (Wald $\chi^2$ (1) = 8.90, $p$ = .003). This is in line with hypothesis (3). Comparison of the fit of Model 1 and Model 2 supports this finding: Model 2 with school attitude of friends as independent variable has a better fit (Wald $\chi^2$ (4) = 116.09) than Model 1 with parental support as independent variable (Wald $\chi^2$ (4) = 94.75).

**Identification with a non-western culture**

Model 4 (Table 3) shows that identification with a non-western culture has a significant, negative effect on school attitude ($B$ = -0.127, $p$ = .016): A student who identifies with a non-western culture has a less positive school attitude than a student who does not. However, no support was found for the hypothesis (4) that the effect of parental support will be stronger for students who identify with a non-western culture than students who do not. As can be seen in Model 4 (Table 3), there is no significant moderating effect of identification with a non-western culture on the effect of parental support on school attitude. As a last validation of the absence of an interaction effect of non-western culture and parental support, Model 4 was also estimated using the dichotomous variable for having a non-western migrant background as a moderator instead of identification. In line with the prior findings, no significant moderating effect was found ($B$ = -0.012, $p$ = .748).

## Conclusion/Discussion

In the present study, the influence of parents and peers on an adolescent's school attitude was examined in the Netherlands. Additionally, the role of identification with a non-western culture in susceptibility to parental influence was explored. These influences were analyzed using data from the first wave of the CILS4EU (Kalter et al., 2013) conducted among Dutch 3rd grade high school students in the academic year of 2010-2011. In line with socialization theory (Knecht, 2008; Spera, 2005; Glass, Bengtson & Dunham, 1986), both parental support and the school attitude of peers were found to positively affect the school attitude of adolescents. Comparison of the two effects showed that peers have a stronger influence on an adolescent's school attitude than parents. There are only a few studies in which such a direct comparison is made. The current findings though are in line with findings on the comparison of influence on substance use (Coombs, Paulson & Richardson, 1991), whereas such a comparison in the context of educational plans suggested the opposite, i.e. a stronger parental influence (Davies & Kandel, 1985). The current findings support the idea that during the transition to adulthood, parents become less influential relative to peers. Adolescents may seek the psychological need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002) stronger among their friends than among their parents and, therefore, are influenced more strongly by their friends.

No differences in the strength of the effect of parental support were found between adolescents who identify with a non-western culture and those who do not. Unlike the expectation derived from the independent-interdependent distinction between cultures (Kagitcibasi, 2005), adolescents who identify with a non-western culture are not influenced more strongly by their parents. A difference was also absent when comparing non-western students with western students based on ethnic background instead of cultural identification. This seems to contradict earlier studies into parental influence among non-western minority students, in which higher levels of conformity to parents were found in their behavior than among their western peers (Fuligni, 1998). An explanation for this contradiction could be that when a student shows conformity to parental norms and expectations in behavior, it does not necessarily entail internalization of these norms. In that case, the student works hard for school extrinsically motivated, that is to say, to meet the parental authority, but not intrinsically motivated, that is to say, because the student self thinks education is important.

Moreover, adolescents with a non-western migrant background were found to have a more negative school attitude than adolescents with a western migrant and native background. This seems hard to connect to the high educational aspirations that are often found among students with a non-western background (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Apparently, having high

aspirations, i.e. having the wish to reach high educational outcomes, does not mean that a student has a positive attitude towards school. Kao and Tienda (1998) argue that ethnic minorities are often uninformed about higher education, which makes their educational aspirations little concrete. It may be the case that for this reason, students underestimate the importance of the current education (i.e. school attitude) for achievements in the future (i.e. educational aspirations). Even though aspirations were not assessed in this study, it may be important to disentangle educational aspirations from school attitude, as is not always the case (Cheng & Chan, 2003). More research is needed to examine why students with a non-western migrant background have a lower school attitude than students with a western background.

The use of the data from CILS4EU (Kalter et al., 2013) makes the present study a unique contribution to the existing literature on parental and peer influence. These data enabled accurate estimation of influence based on direct report by both peers and parents instead of only on the perception of the student. The collection of data in which special care was taken to represent the complete Dutch population also contributes to the quality of the analyses. With the use of multilevel models, justice was done to the clustered structure of the data. Therefore, the findings of the current study give a valuable and reliable insight into the relative strength of influence of parents and peers and the role of culture in parental influence.

Still, the present study has some limitations that should be encountered. Firstly, parental and peer influence were assessed by, respectively, estimating the effect of school attitude of peers and parental support. The measure of parental support could be considered to measure an actual expression of an attitude, while the measure of school attitude of peers simply measures the attitude without taking into account whether it is expressed or not. Future research into comparison of parental and peer influence should aim at equal measures in order to make a valid comparison.

Secondly, in the research design as it was used, selection processes could not be excluded. It could be that at least part of the relation can be explained by the fact that students select their friends on having similarities with them (Knecht, 2008). Students who have, for example, a low school attitude, could be more likely to befriend students who also have a low school attitude. This entails that the influence of friends could be overestimated. Nonetheless, in the present research design, in which similarity with friends within class was estimated, influence is more likely to be the underlying mechanism than selection. By way of explanation, a class is a setting in which students are limited to the group of students in class in their choice of friends. The relatively small number of students to choose from hinders selection of students who are similar, which makes the mechanism of influence more

dominant (De Klepper, Sleebos, Van de Bunt & Agneessens, 2010; Knecht, 2008). Further research with longitudinal data is needed to completely isolate influence from selection. Additionally, a design with multiple time points would give the opportunity to validate the theory that adolescence is indeed characterized by a *decline* of parental influence, as the present findings, based on one point in time, suggest.

Thirdly, the information used on the social environment of the student is limited to the class environment and to only one parent. Even though an adolescent spends a large amount of time in class, there could be friends outside of class that are very important to the adolescent and, therefore, are highly influential (Rothon et al., 2008). Absence of these friends in the analysis may have led to an incomplete picture of the influence of friends. Moreover, although basing parental support on report by only one parent does not determinately bias the measure, it should be kept in mind that the parent who filled in the parental questionnaire is likely to be the parent who is most concerned with the child's education. Finally, the amount of variance that was explained by peer influence in the multilevel model suggested that peer influence takes place not only on the individual level, but also on the class level. In the present study, no hypotheses were derived on context effects of the class. Future research should, however, aim at unraveling the influence on these different levels and the possible different mechanisms behind it.

Altogether, the findings of this study suggest that even though both parents and peers are influential, peers determine a student's school attitude more strongly, irrespective of the student's cultural identification. Peer influence seems to take place partly on the individual level and partly on class level. Therefore, schools should consider the class environment, and specifically the friends within the class, when trying to change a student's school attitude; this may be more effective than approaching the parents. Making effort to persuade parents to support their child to work hard and to get high grades could be ineffective when peers have a negative attitude towards school. To change a student's school attitude, it might be necessary to change the norms of the peer group and the class as a whole. Programs in which peers depend on each other's schoolwork, like group projects, may promote positive encouragement of peers, which might be interpreted as a positive expression of norms considering school attitude.

To conclude, by accurately comparing parental and peer influence the present study has given insight into the relative strength of these influences on students' school attitudes. Comparison of non-western and western students based on both cultural identification and cultural background has shown that cultural differences in parental influence do not play a

role in the relatively disadvantaged school attitudes of students with a non-western background.

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## Appendix

Tables containing factor loadings of the items on school attitude and parental support.

Table A1
*Rotated loadings in factor-analysis on school attitude*

| Item | Factor 1 |
|---|---|
| It is very important to me to get good grades | .889 |
| I put a great deal of effort into my school work | .598 |
| Education is very important for getting a good life later on | .454 |
| Eigenvalue | 1.81 |
| Variance explained (%) | 60.47 |

*Note.* Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation

Table A2
*Rotated loadings in factor-analysis on parental support*

| Item | Factor 1 |
|---|---|
| I show a lot of interest in my child's grades and progress in school | .730 |
| I tell my child I am proud when he/she does well in school | .744 |
| I encourage my child to work hard in school | .654 |
| Eigenvalue | 2.00 |
| Variance explained (%) | 60.83 |

*Note.* Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation