Are dual identifiers (perceived as) social bridges in interethnic networks of youth?

Aim: To understand (a) how adolescents perceive the position of dual ethnic/national identifiers in social networks and (b) how this affects the categorization of dual identifiers as members of the ethnic/national/both groups.

Theoretical background: With the increasing ethnic diversity of many societies, tensions between ethnic groups have become a salient issue. Recent research suggests that school-aged children of immigrant descent may hold a key to improving interethnic relationships: because many identify as both a member of the national majority group and an ethnic minority group, they may be able to create social bridges between communities. Importantly, this requires that others recognize dual identifiers as members of their own group and/or that they have ties to another group. However, ties to two groups can raise questions of group loyalty and may motivate dual identifiers to keep their social networks ethnically segregated by interacting separately with friends from the national and ethnic groups.

The aim of this project is to detect whether and how dual identifiers' social relationships are interpreted as signals of their (multiple) group memberships among adolescents. Do dual identifiers occupy bridge positions between different groups in social networks, do others recognize them in these positions, and does this affect perceptions of their ethnicity? Such socially signaled dual identification cannot be studied with traditional social network approaches. These traditional approaches construct social networks in a given context from self-reported relationships of the network members, thus assuming the network structure is known to everybody. However, research has shown that people's perceptions of social networks often do not align with each other and with reality. This PhD project will implement a novel approach to studying interethnic relations by analyzing how adolescents perceive the structure of the social network in which they are embedded and test how these perceived social networks affect their ethnic/national/dual categorization of their peers. Combining sociological social network theories and social-psychological theories of social categorization and social influence allows making predictions about when and why dual identifiers are (not) recognized and who is (un)likely to recognize them. For instance, observers may perceive someone as a dual identifier when they think that this person has relationships with members of both their ethnic minority group and the national majority group. These perceptions may, however, depend on how one's friends perceive the ethnicity of that person and the perceived ethnic/national belonging of the other network members.

Research design:
As a member of a larger ERC project with two other PhD students, you will collect unique longitudinal data on perceived social networks and perceived ethnic/national belonging in schools and community colleges. You will learn to apply novel statistical techniques (multilevel stochastic actor-oriented models) to simultaneously analyze each adolescent's perception of how the social network in their class looks. Because adolescents who are friends might have similar perceptions of the network, we take into account that these perceptions are not independent (they are networks of networks).
Whereas project 10 focuses on the intergroup consequences of recognizing dual identifiers, the current project focuses on the questions of whether and how dual identifiers are recognized. This project has a more technical/methodological character than project 10 thanks to the novel approach of analyzing perceived social networks.

References
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- Love, A., & Levy, A. (2019). Bridging Group Divides: A Theoretical Overview of the "What" and "How" of Gateway Groups. *Journal of Social Issues*, *75*(2), 414–435. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12327

Project initiators: Tobias Stark (UU), Tom Nijs (UU), Eva Jaspers (UU)

Location: Utrecht University, ERCOMER