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Connected and satisfied.

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Highlights

- **For young people with a migration background, ethnic connectedness is important and positively related to satisfaction with life.**

- **The positive relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction is moderated by the ethnic composition of the school.**

- **Life satisfaction decreases when adolescents with a migration background do not feel ethnically connected and go to an ethnic diverse school.**

Abstract

For young people with a migration background it has never been easier to create and maintain a bond with their country of origin (further: feelings of ethnic connectedness). Previous research has already revealed the importance of such feelings of ethnic connectedness for (young) people's subjective well-being. In this study we investigate whether the relationship between the presence and the degree of ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction is moderated by the ethnic school composition. We study this relationship by performing multilevel analyses on 2091 adolescents (aged 14 to 18 years old) from nine different ethnic groups. Our results shed light on the importance of the ethnic composition of the school in two ways. First, the proportion of adolescents from one's own ethnic group at school is related to higher life satisfaction. Second, the relationship between life satisfaction and the presence of ethnic connectedness is moderated by the extent to which schools are ethnically diverse. More specifically, ethnically diverse schools have a positive influence on the life satisfaction of young people who feel connected to their ethnic group, whereas ethnic diversity at school is negatively related to life satisfaction among young people who do not feel connected to their ethnic group. In the conclusion we elaborate on the implications of our findings.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, adolescence, school context, life satisfaction, subjective well-being.

Connected and satisfied. The relationship between ethnic connectedness, life satisfaction and ethnic school composition among adolescents from nine ethnic groups.

Introduction

As in most Western European countries, ethnic and cultural diversity is increasing in Belgium. In large cities like Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent, the majority of young people have foreign roots (Siongers, 2019). One of the consequences of this evolution is that an increasing number of young people develop an affinity with multiple countries and construct a multi-layered identity (van de Vijver, Blommaert, Gkoumasi, & Stogianni, 2015). Increased digitalisation (e.g., social media) facilitates this process and offers young people an opportunity to maintain social contacts with family members who live abroad, learn about the culture and traditions of their country of origin, and, as such, develop a so-called ethnic identity or ethnic connectedness (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In this paper we study the relationship between life satisfaction and ethnic connectedness, which we define as feeling connected to another country than the one where one lives and/or was born in.

While for a long time a connection with the country of origin was perceived as an obstacle for integration, an emerging literature shows the importance of developing a connection with the ethnic group or the country of origin for young people with a migration background (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). Indeed, a growing number of studies have shown a relationship between ethnic connectedness and a wide variety of positive outcomes, such as better school performance (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Dejud, 2007) and an increased subjective well-being (Lee, 2001; Edwards, 2003; Delva, 2005). Moreover, a higher degree of ethnic

connectedness may buffer negative experiences such as ethnic discrimination, negative stereotyping and stigmatisation (Yoo & Lee, 2005; Liu & Iwamato, 2007).

Previous research has shown that ethnic connectedness develops in conjunction with the broader context and, more specifically, the composition of people within a certain context (Phinney, 1990). For example, young people with a migration background feel more connected to their ethnic group in ethnic diverse schools (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2017; Brown, 2017; Gharaei, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2019). Despite the importance of the ethnic composition of schools, empirical research has not yet studied its potential moderating role regarding the relationship between ethnic connectedness and aspects of subjective well-being (for the neighbourhood context, see Juang, Nguyen, & Lin, 2006; and for the family and school contexts, see Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014a, 2014b). Moreover, due to limited sample sizes, previous research has not accounted for differences between different ethnic groups within one society.

In this article we try to overcome both problems by investigating the relationship between both the *presence* (whether or not they feel ethnically connected), the *degree* of ethnic connectedness (how strong the connection is), life satisfaction and the ethnic composition of the school among 2091 young people (aged 14 to 18) with a migration background in 73 schools in Flanders. We make three contributions to the literature on feelings of ethnic connectedness (in some studies referred to as *ethnic identity*). First, research has not sufficiently mapped the ethnic diversity that is characteristic of Western European societies. It is unclear whether differences exist between groups with a different ethnic background in the degree of ethnic connectedness and whether this affects life satisfaction. In this study we differentiate between nine different (broadly taken together) ethnic background groups: (1) Western or Northern European, (2) Eastern European, (3) Southern European, (4) Moroccan, (5) Turkish, (6) Maghreb or Middle Eastern, (7) American or Australian, (8) Asian and (9) Sub-Saharan African. Research among

young people with a migration background has already investigated the link between ethnic connectedness and subjective well-being (Smith & Silva, 2011), between ethnic connectedness and the school context (Gharaei, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014b) and between subjective well-being and the school context (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). With this article we contribute to the existing research by using multilevel analyses to determine whether the ethnic composition of the school population moderates the relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction. We use two different indicators to tap into various aspects of the ethnic composition of the school population, namely the general proportion of pupils with a migration background in the school and the proportion of pupils from their own specific ethnic group. This way, we identify not only whether school composition moderates the relation between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction, but also as to which school composition characteristics are beneficial to young people with a migration background.

Theoretical background

Ethnic connectednes: presence and degree

People are born in a specifc country and as members of an ethnic group, but it is only from childhood on that they become increasingly aware of their group membership. This self-awareness is, of course, a prerequisite to create an emotional bond with one's country of origin and/or ethnic group (Phinney, 1992; Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). From adolescence onwards individuals develop the cognitive and social skills to connect with their ethnic group and start to vary in the strength of this connection (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Phinney, 1992).

We rely on the work of Phinney (1992, 1993) to study feelings of connectedness with another country than Belgium. Analytically, she distinguished three stages in the development of an ethnic identity. In the phase of an *unexamined* identity, young people are not (yet) exploring the meaning of belonging to an ethnic group and mainly focus on their national identity. During

this phase, the possibility exists that negative judgements of others about one's ethnic group are adopted. In contrast, the second phase is driven by the quest for the meaning of belonging to a certain ethnic group and is called the *searching* identity. During this phase a disengagement takes place from the gaze of others whereby one opens up to learn about the country of origin by searching for information on the culture, traditions and values of that country. It is only in the third and last phase, that of an *achieved* identity, that the group is evaluated positively, that a connection is felt with the ethnic group and that so-called 'ethnic behaviour' – i.e., behaviour inspired by an ethnic group consciousness – is stated. Researchers later showed that the course of these phases is not linear and individuals can go back an forth as a reaction to certain events (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2006). What matters here, is the idea that when young people do not reach the phase of an achieved identity, feelings of confusion, insecurity and restlessness can surface (Navarette & Jenkins, 2011). Thus, as long as the identity is not 'achieved', the positive outcomes on subjective well-being are likely to be absent (Syed et al., 2013; Szabo & Ward, 2015).

Besides theorizing the development of an ethnic identity, Phinney (1992) also introduced the 'Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure' (MEIM) to study the degree of ethnic connectedness across ethnic groups. This measure was originally conceptualized as a continuous variable going from low interest and awareness and little clarity concerning one's ethnicity (i.e. identity *diffusion*) to ethnic identity achievement. The measure follows a two-stage procedure by first assessing to which ethnic group individuals categorize themselves. Next, the degree of emotional attachment to the ethnic group is measured through three crucial elements: (1) positively evaluating the ethnic group, (2) feeling a sense of connectedness to the ethnic group (i.e., feeling a certain 'pride' towards the ethnic group) and (3) establishing behaviour which is typical for the ethnic group (e.g., listening to specific music, speaking the language, maintaining culinary traditions...).

The downside of this measurement, however, is that individuals who do not necessarily perceive themselves as belonging to a larger ethnic group and consequently do not feel connected to their ethnic group are overlooked. In other words, one could argue that individuals in the stage of an *unexamined* identity are not included in Phinney's (1992) MEIM. Therefore, in this article, we use the first step to assess whether or not young people which were born abroad or have at least one parent or grandparent that was not born in Belgium, feel connected to this country or not. In so doing, we assess the *presence* of ethnic connectedness in the first step, whereas in the second step, in line with Phinney's (1992) measure, we tap into the *degree* of ethnic connectedness. Whereas Phinney's (1992) measure taps into low to high emotional attachment, we aim to broaden the range from no attachment to high attachment. This enables us to investigate where exactly in the process of emotional attachment the most important effects occur on young people's satisfaction with life.

The relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction

In this study we do not only aim to map feelings of ethnic connectedness (i.e. both the *presence* and the *degree* of ethnic connectedness) among young people with different migration backgrounds, but also aim to disentangle the (complex) relationship with life satisfaction. Research shows that young people with a migration background are generally less satisfied with their lives compared to young people without a migration background. This difference persists even after taking into account demographic characteristics such as socio-economic background, physical health, age and gender (Verkuyten, 1986, 2008; Michalos & Zumbo, 2001; Ullman & Tatar, 2001; Safi, 2010; Hadjar & Backes, 2013). These differences in life satisfaction can partly be explained by experiences of discrimination or stigmatisation (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

From a social psychological point of view, it is often stated that individuals develop coping mechanisms to minimise the negative effects of social exclusion and to still be able to pursue a sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In line with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel &

Turner, 1986), the rejection-identification model, for example, holds that members of stigmatised groups develop a *reactive identity* in response to social exclusion by focusing more strongly on their own group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Dimitrova, Bender, Chasiotis, & van de Vijver, 2013). This also results in people defining themselves more in group terms and perceiving more similarities with other group members, which in turn reinforces the sense of group belonging (Leach et al., 2008). Stigmatisation or discrimination based on one's ethnic background increases the likelihood of developing a *reactive ethnic identity*. By focusing on ethnic group membership, a positive self-concept can still be achieved. In that case, the felt connectedness with the group may buffer the negative judgements of others (Crabtee, Haslam, Postmes, & Haslam, 2010). Indeed, a meta-analysis by Smith and Silva (2011) shows that ethnic connectedness positively contributes to young people's subjective well-being and, more specifically, self-confidence, self-esteem, academic performance and general quality of life.

The foregoing leads to two crucial insights. First, there is reason to focus more deeply on the subjective well-being of young people with a migration background. Second, not only the presence but also the degree of ethnic connectedness are crucial for understanding the way in which it contributes to subjective well-being. In this paper we focus on one aspect of subjective well-being, namely people's general satisfaction with life.

Ethnic and social differences in ethnic connectedness

Previous research on feelings of ethnic connectedness in Europe has often focused on the largest ethnic groups and has paid little attention to differences between ethnic groups. There are, however, reasons to expect differences between ethnic groups.

Public opinion research shows, for example, a clear hierarchy in the general appreciation of different ethnic groups by the public at large (Hraba, Hagendoorn, & Hagendoorn, 1989). An individual's own ethnic group is generally put first, followed by groups that resemble them in terms of language, religion, geographical location, etc. In Flanders, in addition to the native

ethnic group, groups with Northern and Western European origin are generally assessed more positively, followed by groups with Southern European origin. Groups with Asian or African origin are systematically placed lower in the hierarchy (Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, & Masson, 1996; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000; Siongers, 2019; Mastari & Spruyt, 2018). Seen through the lens of the rejection-identification model which holds that the fear of stigma, discrimination and their actual expression lead to a stronger connection with the ethnic group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Dimitrova et al., 2013), we expect that young people who belong to ethnic groups that are known to be perceived negatively by the public at large have a stronger need to connect with their ethnic group. Consequently, we expect that, if ranked from a weak to a strong ethnic connectedness, the ethnic groups we consider in this study would be arranged as follows: Northern and Western European, Southern European, Eastern European, Asian and African origin groups (including Maghreb countries) (*Hypothesis 1*).

As indicated earlier, the rejection-identification model is related to Social Identity Theory, which holds that stigmatised groups search for ways to achieve a positive self-concept. Stigmatisation can, aside from one's ethnic background, also take place on the basis of one's social position. On the one hand, a young person's social position is determined by their parents, for example, through their financial situation. It is possible that young people with a migration background from less prosperous families connect more strongly with their ethnic group in response to the stigma associated with being in a difficult financial situation (*Hypothesis 2a*). On the other hand, young people already acquire a number of status characteristics during secondary education through the educational track in which they are enrolled in. In Belgium, just like in many countries, less prestige is attributed to vocational and technical tracks compared to general and arts tracks (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Research shows that young people in Flanders enrolled in vocational and technical tracks are aware of this stigma (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). Young people with a migration background enrolled

in vocational or technical educational tracks can, as a result, gain self-worth by connecting to their ethnic group (called *social creativity* in Social Identity Theory). Therefore, we expect to find higher ethnic connectedness among young people enrolled in the vocational or technical tracks compared to young people following general or arts education (*Hypothesis 2b*).

The importance of context: schools' ethnic composition

Recent research on the subjective well-being of young people with a migration background and their ethnic connectedness points to the importance of the context, such as the neighbourhood and the school. In the literature, the development of ethnic connectedness is presented as a process that takes place throughout adolescence. Since adolescents spend most of their awake time in school, this article focuses on the importance of school.

In general, it can be posited that in order to feel connected to an ethnic group and to experience the positive outcomes of such ethnic connectedness, it is important that young people with a migration background feel good at school. The *goodness-of-fit framework* (Lerner & Lerner, 1983; Thomas & Chess, 1977) states that the experienced 'fit' (or compatibility) between the environment and an individual's characteristics generates a more positive subjective well-being. This reasoning renders it plausible that young people with a migration background experience a school with many pupils from the same country of origin as compatible, which in turn increases ethnic connectedness. A study on ethnic connectedness among American Asian young adults in the United States confirms the goodness-of-fit framework for the neighbourhood context (Juang, Nguyen, & Lin, 2006). In that study, young people's psychosocial well-being (measured by depression, self-esteem and the relationship with parents) became more positive as the number of local residents with the same ethnic origin increased. More importantly, the study showed that the relationship between ethnic connectedness and psychosocial well-being was moderated by the number of local residents with the same ethnic background. Based on these findings, we expect that young people with a

migration background will feel more strongly connected to their country of origin as the proportion of pupils with the same ethnic background at school increases (*Hypothesis 3a*). In line with the findings of Juang, Nguyen and Lin (2006), we also expect that the proportion of pupils with the same ethnic background moderates the relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction (*Hypothesis 3b*).

Next, research shows that young people with a migration background in schools with a native majority are bullied more often and are also more likely to be discriminated against and victimized (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2010; Graham, 2006; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). The ethnic connectedness of young people with a migration background is also stronger in schools where there is no native majority (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2017; Brown, 2017; Gharaei, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2019). These findings suggest that a native majority at school creates a climate in which feeling connected to one's ethnic group is less evident. The likelihood of exclusion due to their alleged 'differentness' thus seems higher in such contexts compared to contexts in which many young people have a migration background. In the literature on peer victimization, reference is sometimes made to the *imbalance of power thesis*: when the 'power' is out of balance, for example because there is a clear numerical majority of a certain group, the risk of harassment towards the minority group increases (Graham, 2006; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006). Building on that finding, we might expect a similar mechanism regarding norms, attitudes and behaviour. More specifically, it can be expected that when the native group forms the numerical minority at school, the influence over accepted norms, attitudes and behaviours will be out of balance (see also Agirdag et al., 2010). This potentially creates a freer climate for young people with a migration background, which are then considered as one group compared to young people with a native background. The imbalance of power thesis, thus, leads to the expectation that ethnic connectedness increases as the number of young people with a migration

background at school increases (*Hypothesis 4a*) and that the relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction will, in turn, also be stronger in schools where the number of young people with a migration background is higher (*Hypothesis 4b*).

Although previous research has already examined the relationship between ethnic diversity at school and well-being, the proportion of young people from the same ethnic group has not yet been studied in relation to the proportion of young people with a migration background. By including both measures, we contribute to the literature by disentangling the relevance of different context characteristics and in this way draw a more refined picture concerning *how* context matters.

Overview of hypotheses

The previous arguments and assumptions lead to the following hypotheses that will be tested empirically:

- Young people with a Northern and Western European background more often report no connection to one's country of origin *or* report a lower degree of ethnic connectedness compared to young people with a (in order) Southern European, Eastern European, Asian and African background (*Hypothesis 1*).

- Young people with a migration background from financially deprived families more often report a connection to one's country of origin *and* report a higher degree of ethnic connectedness compared to young people with a migration background from affluent families (*Hypothesis 2a*) and young people with a migration background enrolled in the vocational and technical tracks more often report a connection to one's country of origin *and* report a higher degree of ethnic connectedness compared to young people with a migration background enrolled in the general and arts tracks (*Hypothesis 2b*).

- Young people with a migration background in schools with a higher proportion of pupils with the same ethnic background more often report a connection to one's country of

origin *and* report a higher degree of ethnic connectedness (*Hypothesis 3a*). The relationship between (the presence and degree of) ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction among young people with a migration background is stronger in schools where the proportion of pupils with the same ethnic background is higher (*Hypothesis 3b*).

- Young people with a migration background in schools with a higher proportion of other pupils with a migration background more often report a connection to one's country of origin *and* report a higher degree of ethnic connectedness (*Hypothesis 4a*). The relationship between (the presence and the degree of) ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction among young people with a migration background is stronger in schools where the proportion of pupils with a migration background is higher (*Hypothesis 4b*).

Data and Measures

To test our hypotheses, we rely on data from the Flemish Youth School Monitor 2 (JOP) (2018). The JOP School Monitor 2 was collected in 2018 by the Flemish Youth Research Platform and is based on a sample of 59 Flemish secondary schools in Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels and 21 secondary schools outside these metropolitan regions in Flanders. In total, 8441 pupils participated in this study. The response rates at school and student level were 41.0% and 82.2% for the Ghent sample, 44.0% and 85.3% for the Antwerp sample, 58.0% and 83.5% for the Brussels sample and 54.0% and 89.6% for the sample from non-metropolitan areas (for technical details, see Bradt, Pleysier, Put, Siongers, & Spruyt, 2019). Although surveys were administered across all grades, we only selected the pupils from the second and third grade of secondary education (*N* = 5856) because only this group had to fill in questions regarding feelings of ethnic connectedness. In addition, we only selected respondents who were born abroad or of whom at least one parent or grandparent was not born in Belgium. After deleting

cases that had missing values on one of the variables included in the analysis, we arrived at a final sample of 2091 respondents.

In our final sample of young people with a migration background, 8.9% have a Western or Northern European migration background (e.g., France, the Netherlands, Germany), 8.7% have an Eastern European migration background (e.g., Poland, Bulgaria, Russia, ...), 8.0% a Southern European migration background (e.g. Spain, Italy, Portugal, ...), 28.3% a Moroccan migration background, 13.1% a Turkish migration background, 6.6% a migration background from another country in the Maghreb or the Middle East (e.g., Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, ...), 4.9% an American or Australian migration background (e.g., USA, Brazil, Australia, ...), 9.5% an Asian migration background (e.g. China, Japan, Vietnam, ...) and 12.2% a migration background from Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Congo, Nigeria, Cameroon, ...).

The central indicators in our analyses are both the *presence* and *degree* of *ethnic connectedness*. In line with Phinney's (1992) 'Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure' (MEIM), the JOP school monitor (2018) uses a two-stage procedure to measure ethnic connectedness. In a first step, respondents are asked whether or not they feel connected to the country in which their parents or grandparents were born (0: I feel no connection with the countries in which my parents or grandparents were born; 1: I feel a connection with the country in which my parents or grandparents were born). In the second step, respondents who indicated that they feel connected to one's country of origin were presented six items to measure the extent to which they (1) feel connected to the ethnic origin group (example item: *'I feel proud when someone from that country appears in a positive way in the media'*) and (2) engage in behaviours that are related to the culture of the country (example item: '*I like to listen to music from that country*'). These items are strongly inspired by Phinney's (1992) measurement of MEIM. We chose to adjust items so they fit better in the context of contemporary, digitalised societies by including the role of social media in the following items: '*I think it is important to make it clear*

on social media that I have a connection with that country (by posting photos or music about that country ...)', *'I follow celebrities (artists, politics, ...) of that country on social media'*, *'I have regular contact with family or acquaintances of that country via social media'*. These items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree.* All items have been internationally tested (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and they also produce a reliable scale for Flanders (Cronbach's α = 0.760). Our two-stage procedure allows us to study (1) between-group variation regarding whether or not young people with a migration background feel a connection with their country of origin (*N* = 2091) and (2) within-group differences in the degree of the ethnic connectedness among young people who indicated that they felt connected to the country of origin (*N* = 1823) (Table 1).

Overall life satisfaction is measured by means of the *'Satisfaction with Life Scale'* (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Gadermann, Schonert-Reichl & Zubmo, 2010). This five-item scale (Cronbach's α = 0.827) contains items such as '*In most ways my life is close to my ideal'*, '*If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing*'). Based on these items we constructed a sum scale ranging from 0 to 100 (*M* = 58.75, *SD* = 19.73). This scale is ideal to measure the overall life satisfaction of young people, as it leaves the choice of the life domain (such as health, relationships, appearance, ...) that weighs the most in one's general well-being to the respondent themselves (Diener et al., 2010).

In our analysis we included several individual level variables. Educational track consists of three categories: general or arts education as the reference category (40.7%), technical education (33.2%), vocational education (26.1%). We also control for respondents' gender, for which girls serve as the reference category (girls: 57.4%; boys: 44.6%). Respondents' age (*M*= 16.43, *SD*= 1.57) was divided into three categories: respondents who were 14 to 15 years of age (reference category: 30.9%), 16 to 17 years of age (44.7%) and 18 years and older (24.3%). Information about respondent's experience of their financial situation at home (i.e. subjective

indicator for income) was divided into two categories: those who experience their financial situation at home as difficult to very difficult (4.0%) compared to those who experience it at as inbetween, good or very good (reference category: 96.0%). That way, we compare respondents who experience financial deprivation compared to those who don't[1]. We also control for respondents' country of birth (born abroad: 30.4%; born in Belgium: 69.6%)[2].

We also add three variables at the school-level: the proportion of pupils at school with a migration background[3] ($M = 71.30$, $SD = 23.00$), the proportion of pupils at school who belong to the same origin group as the respondent (Western and Northern European, Eastern European, South European, Moroccan, Turkish, Maghreb and Middle Eastern, American and Australian, Asian and Sub-Saharan African) ($M = 16.74$, $SD = 15.69$) and the proportion of pupils who report that their family's financial situation is difficult to very difficult ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 3.57$). The latter variable is a control variable to properly study the specific relevance of aspects of a school's ethnic composition (Spruyt, 2008).

Results

We present the results in three steps. First, we discuss the variation among young people with a migration background for the presence and the degree of ethnic connectedness (i.e. feelings of ethnic connectedness) (Table 1). We then study whether social differences arise in feelings of connectedness (Table 2). Finally, we investigate the relationship between feelings of ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction, and how the ethnic and socio-economic composition of the school moderates this relationship (Table 3).

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[1] To test the robustness of our results we also re-estimated all models by using an alternative operationalization of subjective income (e.g., as a continuous variable). This did not lead to different conclusions.

[2] As only 6.4% of the respondents in our sample are of the third generation, we do not make a distinction between second and third generation migration.

[3] While preparing this paper we also looked at a third indicator of a school's ethnic composition, namely ethnic diversity. This indicator reflects the number of different groups of pupils with a migration background (Western and Northern European, Eastern European, South European, Moroccan, Turkish, Maghreb and Middle Eastern, American and Australian, Asian and Sub-Saharan African) at the school-level, corrected for the group size. Due to the strong correlation with the proportion of young people with a migration background (r = 0.708, p <0.001), we decided to not include this measure in the final models.

Table 1 shows how many young people with a migration background in our data feel connected to their ethnic group. Firstly, an overwhelming majority of young people with a migration background in Flanders indicate that they feel connected to their country of origin. Indeed, more than 87% of young people with a migration background report a connection with the country in which they were born or in which their parents or grandparents were born (*presence* of ethnic connectedness). Secondly, within this group, we note that the majority of young people with a migration background report strong feelings of ethnic connectedness (*degree* of ethnic connectedness). 85.3% of the young people who reported a connection with one's country of origin, feel proud when someone from their country of origin appears in the media in a positive way. 72.6% have regular contact through social media with family or acquaintances of their country of origin and 66.6% regularly listen to music from their country of origin. These numbers illustrate that for many young people with a migration background ethnic connectedness is a salient feeling accompanied by concrete attitudes and behaviours. Thirdly, when we look at the items associated with a lower ethnic connectedness score, two items stand out: 29.1 % of young people with a migration background do not think it is important to show on social media that they have a connection with their country of origin and 28.1 % do not follow celebrities from the country of origin on social media.

[Table 1]

Social differences in ethnic connectedness

In this section, we investigate social differences in feelings of ethnic connectedness in two ways (Table 2). First, a logistic multilevel analysis was conducted with the *presence* of ethnic connectedness as the dependent variable ($N = 2091$). Second, we used linear multilevel regression analysis to determine which social characteristics are related to the *degree* of ethnic connectedness ($N = 1823$).

A series of nested models were estimated whereby the proportion of pupils with a migration background in the school and the proportion of pupils from an individual's own ethnic group were entered separately into Model 1 and Model 2, and simultaneously into Model 3. This allowed us to assess the individual-level and school-level hypotheses. First, we expected young people to differ in ethnic connectedness according to the group of origin they belonged to (*Hypothesis 1*), their subjective financial situation (*Hypothesis 2a*) and educational track (*Hypothesis 2b*). Second, ethnic connectedness and school characteristics such as the number of pupils at school with a migration background (*Hypothesis 4a*) and/or the number of pupils from the same ethnic origin (*Hypothesis 3a*) were expected to be related.

The third column in Table 2 (Model 3a) shows the relationship between the *presence* of ethnic connectedness and the subjective financial situation at home, the educational track, the ethnic background, school composition characteristics, controlling for gender and age. With regards to ethnic background, compared to young people with a Western European migration background, a larger proportion of young people with a Southern European, a Moroccan or a Turkish migration background indicated that they felt connected to their country of origin. It is noticeable that the other individual-level socio-demographic variables were not significantly related to whether or not one felt connected to the country of origin. Next, young people born outside of Belgium more often indicated that they felt connected to one's country of origin compared to young people born in Belgium. Concerning school characteristics, there was a significant relationship between the presence of ethnic connectedness and the proportion of young people with a migration background. That is, young people who attended ethnically diverse schools more often indicated that they felt connected to one's country of origin.

The analysis for the *degree* of ethnic connectedness – only for respondents who indicated that they felt connected to their country of origin – also indicated clear differences according to one's ethnic background (Model 3b). As expected, young people with a Western European

migration background scored lowest on ethnic connectedness. All other ethnic groups scored significantly higher on the degree of ethnic connectedness, although contrary to Hypothesis 1, no clear hierarchy was observed. This hypothesis is therefore only partially confirmed. In this regard, young people with a Turkish migration background stood out when contrasted with other ethnic groups as they felt strongly connected.

For the other individual-level characteristics, there was no significant relationship between the degree of ethnic connectedness and the subjective financial situation (rejection of Hypothesis 2a) and educational track (rejection of Hypothesis 2b). The degree of ethnic connectedness was, however, related to gender and age. In line with the existing literature, the degree of ethnic connectedness seems to develop further during adolescence and is expressed through concrete attitudes and behaviours. Girls also felt more strongly connected to their ethnic group than boys. Based on this finding, an interaction effect between gender and ethnic background was also tested, although no significant association was found. Finally, the degree of ethnic connectedness was also related to the proportion of young people with a migration background at school. More specifically, a greater degree of ethnic connectedness was reported in ethnically diverse schools. Initially there was also a significant relationship between the degree of ethnic connectedness and the proportion of pupils of one's own ethnic group at school (Model 2b), but this effect disappeared once we controlled for the ethnic diversity within the school (Model 3b). The proportion of pupils with a migration background in a school thus appeared to be more important for the degree of ethnic connectedness than the presence of pupils of one's own ethnic group (confirmation of Hypothesis 4a; rejection of Hypothesis 3a). In the discussion section, we take a closer look at the implications of these findings.

[Table 2]

The relationship between ethnic connectedness and life satisfaction

In the final step of the analysis, we used two linear multilevel analyses to determine whether and how the degree of ethnic connectedness was related to life satisfaction by taking into account relevant individual-level and school-level characteristics, and testing interaction terms between ethnic connectedness and the school-level characteristics (Table 3). In the first analysis, we included the *presence* of ethnic connectedness (Models 1a, 2a and 3a) and in the second analysis we utilised the *degree* of ethnic connectedness (Models 1b, 2b and 3b). The analyses lead to three central findings.

First, a number of social differences were observed in the extent to which young people with a migration background are satisfied with their lives. In line with previous research, boys reported higher levels of life satisfaction compared to girls. A strong relationship was also observed between the subjective financial situation and life satisfaction. Young people with a migration background who experienced the financial situation at home as difficult to very difficult reported lower levels of life satisfaction compared to those with a more beneficial financial situation. The results also showed that pupils enrolled in the technical education track were less satisfied with their lives than pupils from general secondary education. Second, both the presence and the degree of ethnic connectedness were significantly associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. Third, we focused on the role of the school context. The school context only appeared to be important in the models which addressed the presence of ethnic connectedness (Models 1a – 3a). The proportion of young people at school from one's own ethnic group was significantly related to higher levels of life satisfaction (Model 1a). In line with the goodness-of-fit framework, this suggests that young people with a migration background report higher life satisfaction when the school environment is compatible with their own background. However, the interaction between the presence of ethnic connectedness and the proportion of pupils of one's own ethnic group was not associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (Model 3a).

Yet, the proportion of young people with a migration background appeared to moderate the relationship between the presence of ethnic connectedness and overall life satisfaction (Model 2a and Figure 1). When young people felt connected to one's country of origin, the proportion of pupils with a migration background in school appeared to be more important to life satisfaction than the presence of pupils from one's own group of origin (confirmation of Hypothesis 3b). For young people who did not feel connected to one's country of origin, having a higher proportion of young people with a migration background at the school was associated with lower life satisfaction (see Figure 1). In other words, ethnic diversity at school seems to have a positive influence on the subjective well-being of young people who feel connected to one's country of origin, while ethnic diversity at school has a negative impact on life satisfaction for young people who do not feel connected to one's country of origin.

[Table 3]

[Figure 1]

Discussion and conclusion

Against the background of increasing ethno-cultural diversity in contemporary Western societies *and* social media that reduces the limitations of time and space, this article assessed the dispersion and relevance of ethnic connectedness among young people from nine different ethnic origins. We also focused on the relationship between ethnic connectedness and satisfaction with life. Throughout the analyses, we paid attention to the importance of context by taking into account different characteristics of the ethnic composition of schools. Our results add up to a number of general conclusions.

First, our data clearly illustrate the significance of the presence of ethnic connectedness. An overwhelming 87% of young people with a migration background indicated that they felt connected to the country where one of their (grand)parents were born. Regarding the degree of ethnic connectedness, the data revealed that this connection was relatively strong. For example,

the majority of young people feels proud when someone from that country appears in a positive way in the news, likes to listen to music from that country and has regular contact with family members from that country through social media. Given the possibilities created by the internet and social media, the thresholds to develop feelings of ethnic connectedness will only decrease in the future. Our findings illustrate that for young people with a migration background, both the presence and the degree of ethnic connectedness relate to higher levels of life satisfaction. Thus, super diverse societies that aim for the development of positive identities need to take the concept of a multi-layered identity seriously. Rather than seeing these layers as competing, respect for these multi-layered identities seems to be the way to achieve a positive development of young people's (social) identity and their associated subjective well-being.

Second, the degree of ethnic connectedness varied according to several social characteristics. Young people with roots in countries that are cultural-geographically further away from Belgium/Flanders report higher degrees of ethnic connectedness. Moreover, a clear gender difference was observed. Girls reported substantially higher degrees of ethnic connectedness compared to boys. This gender difference may be explained by the observation that ethnic and cultural traditions, values and norms are predominantly transferred and reproduced through female lineage. Mothers continue to be the prime socialisation agent and are therefore sometimes described as the 'carriers of culture' (Phinney, 1990; González, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006; Warikoo, 2005).

Third, besides investigating differences at the individual-level, this paper devoted attention to the relevance of context by taking into account characteristics of the student composition of schools and how this impacts ethnic connectedness, satisfaction with life and the relationship between both. The proportion of young people with a migration background in schools was positively related to both the presence and degree of ethnic connectedness. More specifically, we found that young people in schools who have a higher share of pupils with a migration

background are more likely to feel connected to one's country of origin (*presence* of ethnic connectedness). Based on the *imbalance of power thesis* we can explain this as follows: a majority of pupils with a non-migration background at school seems to create a climate where developing an ethnic connection is more difficult. Although this applies for schools in general, schools with low ethnic diversity should devote special attention in their curricula to implement education on multicultural societies and the associated challenges such as discrimination to create awareness on this topic among pupils and teachers (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). That way, schools become a safe environment to experiment with ethnic connectedness for young people with a migration background.

Another remarkable finding which illustrates the importance of group-level characteristics concerns the lack of a relationship between the percentage of pupils from one's *own ethnic origin group* and the feelings of ethnic connectedness (both presence and degree). This underlines that ethnic diversity itself, rather than solely being surrounded by one's own ethnic group, is important to develop feelings of ethnic connectedness. Ethnic diversity is not only important because it increases contact with people from different ethnic groups, but also because it makes a common experience accessible (i.e., feeling a bond with a country that is different from the one they live in). Taking into account the evolution towards a more diverse ethno-cultural population in most Western societies (Noppe et al., 2018; Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013), one may assume that the importance of feelings of ethnic connectedness will continue to be salient in the near future. The findings of this article illustrate that schools and societies at large should take this development seriously, guide it and make sure that feelings of ethnic connectedness are not hijacked by groups or movements that aim for polarisation.

Concerning life satisfaction, our results are in line with the *goodness-of-fit framework.* In schools with a higher share of pupils from the same ethnic background, young people report more satisfaction with life. The proportion of pupils with a migration background itself was not

directly related to life satisfaction but was moderated by the presence of ethnic connectedness. More specifically, the relationship between the presence of ethnic connectedness and satisfaction with life turned out to be stronger in schools with a higher number of pupils with a migration background. Thus, young people with a migration background reported a lower satisfaction with life when they felt no ethnic connection and followed education in schools with a higher number of young people with a migration background. Interestingly, this was not the case for the degree of ethnic connectedness. Satisfaction with life did not increase with higher levels of ethnic connectedness. Our findings underscore the relevance of also assessing whether individuals feel a connection to one's country of origin, rather than solely focusing on the degree of ethnic connectedness. We argue that young people with a migration background who do not feel ethnically connected are situated in the stage of an *unexamined* identity (Phinney, 1993). Previous studies already showed that an unachieved identity negatively impacts individuals' well-being (see Syed et al., 2013). This study not only provides additional evidence, but also offers more insight by showing that the most detrimental effects on subjective well-being are situated in the stage of an *unexamined* identity. We believe that future research on the relationship between ethnic connectedness and psychosocial adaptation at large should devote more attention to young people in this stage. Moreover, our study highlights the importance of the school composition in this process: one's subjective well-being is related to the compatibility of the school context with people's individual characteristics. In schools with a higher number of pupils with a migration background and associated feelings of ethnic connectedness, young people who do not feel a connection to one's country of origin may feel 'different' which in turn could reduce their sense of belonging in such schools. The latter interpretation would imply that not only the number of pupils with a migration background matters, but also the subjective meaning that a migration background holds. Alternatively, we cannot rule out a possible role of peer pressure since a qualitative study among young people

with a Turkish background found that they experienced social pressure for ethnic conformity (i.e., conformism to the norms, values and practices typical of the ethnic group) in neighbourhoods where many young people with a Turkish background lived (as compared to neighbourhoods where this was not the case) (Van Kerckhem, Van de Putte, & Stevens, 2013). Applied to our case, it seems possible that peer pressure has a negative impact on satisfaction with life among young people with a migration background who do not feel connected to one's country of origin. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to disentangle and empirically test both interpretations. Further research should devote more attention to intergroup processes (and related phenomena such as peer pressure) when studying the relationship between feelings of ethnic connectedness and subjective well-being.

Finally, we did not find (indirect) empirical support for the *rejection-identification* model as neither young people's educational track position nor their financial situation was related to the presence or the degree of ethnic connectedness. In addition, our results did not support the assumption that ethnic groups which are known to be negatively perceived by the public at large report stronger feelings of ethnic connectedness. Further research would benefit from adopting more direct measures of experienced discrimination or stigmatisation.

Despite these new questions that our results raise, the core message of this article is clear. For young people with a migration background, feelings of ethnic connectedness are important and positively related to satisfaction with life. When studying this relationship, the relevance of the characteristics of one of the most important socialisation spaces in a young person's life, i.e. the school, should be considered.

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Table 1. Percentages and factor loadings for feelings of ethnic connectedness among young people with a migration background, pupils from the second and third grade of secondary education in Flanders.

Presence of ethnic connectedness (percentage): Do you have a connection with the country (or one of the countries) where your (grand) parents were born (N = 2091)

I feel a connection with one of the countries where my parents or grandparents were born	87.3

Degree of ethnic connectedness (N = 1823)

	Factor loadings	Row percentages		
		(Totally) disagree	In between	(Totally) agree
I think it is important to follow the news (political, social ...) from that country	0.572	13.7	37.9	48.4
I feel proud when someone from that country appears in the media in a positive way	0.643	4.1	10.7	85.3
I think it is important to make it clear on social media that I have a connection with that country (by posting photos or music about that country ...)	0.723	29.1	29.2	41.7
I like to listen to music from that country	0.763	13.6	19.8	66.6
I follow celebrities (artists, politics ...) of that country on social media	0.764	28.1	23.3	48.6
I have regular contact with family or acquaintances of that country via social media	0.562	9.6	17.8	72.6

Table 2. Multilevel analysis for presence of ethnic connectedness (N = 2091) and degree of ethnic connectedness (N = 1823) among young people with a migration background in higher secondary education in Flanders.

	The *presence* of ethnic connectedness			The *degree* of ethnic connectedness		
	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b
	logit	logit	logit	B	B	B
Constant	/	/	/	59.852***	58.565***	59.711***
Individual characteristics						
Gender (0: girl)	-0.149	-0.170	-0.149	-4.401***	-4.458***	-4.414***
Age (0: < 16 years old)						
16 to 17 years old	-0.257	-0.197	-0.260	2.614**	2.851**	2.665**
18 years old or older	-0.334(*)	-0.233	-0.336(*)	1.685	2.071(*)	1.743
Subjective financial situation (0: inbetween, easy, very easy)	-0.201	-0.209	-0.201	-1.633	-1.631	-1.613
Educational track (0: general)						
technical	0.032	0.107	0.034	0.460	0.664	0.428
vocational	0.232	0.296	0.234	0.176	0.393	0.143
Ethnic background (0: West-European)						
East-European	0.310	0.540(*)	0.298	8.154***	9.546***	8.502***
South-European	1.161***	1.356***	1.145***	11.562***	12.997***	11.998***
Moroccan	0.879***	1.028***	0.898***	4.517*	4.830**	4.186*
Turkish	1.380***	1.594***	1.379***	16.646***	17.755***	16.830***
Maghreb and Middle Eastern	0.500	0.795*	0.486	5.695*	7.278***	6.054*
American and Australian	0.246	0.486	0.228	7.335**	8.918***	7.835**
Asian	0.221	0.468(*)	0.207	5.369*	6.953***	5.774**
Sub-Sahara African	0.359	0.576*	0.348	8.380***	9.758***	8.736***
Country of birth (0: Born in Belgium)	0.439**	0.423*	0.441**	1.420	1.443	1.430
School characteristics[a]						
Proportion young people with a migration background	0.339***		0.347***	1.294**		1.100*
Proportion young people from the own ethnic group		0.127	-0.026		1.123(*)	0.547
Proportion young people that experience the financial situation at home as (very) difficult	-0.049	-0.057	-0.050	0.198	0.252	0.221
Variance individual level	/	/	/	326.892	326.484	326.613
Variance school level	0.159	0.226	0.158	0.393	1.608	0.800
N pupils	2091	2091	2091	1823	1823	1823
N schools	73	73	73	73	73	73

(*) p < 0.10; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

[a] School-level variables were standardized.

Table 3. Multilevel analyses of life satisfaction among young people with a migration background in higher secondary education in Flanders with the presence and the degree of ethnic connectedness.

	Life satisfaction with *presence* of ethnic connectedness			Life satisfaction with *degree* of ethnic connectedness		
	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b
	B	B	B	B	B	B
Constant	53.591***	52.756***	53.388***	60.152***	60.156***	60.115***
Individual characteristics						
Gender (0: girl)	3.591***	3.546***	3.558***	4.310***	4.309***	4.312***
Age (0: < 16 years old)						
16 to 17 years old	-0.941	-0.947	-0.948	-1.202	-1.183	-1.183
18 years old and older	-2.001(*)	-2.001(*)	-2.000(*)	-1.848	-1.793	-1.801
Subjective financial situation (0: inbetween, easy, very easy)	-15.679***	-15.555***	-15.580***	-14.479***	-14.523***	-14.539***
Educational track (0: general)						
technical	-2.203*	-2.267*	-2.189*	-2.527*	-2.460*	-2.462*
vocational	0.378	0.206	0.377	-0.029	0.060	0.081
Ethnic background (0: West-European)						
East-European	-0.817	-0.682	-0.933	-0.363	-0.439	-0.383
Southern European	-1.831	-1.741	-1.867	-1.789	-1.861	-1.791
Moroccan	-0.836	-0.629	-0.885	1.489	1.409	1.456
Turkish	2.856	3.005	2.786	3.629(*)	3.556(*)	3.658(*)
Maghre and Middle Eastern	0.294	0.375	0.220	1.140	1.106	1.119
American and Australian	-2.555	-2.221	-2.603	-3.724	-3.800	-3.788
Asian	-1.429	-1.361	-1.571	0.856	0.901	0.907
Sub-Sahara African	-3.609(*)	-3.478(*)	-3.701(*)	-3.158	-3.241	-3.191
Country of birth (0: born in Belgium)	-0.620	-0.567	-0.569	-0.475	-0.416	-0.440
Degree of ethnic connectedness (group mean centered)	7.757***	8.517***	8.001***			
Presence of ethnic connectedness (0: no connection)				0.136***	0.134***	0.135***
School characteristics[a]						
Proportion young people with a migration background	0.358	-1.731	-0.569	0.794	0.834	0.824
Proportion young people from the own ethnic group	1.113(*)	1.055	-0.182	0.618	0.609	0.627
Proportion young people that experience the financial situation at home as (very) difficult	0.308	0.265	0.308	0.264	0.207	0.242
Interaction-effects						
Whether or not feeling connected with country of origin * Proportion young people with a migration background		2.537*				
Whether or not feeling connected with country of origin * Proportion young people from the own ethnic group			1.419			
Degree of ethnic connectedness * Proportion young people with a migration background					0.011	
Degree of ethnic connectedness * Proportion young people from the own ethnic group						0.017
Variance individual level	358.388	357.419	358.138	346.606	349.432	345.990
Variance school level	2.644	1.294	1.837	3.331	4.451	3.418
N pupils	2091	2091	2091	1823	1823	1823
N schools	73	73	73	73	73	73

(*) $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

[a] School-level variables were standardized.

Figure 1. Interaction between the presence of ethnic connectedness and proportion of young people with a migration background on the life satisfaction of young people with a migration background.
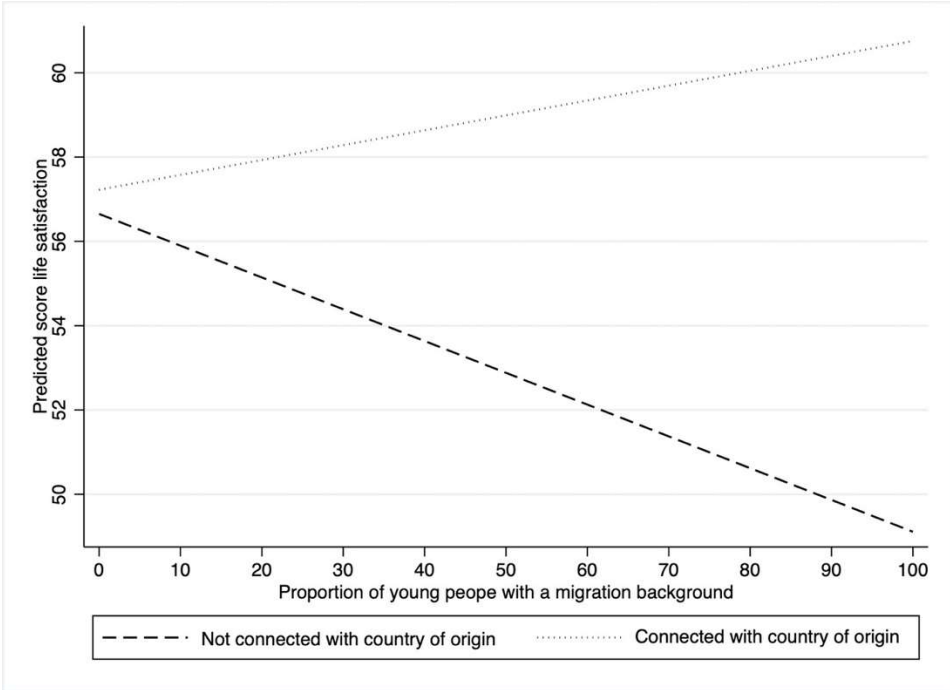
Appendix

Table A.1. Descriptive information on the sample of young people with migration background in the second and third grade of secondary education in Flanders (N = 2091).

	%		%
Ethnic background		**Gender**	
West-European	8.85	Girl	57.44
East-European	8.66	**Age**	
South-European	7.99	14 to 15 years old	30.94
Moroccan	28.31	16 to 17 years old	44.72
Turkish	13.10	18 years old and older	24.34
Maghreb and Middle Eastern	6.60	**Subjective income**	
American and Australian	4.88	(Very) difficult	4.02
Asian	9.47	Rather difficult to very easy	95.98
Sub-Saharan African	12.15		
Country of birth			
Born in Belgium	69.63		