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From my minority friends' perspective: sharing minority perceptions of inequality in ethno-racially diverse friend groups

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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of inequality are highly consequential and ethno-racial minority members often face unequal treatment, but we know little about minority influence on perceptions of inequality. Therefore, we ask whether ethno-racial minority youth's inequality perceptions are shared in diverse friend groups. Using Belgian CILS data among stratified random samples of 1800 ethno-racial minority & 1700 majority youth nested in 433 classes across 69 schools (2 waves), we combined social network data with longitudinal multilevel modeling. Ethno-racial minority and majority youth alike shared perceptions from minority friends; mainly majority youth also shared perceptions from majority friends. Only minority friendship effects are replicated longitudinally. The findings suggest minority influence so that youngsters perceived inequality from their minority friends' perspective.

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Schools are prime sites of ethno-racial inequality as evident from persistent and often dramatic unequal attainments between historical or recent ethno-racial minority groups and majority groups in most countries (Alba & Holdaway, 2016; Oecd, 2015). Perceptions of such inequalities in school can be highly consequential for youngsters' motivation and well-being (Baysu et al., 2023; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). While there is an abundance of literature on the individual antecedents and the consequences of perceived inequality, we know much less about how such perceptions of inequality are negotiated and shared in friend groups. Meanwhile, from an intergroup relations perspective, ethno-racial minority group members are more likely targets of unequal treatment based on their ethnicity or race; and they are hence more likely to be aware of inequalities than their majority peers (Alanya et al., 2017; Rucker & Richeson, 2021; Salter et al., 2017). Therefore, it is an especially interesting question when minority perceptions of unequal treatment could be shared. As ethno-racially diverse schools provide opportunities for friendships across group boundaries, minority perceptions of inequality could be shared among ethno-racial majority and minority friends (Bracegirdle et al., 2023; Foner et al., 2019; Kende et al., 2024).

As most research on perceptions of inequality focuses on inequality perceptions as an individual phenomenon, we newly ask when minority perceptions of inequality are shared in diverse settings (Bou Zeineddine & Leach, 2021). To this end, we draw on earlier work on social influence in diverse groups concerning intergroup attitudes and apply it to perceived inequality (Bracegirdle et al., 2022; Rivas-Drake et al., 2019). Our main aim is to establish when youth see inequality from their minority friends' perspective. More specifically, we examine when youth share minority perceptions of inequality within and across ethno-racial group boundaries, because social influence is often limited to the ingroup (Echterhoff & Higgins, 2017; Mackie & Wright, 2003; Spears, 2021). Moreover, when it comes to perceptions of inequality, intergroup contact research suggests asymmetric social influence: minority members often see less inequality with more majority contact, while in some cases majority members perceive more inequality with more minority contact (Dixon et al., 2012; Tropp & Barlow, 2018). Combining these strands of research, the current study investigates how minority perceptions of inequality in school are shared in diverse friend

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groups of national majority and immigrant-origin minority adolescents. We focus on minority youth who belong to ethno-racial minority groups in society in terms of their numbers, power and status, though they might constitute a numerical majority in some classrooms. We focus on adolescents because adolescence is a formative period when minority youth in particular learn how to make sense of inequality (Syed et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). We are especially interested to see whether minority perceptions of inequality become shared, considering these shared perceptions of inequality as a precursor to solidarity with minority groups. We also examine in parallel whether majority perceptions of inequality become shared. By sharing, we mean that youth may come to align their perceptions of inequality as they engage in repeated interactions with their friends (Echterhoff & Higgins, 2017; Higgins et al., 2021; Kashima, 2014; Meeussen et al., 2014).

To address this question, we draw on the large-scale school-based CILS-Belgium survey of over 1700 ethno-racial majority and 1800 immigrant-origin minority youth nested in 433 classes across 70 secondary schools in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Phalet et al., 2018). We focus on youth who belong to the major ethno-racial minority groups in Belgium: Turkish- and Moroccan- and (other) African-origin descendants of immigrants (Kagné & Martiniello, 2001; Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003). All of these minority groups face persistent disadvantage and discrimination in education, labor market, housing and other areas of life, and especially Turkish- and Moroccan origin immigrants endure dire Islamophobia as well (Bourabain et al., 2023; Colak et al., 2023; Derosus et al., 2017; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Ghekiere et al., 2023). We estimate cross-sectional and longitudinal multi-level models with repeated measures of perceived inequality in schools. Making use of social network data, we map the friend groups of minority and majority youth within multi-ethnic classrooms onto their perceptions of inequality. The social network data allows us to investigate friendship ties within minority and majority groups and also cross-cutting ties across majority and minority groups (Dahinden, 2016; Wölfer & Hewstone, 2017).

Are minority perceptions of inequality shared in diverse friend groups?

An influential strand of experimental research on minority influence has shown that it is possible for minority members to change majority attitudes (Butera et al., 2016; Moscovici & Mugny, 1983; Sanchez-Mazas, 2018). While most of the minority influence studies focused on minority members in a numerical sense, a few studies have shown that ethno-racial minority group members (who are also a minority in terms of their power and status) can also shift majority attitudes (Pérez & Mugny, 1987). For example, ethnic majority Spanish people had more favorable attitudes toward ethnic minority Roma after reading a text on Roma rights ostensibly written by a Roma person (Quiamzade et al., 2003b). Similarly, the majority of Swiss people expressed higher solidarity with refugees after exposure to a text that was presented as written by a Syrian refugee and that appealed for a more welcoming environment for refugees (Politi et al., 2017). Moreover, a recent study showed that minority perceptions of inequality are shared among peers in ethno-racially diverse schools (Kende et al., 2024). However, few studies have investigated instances of ethno-racial minority influence in diverse friend groups (for exceptions see Bracegirdle et al., 2022, 2023; Lorenz et al., 2021)

Therefore, we ask whether youth in ethno-racially diverse schools will share minority perceptions of inequality. More specifically, we examine shared perceptions of inequality among friends. Due to the intimate nature of friendship relationships (as distinct from more casual forms of peer contact), friends are most likely to take each other's perspectives and thus come to share common understandings of their social world (Davies et al., 2011). Thus, we expect that minority perceptions of inequality would tend to be aligned among friends (Jost et al., 2008).

Sharing perceptions of inequality within ethno-racial minority and majority groups

Social influence in diverse networks may depend on ethno-racial group status, so that minority youth may primarily share perceptions with other minority friends; and majority youth with their majority friends. To articulate an ethno-racial dimension of minority influence in diverse intergroup contexts, we draw on a social identity approach which conceives of individual perceivers as (ethno-racial) in-group members who are susceptible to social influence toward shared perceptions with in-group peers as fellow group members

(Spears, 2021). Previous research concluded that outgroup minority influence would be limited, especially when the outgroup minority perspective is seen as threatening (Butera et al., 2016; Clark Iii & Maass, 1988; Crano & Seyranian, 2009; Mackie & Wright, 2003). Similarly, in intergroup contexts where category-based distinctions are salient and relevant, in-group norms are more influential than out-group norms, in particular in shaping intergroup attitudes (Hogg & Gaffney, 2018; Spears, 2021). In line with this, a recent study in British schools showed that co-ethnic minority youth shared each others' perceptions of discrimination, but they did not share their majority peers' perceptions of discrimination (Bracegirdle et al., 2023).

In line with within-group influence, we hypothesize within-group sharing of perceived (un)equal treatment (Hypothesis 1: within-group sharing). Specifically, we expect that individual perceptions of inequality by minority youth will be shared by minority friends within time and over time; (H1a minority within-group sharing). We also examine whether individual perceptions by the majority of youth will be shared by majority friends within time and over time (H1b majority within-group sharing).

Sharing perceptions of inequality across ethno-racial minority and majority groups

Whereas adolescents embedded in diverse friend groups share in many ways similar social worlds, they could also face differential treatment based on ethnicity, race, class or other characteristics (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Across OECD countries, disadvantaged minority students with an immigration background have lower levels of attainment than their non-immigrant origin majority peers, and they end up with lower educational qualifications at the end of the road (Heath & Brinbaum, 2014; Oecd, 2015). Furthermore, teachers often hold negative views of immigrant-origin students and see them as disruptive in school (Agirdag et al., 2012). Thus, majority and minority youth often experience the school environment differently. Still, in diverse settings, minority and majority youth engage in intergroup contact, therefore they are potentially susceptible to cross-group influence. This is due to the fact that in diverse classes ethno-racial boundaries can shape friendship ties, but ethno-racial categories are not necessarily the most important boundaries influencing relationships (Bilecen, 2021; Dahinden, 2016). Through friendship, cross-group friends could in turn influence each others' perceptions of inequality. However, research is scarce on the potential of cross-group influence in diverse friend groups (for exceptions see Bracegirdle et al., 2022, 2023; Lorenz et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, when it comes to perceptions of inequality, intergroup contact research provides mixed support for cross-group influence. On the one hand, in line with solidarity with ethnic and racial minorities, some recent intergroup contact studies showed that with more contact with ethnic and racial minorities, ethnic and racial majority members perceived higher levels of inequality inflicted upon minority members (DiBernardo et al., 2019; Reimer et al., 2017). For example, with more contact, White South Africans were more aware of the discrimination that Black South Africans face (Dixon et al., 2010). Similarly, the majority of Italian students who had more contact with their immigrant-origin peers saw inequalities as less legitimate (DiBernardo et al., 2019). On the other hand, friendly contact of ethnic and racial minorities with majority members has been criticized for eroding minority perceptions of inequality, thus unwittingly consolidating the status quo of unequal intergroup relations in the wider society (Dixon et al., 2012). For example, Black South Africans, African and Latinx Americans in the US, as well as Muslims in India, and Arabs in Israel all saw less inequality of their minority groups with more contact with their respective majority groups (for a review see Dixon et al., 2012). But not all majority contact is related to lower perceptions of inequality. For example, Roma minorities in Macedonia, and immigrant-origin students in Italy did not perceive less inequality with more majority contact (DiBernardo et al., 2019; Kamberi et al., 2017). Indeed, in a recent meta-analysis, minorities perceived less inequality overall when they had more contact with majority peers, though effects were small and varied greatly between studies (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022). In sum, contact researchers to date do not agree whether and when intergroup contact in unequal intergroup contexts may lead to minority influence so that majority members adopt the minority perspective on inequality, or when it would lead minority members to discount real inequalities (Dixon et al., 2012; Reimer & Sengupta, 2022; Tropp & Barlow, 2018).

Beyond this disagreement, intergroup contact studies are open to competing explanations, because they examine associations between intergroup contact and inequality perceptions and assume that differences or changes in perceptions result from cross-group influence. Therefore, we do not know

if it is the contact, i.e., the time spent together in itself or the peer perceptions that influence individual perceptions. To argue convincingly about cross-group influence, we need to directly test associations with cross-group peers' actual attitudes (Bracegirdle et al., 2022). Moreover, mostly cross-sectional contact studies cannot convincingly argue about influence because they are not able to disentangle increased similarity as a consequence of social influence from self-selection into intergroup contact. For example, if minority members who have more contact with majority members see less inequality, it could be because they are influenced by majority perceptions or it could be that those minority members who experience less discrimination engage in more contact with majority members. Therefore, longitudinal studies are necessary for documenting social influence. Hence, the main research question guiding this work is whether minority and majority youth will see inequality through the eyes of their racial and ethnic minority friends? We will also assess whether minority and majority youth see inequality through the eyes of their majority friends.

Cross-group influence should be particularly likely in intergroup friendship because friendship fosters perspective taking (Davies et al., 2011). However, recent studies on attitudes other than perceptions of inequality did not unequivocally document cross-group influence in ethno-racially diverse friend groups. A study with middle school students in the UK found no cross-group minority or majority influence on outgroup attitudes (Bracegirdle et al., 2022); but another study in Germany confirmed cross-group effects for majority and minority friends on education aspirations (Lorenz et al., 2021). Close to our focus, a longitudinal network study in the United Kingdom did not document that majority contact influenced minority perceptions of discrimination, though this paper did not test the influence of majority perceptions directly or the potential minority influence on majority perceptions (Bracegirdle et al., 2023).

In view of mixed evidence of cross-group influence, we explore (rather than hypothesize) shared perceptions in intergroup friendship (Question 2: cross-group sharing). Specifically, we examine whether minority perceptions of inequality are shared by majority friends within time and over time (Q2a minority cross-group sharing). We also assess whether the majority perceptions are shared by the majority of friends within time and over time (Q2b majority cross-group sharing).

Method

Participants and procedure

Data were collected as part of the large-scale Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS-Leuven). These data constitute the Belgian part of the European CILS, with the larger study surveying representative samples of students in Belgium, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For the Belgian data, secondary schools were randomly sampled across Belgium-Flanders using a stratified sampling design which ensured the oversampling of more ethno-racially diverse schools (see Belgian and international technical reports for more detailed information on sampling designs (Phalet et al., 2018)). After obtaining ethical clearance from the school principal – as well as parental and teacher consent – all eligible students in selected classrooms in 70 schools completed a survey during class hours in the calendar years 2012–2013. All participants who were still in the same schools were followed up in 2013–2014. The survey was introduced as a study on the social relations and school achievement of European youth. Within each school, classes were randomly sampled from the first (29%) second (32%) and third (39%) year ($n = 433$ classes). For these analyses, we selected ethno-racial minority and majority youth based on foreign-born parentage (ego or at least one parent or grandparent) and ethno-racial self-categorization. As noted, as we were interested in perceived inequality, we selected the most disadvantaged ethno-racial minority groups to be included in the analyses. Specifically, the minority subsample included Turkish, Moroccan and other African origin minority youth ($N_{Wave1} = 1891$). Their ages ranged from 12 to 18 years, $M = 15$, with 53% boys. The majority subsample was restricted to ethno-racial majority youth who self-categorized as Belgian only, and whose parents and grandparents were all born in Belgium ($N_{Wave1} = 1866$).¹ We sampled the same minority and majority youth for the longitudinal analysis, though there the samples are smaller due to attrition (minority $N_{Wave2} = 1261$, majority $N_{Wave2} = 1491$).² For the longitudinal sample ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, $M = 14.6$, with 49% boys.

The data and codes necessary to reproduce the analysis are available at:
https://osf.io/v8u53/?view_only=fafb2aef21f54f72b629d54dba50b65a.

Measures

Individual perceptions of inequality were used as the dependent variable, with Wave 1 perceptions as the dependent measure in the cross-sectional analysis and Wave 2 perceptions as the dependent measure in the longitudinal analysis.

Perceived inequality was a composite index of two indicators: In my school ... ‘the rules are applied equally to all students (reverse coded)’ and ‘some students are allowed to do more than others’ (Baysu et al., 2016)³ Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale, coded from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). $r = .51$. Responses ranged from 1 to 5, $M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.99$ for minority, and from 1 to 5, $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.98$ for majority youth.⁴

To assess friends’ perceptions of inequality, each student’s individual perceptions were first assessed and afterward the mean of friends’ individual perceptions of inequality were calculated for all nominated friends and for majority and minority friends separately, excluding participants’ own perceptions. Friends’ perceptions were specified as predictors of individual perceptions, both within time and over time. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the model specifications.

Friends were identified using a class network generator (Wave 1). Each participant was asked to indicate ‘who are your best friends in class.’ They could nominate any number of friends in the classroom. For the current purposes, outgoing nominations were used, i.e., nominations by the person who nominated others as their best friend.⁵⁶ We distinguished further between ethno-racial minority and majority friends using the same criteria of Turkish, Moroccan or other African origin (versus Belgian only) self-categorization or foreign-born (vs. Belgian-born) parentage (cf. supra).

Minority friends’ perceptions of inequality were calculated by averaging individual perceptions of inequality over each participant’s minority friends. Scores ranged from 1 to 5, $M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.83$.

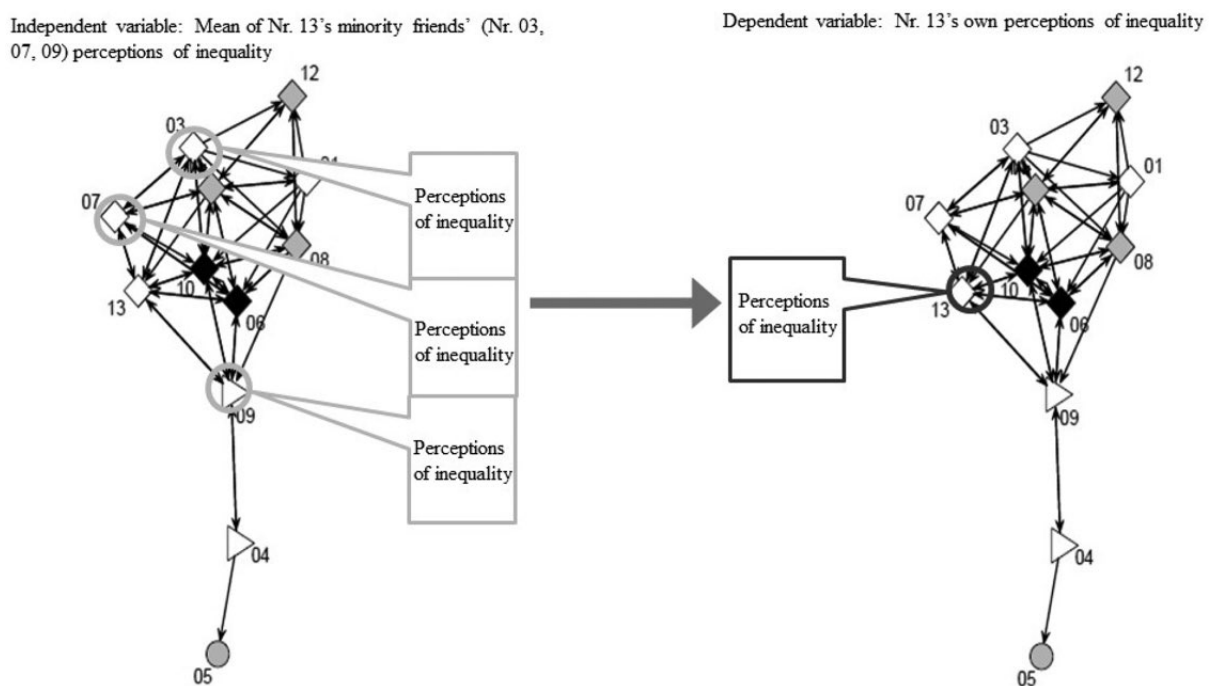


Figure 1. Example illustration of the relation in a class network between the main predictor ‘friends’ perceptions of inequality’ and the outcome (own) ‘perceived inequality’. Figure 1 provides an example illustration of the model specifications. In this example, the class network consists of 13 students who are represented by 13 nodes. The network is composed of minority students denoted by white nodes and majority students denoted by gray nodes. The ties between the nodes represent outgoing friendship nominations. The left side of the figure illustrates the calculation of the predictor variable “minority friends’ perceptions (of inequality)” for the example of student Nr. 13: in a first step we selected all of Nr. 13’s minority friends (Nr. 03, 07, 09) and in a second step calculated the mean of Nr. 03’s, 07’s and 09’s perceptions of inequality. The right side of the figure illustrates the outcome measure: Student Nr. 13’s own perception of inequality.

Majority friends' perceptions of inequality were calculated using the same method as above, with scores ranging from 1 to 5, $M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.70$.

Group status measured participants' minority or majority group position, as based on their ethno-racial self-categorization or foreign-born parentage (1 = minority) versus only Belgian self-categorization or Belgian-born parentage (0 = majority).

Controls. As control variables, participants' age (range 12.21–18, $M = 14.81$, $SD = 1.20$), gender (1 = *boy*, 2 = *girl*), their cognitive test performance and minority presence in the classroom (range from 0% to 94% minority presence, $M = 0.41$, $SD = 0.30$) were added.⁷ Participants' cognitive test scores were based on a shortened form of the non-verbal inductive reasoning subtest from Catell and Catell's (1961) Culture Fair Intelligence Test, which they completed as part of the CILS-Belgium surveys. Scores ranged from .04 to 1.00, $M = .68$, $SD = .18$.

Gender was included as a control because educational inequality is gendered with immigrant-origin girls outperforming boys (Fleischmann et al., 2014); therefore, perceptions of inequality might be gendered as well. We included cognitive test performance in the models to illustrate that perceptions of inequality are not due to worse cognitive performance in itself.

Analytic strategy

To test the hypotheses, we pooled minority and majority subsamples and specified separate stepwise multi-level models to test the effects of minority and majority friends' perceptions of inequality. The models with minority friends' perceptions included all minority and majority participants from the pooled sample who had nominated minority friends ($N_{Wave1} = 818$ minority and 384 majority youth; $N_{Wave2} = 533$ minority and 276 majority youth). Similarly, the models with majority friends' perceptions included all majority and minority participants from the pooled sample who had nominated majority friends ($N_{Wave1} = 1149$ majority and 299 minority youth; $N_{Wave2} = 904$ majority and 196 minority youth). Furthermore, we implemented additional analyses with separate minority and majority samples as a further robust test of the hypotheses.

For the longitudinal analysis, we replicated the same stepwise model using the longitudinal samples and repeated measures of perceived inequality. We use the same measures of minority and majority friends' perceptions of inequality at time 1 as predictors of youth's own perceptions one year later (time 2). Controlling for these own prior perceptions at time 1, we then test whether changes in perceived inequality 1 year later are in line with the prior perceptions of the participants' minority and majority friends. We opted for using such models because classes change each year in Belgian schools and the overlap among class networks falls below 60% across years, therefore the setup does not allow for stochastic actor-oriented models. We undertook both cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis also because classes in Belgium change each year. Therefore, the cross-sectional analysis shows how friendship groups exert influence when friends attend the same class during an academic year, while the longitudinal analysis demonstrates influence over time when friends nominated at Time 1 might or might not be in the same class a year later at Time 2.

Two-level regression analyses were conducted in Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) because of the nested data structure of students (individual level) within classes (class level).⁸ All predictors, controls and dependent measures were defined at the individual level, except for minority proportion⁹ defined at the class level.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptives and bivariate correlations. Table 2 shows cross-sectional and Table 3 longitudinal multi-level models with minority and majority friends' perceptions. Tables S2 & S4 in the Supplemental Online Materials show the null models and the models with only control variables for cross-sectional and longitudinal models, respectively.

Table 1. Correlations among variables for minority participants (below the diagonal) and majority participants (above the diagonal).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender (1)	–	–.01	.02	–.11**	–.13**	–.13**	–.07**	.04
Age (2)	.016	–	–.06*	.03	.23**	.18**	.18**	.14**
Cognitive test (3)	–.05	–.01	–	–.09	–.11**	–.15**	–.10**	–.32**
Minority friends' perceptions of inequality (4)	–.04	.058*	–.01	–	.15**	.13**	.11*	.00
Majority friends' perceptions of inequality (5)	–.18**	.08	.06	.12*	–	.20**	.14**	.10**
Own perceptions of inequality W1 (6)	–.06*	.08**	–.03	.22**	.08	–	.41**	.09**
Own perceptions of inequality W2 (7)	–.03	.10**	.07*	.17**	.05	.40**	–	.10**
Minority proportion (8)	.06*	.03	–.15**	–.13**	.08	–.08**	–.08**	–

When is minority friends' perception of inequality shared within time?

Minority friends' perception predicted perceived inequality in youth, controlling for age, gender, cognitive performance, and minority proportion in class networks (Table 2, minority friends main effect model). The interaction with group status was non-significant (Table 2, minority friends X group status model) and minority friends' perception was equally predictive in separate minority and majority subsamples (Table S3). Thus, the results supported both H1a on minority within-group sharing and Q2a on minority cross-group sharing.

When is majority friends' perception of inequality shared within time?

Similarly, majority friends' perception predicted perceived inequality in youth, controlling for age, gender, performance, and minority proportion (Table 2, majority friends main effect model). The interaction with group status was again non-significant (Table 2, majority friends X group status model), yet majority friends' perception was predictive only for majority youth, not for minority youth in separate subsamples (Table S3). Therefore, the results supported H1b on majority within-group sharing but not Q2b on majority cross-group sharing.

When is minority friends' perception of inequality shared over time?

In a next step, we tested Wave 2 perceived inequality as lagged outcome of minority friends' perception: minority perceptions longitudinally predicted individual perceptions in youth 1 year later, using the same controls and prior individual perceptions (Table 3, minority friends main effect model). The interaction with own group status was non-significant (Table 3, minority friends X group status model), yet minority friends' perception was longitudinally predictive for minority youth, not for majority youth in separate subsamples (Table S5). Please note that the nonsignificant result in the majority sample might be due to low power as this longitudinal majority sample with minority friends only consisted of 276 youngsters. Thus, the results supported H1a on minority within-group sharing and provided some support for Q2a on minority cross-group sharing.

When is majority friends' perception of inequality shared over time?

Specifying perceived inequality as lagged outcome of majority friends' perception and adding the same controls and prior individual perceptions, majority friends failed to predict youths' perception 1 year later (Table 3, majority friends main effect model). Interactions with group status was also non-significant (Table 3, majority friends X group status model), nor were majority friends' perceptions longitudinally predictive in separate majority (vs. minority) subsamples (Table S5). Therefore, the results supported neither H1b on majority within-group sharing nor Q2b on majority cross-group sharing.

General discussion

Perceptions of inequality are highly consequential and ethno-racial minority members face unequal treatment in many ways, yet we know little about when minority and majority friends see inequality

Table 2. Minority and majority friends predicting own perceived inequality. Cross-sectional main effects and interaction models with group status.

	Null model			Controls			Minority friends main effect			Minority friends X Group Status			Majority friends main effect			Majority friends X Group Status		
	B (S.E.)	CI	P	B (S.E.)	CI	P	B (S.E.)	CI	P	B (S.E.)	CI	P	B (S.E.)	CI	P	B (S.E.)	CI	P
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL																		
Minority friends				0.20 (0.05)	0.12, 0.27	0.000	0.13 (0.06)	0.03, 0.23	0.037	0.13 (0.06)	0.12 (0.08)	0.106	0.14 (0.06)	0.05, 0.24	0.016	0.17 (0.07)	0.05, 0.29	0.023
Minority friends* Group status																		
Majority friends																		
Majority friends* Group status																		
Control variables																		
Age	0.12 (0.02)		0.000	0.10 (0.03)	0.06, 0.15	0.000	0.10 (0.03)	0.06, 0.15	0.000	0.10 (0.03)	0.06, 0.15	0.000	0.13 (0.03)	0.09, 0.17	0.000	0.13 (0.03)	0.09, 0.17	0.000
Gender	-0.20 (0.04)		0.000	-0.15 (0.06)	-0.25, -0.06	0.009	-0.16 (0.06)	-0.25, -0.06	0.007	-0.16 (0.06)	-0.25, -0.06	0.007	-0.18 (0.05)	-0.27, -0.10	0.000	-0.18 (0.05)	-0.27, -0.10	0.000
Cognitive test	-0.50 (0.14)		0.000	-0.35 (0.17)	-0.63, -0.07	0.041	-0.36 (0.17)	-0.63, -0.07	0.034	-0.36 (0.17)	-0.63, -0.07	0.034	-0.42 (0.17)	-0.70, -0.14	0.015	-0.41 (0.17)	-0.70, -0.13	0.016
Group status	-0.02 (0.06)		0.803	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.24, 0.03	0.191	0.01 (0.11)	-0.16, 0.19	0.908	0.01 (0.11)	-0.16, 0.19	0.908	0.02 (0.08)	-0.12, 0.16	0.825	0.03 (0.08)	-0.11, 0.16	0.756
CLASS LEVEL																		
Minority proportion				-0.20 (0.11)	-0.37, -0.02	0.073	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.40, 0.07	0.248	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.37, 0.08	0.296	-0.07 (0.17)	-0.35, 0.21	0.687	-0.06 (0.17)	-0.34, 0.22	0.736
Residual variance																		
Individual level	0.89 (0.02)	0.85, 0.92	0.000	0.86 (0.03)	0.81, 0.91	0.000	0.86 (0.03)	0.81, 0.91	0.000	0.95 (0.04)	0.88, 1.01	0.000	0.87 (0.04)	0.80, 0.94	0.000	0.87 (0.04)	0.81, 0.94	0.000
Class level	0.10 (0.02)	0.08, 0.13	0.000	0.08 (0.02)	0.04, 0.11	0.000	0.04 (0.03)	-0.01, 0.08	0.172	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02, 0.07	0.277	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02, 0.08	0.283	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02, 0.07	0.372
Model fit																		
Number of parameters	3			8			9			10			9			10		
Deviance (-2LL)	10495.7			6603.182			3387.716			3384.774			3953.352			3952.566		
Akaike (AIC)	10501.7			6619.182			3405.716			3404.773			3971.351			3972.565		
Bayesian (BiC)	10520.39			6665.434			3451.541			3455.691			4018.853			4025.345		
Sample-Size Adjusted BIC	10510.86			6640.016			3422.954			3423.927			3990.263			3993.578		

through minority members' eyes (Rucker & Richeson, 2021). Schools provide opportunities for ethno-racial minority and majority students to meet and befriend each other in increasingly diverse classrooms (Ryan & Dahinden, 2021; Zhao, 2023). These cross-group friendships in turn could provide opportunities for minority students to influence their friends' perceptions (Jost et al., 2008; Kende et al., 2024). In support of this argument, some recent social network studies in diverse settings show that peers can shape attitudes and identification among majority and minority adolescents though not all studies find cross-group influence (Bracegirdle et al., 2022; Leszczensky et al., 2019; Lorenz et al., 2021; Rivas-Drake et al., 2019). We extend these findings and ask whether cross-group friendship might be a way to see inequality through minority members' eyes. Social influence and minority influence studies largely document limited influence from outgroup members (Butera et al., 2016; Clark Iii & Maass, 1988; Crano & Seyranian, 2009; Mackie & Wright, 2003). In contrast, intergroup contact studies showed that both minority and majority members' perceptions of inequality are associated with their intergroup contact experiences (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022; Tropp & Barlow, 2018). However, the existing evidence from contact research is mixed, pointing toward possibilities for both higher perceptions of inequality among majorities and for lower perceptions of inequality among minorities with outgroup contact. Therefore, we ask whether and when minority and majority friends would come to share minority perceptions of inequality. Moreover, we also assess whether the majority of perceptions are shared among friends. We go beyond previous studies of self-reported contact and draw on social network methods as a rigorous test of cross-group influence (Bracegirdle et al., 2023; Flache et al., 2017; Wölfer & Hewstone, 2017). We found that minority friends influenced both minority and majority youths' perceived inequality within and over time, in line with intragroup sharing (H1a) and cross-group sharing (Q2a). In contrast, majority friends' perceptions only predicted perceptions of inequality by majority youth and only consistently within time (not H1b); and they failed to be shared by even majority youth over time (not Q2b).

Most importantly, we found consistent evidence of minority influence as a precursor of solidarity with minority peers, so that both majority and minority youth would see inequality through their minority friends' eyes. Youngsters shared minority friends' perceptions of inequality within time and over time, one year later on. These results contradict largely consistent findings on limited outgroup minority influence (Butera et al., 2016). Presumably, our results differ from these experimental studies because in the experiments minority outgroup members were unknown to the participants: either confederates or characters presented through vignettes. In contrast, in our study, minority youth in a classroom form part of the interactive peer group of both majority and minority youth. Youth might self-categorize themselves as members of these interactive friendship groups and thus align their attitudes with their friends (Spears, 2021). Moreover, in diverse friend groups, ethno-racial boundaries are not necessarily the most important boundaries shaping relationships and influence (Bilecen, 2021; Dahinden, 2011, 2016). Thus, our findings align with a line of minority influence studies showing that in intergroup situations multiple categorizations are possible and minority influence is strongest when the source and the target share some categories but not all of them (Quiamzade et al., 2003a, 2017). The results also align with a recent study showing that in ethno-racially diverse peer groups, minority perceptions are shared by both majority and minority youth in Belgium and the United States (Kende et al., 2024). In sum, we add to minority influence research by examining sharing minority perceptions in real-life friend groups. Interestingly, the effect of minority or majority friends' perceptions did not depend on the proportion of minority students in the classroom. This finding contradicts previous minority influence research which found that larger minority groups are more influential (Butera et al., 2016; Clark Iii & Maass, 1988). We speculate that we do not find such composition effects because we look specifically at friend groups and friendships are especially conducive to sharing perspectives (Davies et al., 2011). Therefore, friends' perceptions could be associated with individual perceptions even when the friend group is embedded in a more homogenous classroom. Moreover, contextualizing our findings, youth in our samples attended highly diverse classrooms with on average a 40% minority proportion. This high minority presence might explain why we find stronger influence from minority friends than majority friends, in line with simulation studies on local numerical majority influence, and also why we do not find moderation by minority presence (Galam, 2002).

Our findings on minority influence align with new contact research suggesting that minority members can exert outgroup influence and extend it in several ways. First, the results are in line with research showing that the majority of members perceive more inequality with more minority contact (Reimer et al.,

2017; Tropp & Barlow, 2018). Second, the results are also in line with a recent study showing that minority friends influence each others' perceptions of inequality (though this paper did not examine whether majority youth would also share minority perceptions) (Bracegirdle et al., 2023). Third, by including youth from different ethno-racial minority groups, we replicate and extend longitudinally previous studies that showed that, in close and equal contact such as friendships, members of different minority groups would come to see inequality in similar ways (Dixon et al., 2015). Finally, we go beyond the bulk of previous contact studies by testing (longitudinal) associations with actual perceptions of inequality among friends controlling for participants' perceptions at Time 1. In contrast, previous contact studies relied largely on cross-sectional findings and did not include minority peers' or friends' perceptions (Bracegirdle et al., 2023). Thus, unlike the bulk of previous contact studies, our data lends credence to causal claims of social influence.

Furthermore, evidence of majority cross-group influence was limited, challenging earlier findings that majority contact would sedate minority members and undercut minority perceptions of inequality (Dixon et al., 2010, 2012). Instead of contact potentially sedating minority members, our findings consistently suggest increased solidarity with minority friends through intergroup contact in ethno-racially diverse friend groups. Similarly, a recent meta-analysis of contact studies documents the small and inconsistent effects of majority contact on minority perceptions of inequality (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022). Close to our approach, a recent social network paper did not find evidence of majority contact lowering minority perceptions of inequality either (Bracegirdle et al., 2023). A potential reason for these disparate findings is that the current study investigates long-term friendship, whereas most contact studies focus on more casual contact. Minority influence may require repeated exposure to minority views over time to be effective, which may be one reason why contact studies often fail to pick it up (Carter & Murphy, 2017). Furthermore, the nature of contact would matter for minority influence, so that friendships as close and equal contact influence perceptions more than casual contacts.

The current study also has limitations. First, the analysis focused on perceptions of inequality as a known driver of support for social change toward more equality (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Future research may examine other shared perceptions (collective efficacy) or emotions (anger) known to drive cross-group support for collective action in response to inequality, supplementing increasing evidence linking close contact to cross-group solidarity (Hässler et al., 2020; Reimer et al., 2017). Second, age and gender differences in perceived inequality are beyond the scope of our studies, yet future studies may fruitfully examine such intersections with ethno-racial and numerical group status (Bilecen, 2021; Zhao, 2023). Third, future studies should replicate our findings associating contact with shared perceptions of inequality beyond relatively peaceful – though unequal – sociopolitical contexts to understand if and when cross-group contact affords sharedness also in violent societal contexts (Albzour et al., 2022; Durrheim et al., 2014). Fourth, we lacked information on the content of contact among friends and on youth's ideologies. Previous research suggests that the content of contact and individual ideologies influence whether contact leads to shared perceptions of inequality; for example explicitly discussing inequalities should matter (see Hässler et al., 2021 for a review). Future research could potentially engage with these questions, qualitative studies could be especially useful to learn about the content of contact that leads to shared perceptions of inequality. Fifth, it was beyond the scope of the current paper to investigate how the characteristics of social networks and youth in the network impact sharing perceptions, but future research could examine, for example, the role of network density and centrality to gain deeper insights about the dynamics of influence. Finally, our data did not allow for longitudinal analysis taking into account selection and influence effects simultaneously, because the network composition largely differed from one year to another as students change classes in Belgian schools each year. Therefore, while our results point in the direction of friends influencing each others' perceptions, we cannot fully exclude that likeminded peers were more likely to become friends. Future research should examine these questions using stochastic network models and experiments.

To conclude, the current findings imply that the majority of members come to share minority perceptions of inequality in diverse schools where ethno-racial inequalities in educational achievement co-exist with equal relationships such as friendship (Alba & Duyvendak, 2017). How intergroup relations unfold in diverse settings such as urban schools or neighborhoods is an important question for both societal and theoretical reasons (Foner et al., 2019). Our results provide evidence that closeness with minority members

could raise awareness of hitherto unacknowledged inequality among majority members (Rucker & Richeson, 2021). Such emergent shared perspectives on inequality could ultimately translate into political support for challenging inequality.

Notes

1. As noted, the survey also included students whose families originate from other European countries besides Belgium, but they were not the focus of the current analyses.
2. Attrition rates were higher for minority students (67% retention) than majority students (80% retention). The most commonly reported reasons for panel dropout were being absent or changing schools. Selective attrition reflects the reality that ethno-racial minority students are more likely to change schools or leave school (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003). There was no difference in the age or gender composition of the sample between students who were included in the longitudinal sample and students who dropped out.
3. Our measure of perceived inequality was not specific to some social groups, because we aimed to capture various significant markers of group difference in the Belgian intergroup context. The measure has been established as a valid indicator of perceived inequality for both minority and majority youth. More precisely, higher perceived inequality was related to more personal experiences of discrimination among minority youth Baysu et al. (2021) and with less positive intergroup attitudes among minority and majority youth (Gale & Phalet, 2024; Kende et al., 2021). Moreover, perceived inequality corresponded to actual ethno-racial disparities in school belonging, engagement, and achievement, cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Baysu et al., 2016, 2021).
4. The correlation of the two inequality items is high among both majority $r = .53^{**}$ and minority students $r = .43^{**}$.
5. See preliminary analysis in Table S1 in Supplemental Online Materials (SOM).
6. We replicated the main effects models both cross-sectionally and longitudinally with only reciprocal nominations (see Table S6 in SOM).
7. 64% of minority students constituted a numerical minority group in their classroom and 36% of minority students were in classrooms where there were more minority than majority students.
8. We used class and not school as level 2, because participants nominated friends within their classrooms. The partitioning of the variance also supported this setup: class-level variance in perceived inequality was significant and sufficiently large for both minority (10% of the variance) and majority participants (13% of the variance). In contrast, school-level variance in perceived inequality was smaller and about half of the class-level variance for both minority (4% of the variance) and majority participants (6% of the variance).
9. We also tested the interactions of either minority or majority friends' perceptions with minority proportion in the cross-sectional and longitudinal models, but neither of the interactions were significant.

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