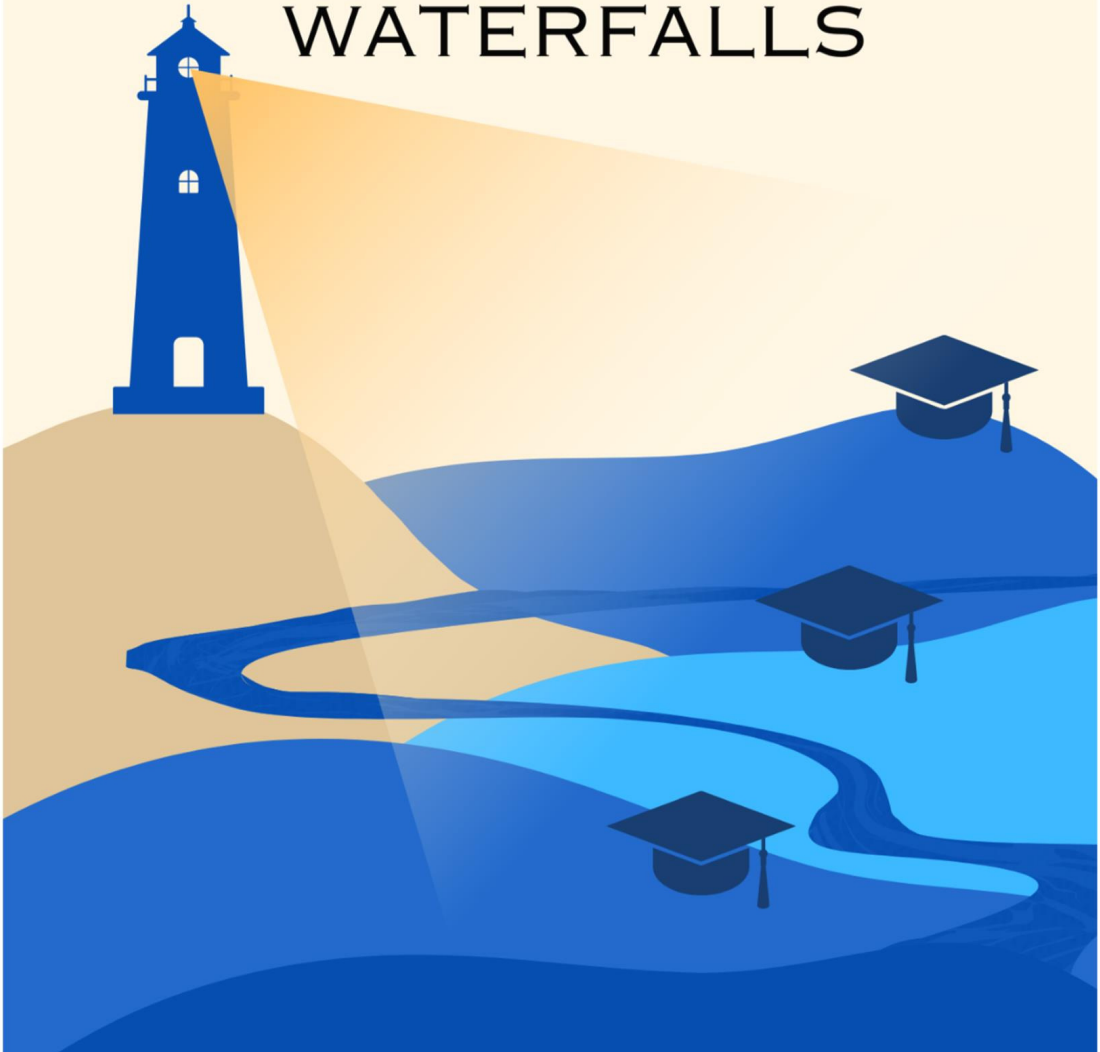
Don't go chasing waterfalls



A cross-sectional study on educational tracks as social idenities

Lorenz dekeyser

2024

Don’t go chasing waterfalls

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I. Acknowledgements

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II. List of Figures and tables

III. List of publications

One does not simply track students: the relationship between teachers' perceived public track regard and their job satisfaction in a context of rigid tracking.

[Chapter 6.1]

Published as:

Dekeyser, L., Van Houtte, M., Maene, C., & Stevens, P. A. J. (2021). One does not simply track students: the relationship between teachers' perceived public track regard and their job satisfaction in a context of rigid tracking. *Social Psychology of Education*, 24(6), 1433-1459. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-021-09652-9

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[Chapter 6.2]

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Students' chauvinistic track attitudes: the role of public track regard and teachers' chauvinistic communication in Belgian secondary schools.

[Chapter 6.3]

Published as:

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Me, my track and society: how track identification affects the relationship between general self- esteem and perceived public track status.

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1. Introduction

For decades, education around the world has tried to find an answer to the question of how to provide the best education to each student, under the assumption that there is a large diversity in interests, abilities and skillsets. Taking this diversity into account, education is deemed to have two functions: a teaching function, providing all students with proper education, and a selection- and status allocation function that differentiates students in order to select 'the best people for the best jobs' (Dornbusch, Glasgow & Lin, 1996; Autin, Batruch & Butera, 2015). This causes every nation at some point to differentiate their students to prepare them for their specific future. How nations do this can differ on a number of factors, like the extent of differentiation, for instance on a course by course basis or at the class level, and the age of division, with some nations already starting differentiation between classes at the age of 10 (OECD, 2013). Yet a considerable number of nations organize this division based to some extent on academic achievement. Any differentiation which has a basis in performance has students that 'succeed' and students that 'fail' according to these performance standards. Generally speaking, ability groups that prepare for higher education are attributed the highest status, be it tracks that separate students for their entire curriculum, or bands that differentiate on a subject matter basis, whereas education that prepares for the labor market gets credited with less status (Gamoran, 1992; Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Since every young person goes through formal education in almost every nation, the practice of differentiating students is an impactful one. Tracking has caught the interests of social scientists and educational researchers across the globe. They have already shown the impact of tracking on a range of outcomes, both educational and non-educational. The initial focus of this research is on educational achievement. The general consensus is that tracking is not unequivocally beneficial to students (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Terrin & Triventi, 2023). There is no significant correlation between tracking and the average achievement level of the entire student population. Secondly, tracking does considerably increase inequality of achievement between students. Thirdly, the background of students becomes more important in tracked systems, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds more often ending up in less prestigious tracks that provide less societally desired opportunities for the future. The idea of an 'equality-efficiency trade-off', where equality has to be sacrificed to

some extent to improve the overall quality of education, is not supported (Skopek, Triventi & Buchholz, 2019). The question therefore arises why (early) educational tracking is organized? Ability grouping is rooted in the idea that teaching students in homogeneous ability groups leads to better results through curricula and teaching methods that are adapted to the student's ability level, even if this idea is not necessarily supported by research (Hallinan et al., 2003).

While educational achievement was the initial focus of tracking research, that focus did over time broaden to include (non-)educational attitudes and outcomes as well. In order to understand why students might be affected by track membership, even to the point where the influence of tracking extends beyond educational attitudes, we first have to look at what the differentiation in ability groups implies on a societal level. Most western nations are knowledge-based societies characterized by a lower demand for manual labor due to technological changes (Nixon, 2006). Such societies attribute the highest status to academic tracks, since they provide training specifically for more desirable knowledge-based higher education and jobs (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Vocational education is valued the least since it leads to less desirable blue collar, agricultural or service jobs (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005). In some nations it even goes so far that these labels are applied to students outside the educational context, for instance used by politicians, and that there are even (not necessarily positive) personality traits and behaviors attributed to track membership (Jackman & Muha, 1984; Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). The differential status of educational tracks has a wide range of consequences, where generally speaking the academic track students benefit from tracking, whereas vocational and lower status tracked students experience negative effects. In terms of educational attitudes, these include an influence on academic self-concept, the belief of students in their own competence; and the development of a sense of futility, being the feeling that students have no control over their own success, regardless of their efforts (Trautwein et al., 2009; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Belfi et al., 2012; Van Houtte, 2016). These are related to students' intention to drop out of education, directly affecting their future career prospects (Filozof et al., 1998; Van Houtte & Demanet, 2016). Yet, possibly due to the fact that the use of the track label goes beyond the school context, its consequences also extend beyond educational attitudes or achievement. Track position can affect students' general self-esteem, feelings of depression and the development of friendship relations (e.g.,

Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2005; Pinquart, Silbereisen & Grümer, 2014). It goes without saying that general self-esteem is very impactful, even being connected to suicidal thoughts (e.g., Wilburn & Smith, 2005). The effects of tracking extending beyond education itself is even more likely in educational systems that have public tracking, being that the public knows which track you are a part of and where that track falls in the societal status hierarchy.

Teachers are very influential towards students' educational experience and students' attitudes (e.g., Goodenow, 1993; Ardies et al., 2015). When it comes to tracking, prior research has shown that teachers could be considered as tracked themselves to some extent (e.g., Finley, 1984; Amitai, 2021). This differs between nations, as some nations attach teacher status to track membership and instill a competitive environment in which teaching more societally prestigious tracks is considered a reward for teachers' performance (Talbert & Ennis, 1990; Kelly, 2004b). This shared experience of being tracked might enable teachers to relate to their students' experience more easily and might urge them to communicate about track status to their students. This might go in two directions: on the one hand teachers in the higher status tracks might feel the urge to highlight that students in their tracks should be proud of their achieved position, especially if they value 'merit' and want to stimulate academic attitudes in their students, on the other hand teachers in the lower status tracks might feel the desire to help students combat their negative societal status by highlighting and valuing what makes their track unique. These communications might be influential towards students, as teachers are considered role models by their students (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Yariv, 2009).

The impact of education as an institution can barely be overstated, as it is, alongside occupation and income, one of the primary sources of achieved status, making education an instrumental status allocator in society (Meyer, 1977; Haller, Fink & Janusik, 2000). To some extent, occupation and income are a consequence of education, even increasing its importance as a status allocator. This status allocation is based on the position a student attains within the educational status hierarchy, not necessarily on the actually obtained skills. Additionally, society considers education as a very legitimate source of status allocation (Meyer, 1977). Students are not necessarily passive recipients of the status allocated to them by the position they take in educational hierarchies. Coping research shows several avenues through which people can try to deal with disadvantaged status positions and the

accompanying stigma. Some of these methods are known to be used by students. Students can dis-identify with the low status track to preserve their self-esteem (Steele, 1997). They could then shift their focus to other identities that are more rewarding (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2016). If they choose to maintain their educational connection, they can set themselves apart from fellow track members to create a distance between their self-image and the negative track image (Van Praag et al., 2017). In current tracking research, track membership is usually considered as a given label, operationalized by students being a member of one track or another track. When research does look at the dynamic of students with their track membership, it is often a question of whether students identify or disidentify with their track (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019), but less about the ways in which they do this. This study expands the views of existing tracking research on track identification by investigating how positive types of identification with the track, in high and low status tracks, might influence students' self-image and views on other tracks.

The choice to investigate possible benefits of identifying with the track in all tracks is inspired by national and ethnic identity research. Social Identity Theory (SIT, Tajfel et al., 1979) posits that people gain self-worth benefits from identifying with their ingroup, regardless of group status. This can be done for instance by devaluing the source of stigma and highlighting the areas in which the ingroup is better, for low status groups (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Two influential types of positive ingroup identification are patriotism and chauvinism. On the one hand there is patriotism, a positive ingroup evaluation based on ingroup pride (Sellers et al., 1998). On the other hand there is chauvinism, stimulating positive ingroup feelings by distinguishing the ingroup from meaningful outgroups through feelings of ingroup homogeneousness and superiority, leading to exclusionary and hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008). These concepts have already been established in ethnic, welfare and national identity research (e.g., Van der Waal et al., 2010; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019).

Studying educational track identification through applying concepts that have already been established in the field of national and ethnic identity research could be beneficial to both fields of study. Firstly, if the results for educational track identification are in line with findings from ethnic and national identity research, it would show that track membership could be considered a relevant identity to students. This would signify that there is a transferability of

national/ethnic identity concepts to a new field of study, being educational tracking. This transferability would open the door for future research to explore what other identity concepts and processes could be relevant to study in relation to tracking and in doing so gain more insight into how students approach their track and the status attached to it. Secondly, if the results indicate that educational tracks are relevant as an identity to students, it could stimulate future tracking researchers to expand their operationalization of track membership. This operationalization could, and maybe should, then be broadened to not only be a categorization of which track a student is in or to study whether students disidentify with their track. It would raise the question of how students identify with their track and if differential identification would alter how educational tracking affects students concerning a myriad of outcomes.

Yet, before any of these identity concepts can be applied to educational tracks, there has to be a theoretical basis that indicates that tracks could be considered as an identity. Recently, there is a new branch of research that suggests educational tracks could be considered a social identity. Spruyt and Kuppens (2015) motivate this theoretically based on: (1) the centrality and authority of education as a status allocator, (2) the awareness of students of their position within the educational hierarchy, as their educational position is referenced in non-educational contexts such as the media and political discourse and (3) certain opinions and behaviors being considered as characteristic to 'higher' - and 'lower' educated people and as such connected to educational labels (Jackman & Muha, 1984). De Pauw and colleagues (2021) put this idea into practice, studying track membership as a social identity and how the extent of track identification affects students' sense of futility and future perspectives. The present research wishes to continue this line of research by adding different types of positive identification, being patriotism and chauvinism, and looking at their relationship with both self-image and outgroup track attitudes. This should provide more insight into the question of whether tracks can be considered as relevant social identities and to what extent they behave similarly to other identities within status hierarchies.

The study of positive track identification on students' self-image and opinion of in- and outgroup tracks, and how this is affected by contextual (f)actors, will be conducted in the Belgian educational context. Belgium provides a particularly interesting context to study this research question due to its organizational features. Firstly, tracking is rigid and public,

meaning that students are differentiated for their entire education between the tracks and these tracks are publicly known (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015; Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). The clear and public nature of these tracks allows students, teachers and society to formulate clear opinions on these tracks (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). Secondly, Belgian education can be typified as a 'cascade system', since students can move from more academic to more vocational tracks, but the opposite rarely happens (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). This clearly attaches a status hierarchy wherein those who attend more vocational education can be considered by society as not living up to the academic standards of the academic track (Van Praag et al., 2015). Thirdly, there are schools that provide only one track and schools that provide multiple tracks (e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). This allows us to study the influence daily interactions with students from different tracks have on the salience of track membership. Lastly, Belgian education is divided in a Flemish-governed educational department and a French-speaking community educational department. These two jurisdictions are fairly similar, but have some differences (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2019; Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). The inclusion of both regions can already shed a light on the possible transferability of findings from one societal context to another.

Education is one of the primary status allocators in society (Meyer, 1977; Haller, Fink & Janusik, 2000). Track status is based on the status of the prospective jobs these tracks prepare for (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). So the differences in status that are attributed to educational tracks could be considered as precursors to the differential status of social classes in society. Social classes can be thought of as either organized social entities or as people categorized into a group based on shared individual characteristics (Kincaid, 2016). Tracks could be considered precursors of social classes by giving students similar status and future job prospects as a shared characteristic. Additionally, tracking, especially if it is as rigid and public as in Belgium, might facilitate tracks as social entities due to limited between-group contact. Gaining a deeper insight into the ways the differential track status allocated by society impacts all students' self-image can give an indication of whether the views adults hold of their own position within society might originate from the choice to track students in a clear status hierarchy in secondary education.

Additionally, the impact of track status on students' view of other tracks can give an indication of whether adults' outlook on other social classes originates from secondary education tracking.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Ability grouping and tracking: international comparison

Education has three functions according to sociology: (1) a qualification function, as education has to provide all students with the capacities for learning and the knowledge, competencies and skills required for their future job, (2) a socialization function, as schools prepare students to participate in society and transmits culture, with different nations transmitting different societal values to their students and (3) a selection function that differentiates students into different training programs to prepare them for specialized functions, in order to fulfill the diverse needs of the labor market, a differentiation that is commonly based on educational achievement (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2004; Hallinan, 2006; Dworkin et al., 2013; Autin, Batruch & Butera, 2015; Brint, 2017). All OECD countries show some level of grouping based on achievement (OECD, 2013). In these systems, students who achieve the most academically are placed within the most societally desirable ability groups, in order to select the 'best people for the best jobs'. Education as having a stratification function- and being a status allocator is born from the idea that in a meritocratic society the most valuable societal positions should no longer be distributed based on inheritance, but based on the measurement of motivation and ability (Young, 1958; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Carson, 2007). Dornbush and colleagues (1996) outline the two main theoretical perspectives on education's selection function and role as status allocator. Firstly, the necessity for this educational selection can be found in the functionalist perspective. Knowledge based societies have a wide range of jobs, requiring specific skills. The function of education is therefore to train its students for these jobs, and find the best match between students' abilities and the required job skills (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). Secondly, since the jobs education prepares for hold differential status and rewards, education becomes a space in which different groups can fight over the most coveted status positions, which aligns with the conflict approach (Collins, 1979; Brown, 2001). The conflict approach claims that achieving high status educational positions is aimed at accumulating cultural capital and excluding other groups from attaining this capital, more so than it is aimed at actually learning the required skills for these desired jobs (Collins, 1979).

While the underlying idea might be similar across societies, the extent to which students' ability groups are distinguished in secondary education shows a range. It can be organized (a)

within a single course with different ability subgroups, (b) on a course by course basis, students might for instance be allowed to go to advanced mathematics but stay in remedial English, all within the same curriculum, (c) at the class-level, with one classroom containing one ability group which is divided from the other ability group classes, (d) at the school level, where a school only provides one type of ability group. For instance, a school providing only vocational education might be considered as an example of separated ability grouping at the school level compared to schools that also provide academically oriented education, despite organizing a multitude of vocational programs (Chmielewski, 2014). Alternatively, admission to schools sometimes does not happen based on academic ability, but geographically. Nations that have a widespread population or place the responsibility of ensuring sufficient schooling capacity to local governments, like the United States and Finland, mostly use geographical admission. This geographical admission does not provide as much opportunity to place an additional admission restriction based on academic performance. In these systems regional segregation becomes more relevant than in nations that have very strict admissions at the school level based on academic performance. Academic admission is, among others, the case for Japan and the Netherlands (OECD, 2013).

Although there is a difference between course by course grouping and overarching ability grouping programs at the school level, the names given in the literature are seemingly interchangeable. Whereas some research views tracking as grouping on a course by course level and streaming as the more overarching ability grouping, other research considers the latter as tracking as well, even going so far as to see course by course division as exhibiting 'no tracking' (e.g., Hanushek & Wößmann, 2006; Chmielewski, 2014). Going forward we will focus on educational tracking, defined as the type of ability grouping in which students are taught an entirely different curriculum depending on their ability group (Gamoran, 1992).Tracking systems usually make divisions between an academic track preparing for higher education and a vocational track, aimed towards practical skills and the labor market. Some systems provide tracks that lie in between these, like a technical or an arts track, aimed at both higher education and the labor market. The way in which educational systems and nations track their students can differ along certain parameters (OECD, 2013): (1) the age of first grouping, (2) within or between school division, (3) admission to tracks (4) track mobility and (5) how these divisions provide entry to higher education.

(1) The age of differentiation generally is anywhere between age 10 (e.g., Germany and Austria) and age 16 (e.g., United States, Finland,…) (OECD, 2013). For the OECD-countries, the average age of tracking is 14.

(2) Within or between school ability grouping: Within course ability grouping is by default organized within the same school. The same goes for course-by-course grouping. When it comes to separating full curricula, nations, or educational systems within nations can choose whether they organize this within (e.g., Australia and Israel) or between schools (e.g., Japan), while some nations provide both within- and between school tracking (e.g., Germany and Belgium) (Gamoran, 2010).

(3) Admission to educational tracks at the start of education can differ between educational systems. On the one hand there are systems that provide freedom of track choice, like in Belgium, where all students who successfully graduate from primary education have freedom of choice where they start their secondary education (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). The same goes for Italy in its transition from lower secondary education, which provides a common program to all students, to higher secondary education which is tracked (Justlanded.com, 2023). On the other hand there are more restrictive systems, like the Netherlands. Primary education school teachers give a track recommendation based on their own assessment of their students and a central exam, based on which a central committee assigns the level of secondary school a student is allowed to enroll in (Onderwijskiezer.be, 2023). Both in systems with free choice and with restricted track choice, parental SES is to some extent reproduced in students' transition to tracked education (e.g., Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Timmermans et al., 2018).

(4) Mobility between ability groups: there are some differences in what conditions nations impose for students to be allowed to move from one track to another. There are nations like Germany and the Netherlands that facilitate 'upwards' and 'downwards' mobility, movement from more vocational towards more academic tracks and from more academic to more vocational tracks respectively (Jacob & Tieben, 2009). Alternatively, there are tracking systems like Belgium where 'upwards track mobility', while in theory allowing for it, barely happens in practice (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018).

(5) Entry into higher education entails the freedom students have, both in terms of being allowed into higher education and which degrees students can opt for, which differs between nations. For example, in Belgian education, students who achieve their secondary school diploma are free to choose any type of higher education, with the exception of a few degrees like Medicine and Veterinary Studies (Vlaamse Overheid, 2023). The Netherlands are an example of a more restrictive system, as certain domains have a 'numerus fixus': a limitation on the number of students that can start certain popular courses (e.g., The Humanities and Medicine), with the main limiting factor being the societal need or demand for graduated students from these courses. The chance to be allowed entry into these courses is partially based on the grades with which a student graduates and partially on motivation letters or portfolios (Studiekeuzelab, 2023). In the UK, not only the performance on courses in secondary education, but also the level of courses a student elects are instrumental to their entry into higher education. Certain courses or institutions demand a minimum number of completed A-level (Advanced) theoretical courses or GCSE's (General Certificate of Secondary Education) to be allowed entry into higher education (Study in the UK.org, 2023).

2.2 The evolution of tracking research over time

2.2.1 Tracking and achievement

The initial focus of tracking research was on performance. This focus can be divided into two strands of research, the first strand concentrates on the differences in achievement between systems that do track and those that do not (e.g., Slavin, 1990; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Terrin & Triventi, 2023). The relationship between educational tracking and achievement has been continuously studied up to the present. Kulik and Kulik (1982) and Slavin (1990) were the first to rebuke the argument that tracking benefits students simply by grouping them according to ability, and as such make the learning process more efficient for all, based on meta-results from so-called XYZ-programs (Loveless, 1998). XYZ-programs provide the same curriculum to students in class X, Y or Z but divides students in these classes based on IQ-tests. These programs however only studied classroom composition but not the fact that different curricula can be provided after grouping. Taking into account that ability grouping allows educators to tailor their methods more closely to the level of the class, Kulik and Kulik (1982)

found a significant, small benefit of ability grouping, in particular for high ability students, Slavin (1990) however found no effect of between class ability grouping. Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) performed a literature review on the dynamics between (a lack of) tracking and educational inequality. This review mostly included literature that used international standardized tests like TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS. They reached three major conclusions. Firstly, there is a negative relationship between differentiation and learning efficiency, meaning that the average learning achievement of a country is lower in more differentiated systems. Secondly, differentiation leads to lower equality of achievement in general. Thirdly, differentiation increases the inequality of achievement based on students' background, with more disadvantaged students showing lower average performance. When it comes to standardization, they find benefits to both average performance and to equality of opportunity.

Terrin and Triventi (2023) performed a meta-analysis on the same question of the relationship between educational tracking and achievement, including research across several nations on a variety of tracking styles, through both longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis between 2000 and 2021. They made the same conclusions as Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) when it comes to tracking increasing both inequality of achievement and inequality of opportunity. Yet where Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) saw a negative relationship between differentiation and learning efficiency, Terrin and Triventi (2023) saw no significant correlation between tracking and educational efficiency. These findings confirm one of the major, early criticisms on tracking, formulated first in the US in the 1970s and '80s, that it would reproduce and increase social inequality (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Rosenbaum, 1976; Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985). The idea of an 'equality-efficiency trade-off' where equality has to be sacrificed to some extent to improve the overall quality of education is not supported (Skopek et al., 2019). Within-school tracking seemingly causes more inequality than between-school tracking (Terrin & Triventi, 2023). While it is not entirely clear whether there is a significant relationship between tracking and general performance, de-tracking research shows that students from high SES-backgrounds are at risk of losing performance when being de-tracked (Van de Werfhorst, 2019). There might be pedagogical workarounds for this loss, but these have to be incorporated in de-tracking policies to avoid backlash and unwanted consequences. It has to be noted that, while this analysis gives a thorough overview of the general effects of tracking

on performance, there will be national differences since tracking is not organized in the same way across nations.

One way in which tracking can affect achievement is through comparative reference group effects like the 'big fish little pond' effect (Marsh & Parker, 1984). As students base their academic self-concept – that is a person's perception of their own abilities in general or for a specific subject matter (Bong & Saalvik, 2003) – on the comparison of their own performance with their classmates, higher performing students generally exhibit a lower academic self-concept in 'high' tracks than equally high performing students in 'lower' tracks (Marsh & Hau, 2003; Liu, Wang & Parkins, 2005), while a high academic self-concept benefits achievement (e.g., Valentine et al., 2004; Giofrè, Borella & Mammarella, 2017).

Another way in which tracking can affect achievement is through normative reference group effects, as students try to match the expectations and ambitions of the ingroup (Kelley, 1952; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). The contrasting effects of normative and comparative reference group effects is at the core of the discussion on whether or not tracking is beneficial to educational achievement (Richer, 1976). Normative reference group effects, or spillover effects, are one of the main arguments against tracking, as being grouped with higher ability students is particularly beneficial to lower ability students, but heterogenous grouping might be detrimental to higher ability students (e.g., Zimmer, 2003; Becker et al., 2022). These spillover effects do however not occur by simply being part of a high achieving school, but require a diverse student-ability composition at the classroom level (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009; Dicke et al., 2018).

The second strand of research focuses on the differences in achievement between tracks. This strand of research generally shows that students in vocational tracks have lower achievements than those in academic tracks (e.g., Van Houtte, 2004a; Carbonaro, 2005). There is a vast array of reasons for this, which primarily concern students' (academic) attitudes: for example, academic track students show considerably higher study efforts than vocational students (Carbonaro, 2005). Tracking can also provoke a sense of futility, mostly in more vocational tracks (Van Houtte, 2016). Sense of futility is the feeling that students have no control over whether they will succeed or fail at school, regardless of their efforts (Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Van Houtte, 2016). A heightened sense of futility negatively affects achievement and is even related to an increased chance of dropping out of education (Agirdag et al., 2012; Van

Houtte & Demanet, 2016). Normative reference group effects are also important in studying between track achievement differences (Zimmer, 2003; Zurbriggen, 2015). Aside from students' (academic) attitudes, achievement in a tracked system can be influenced by school culture and teachers' expectations and behavior, while it is indirectly influenced by the societal stigma towards vocational tracks (e.g., Van Houtte, 2006a; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Kelly & Carbonaro, 2012; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015; Andersen, 2018).

2.2.2 Tracking and (non-)educational attitudes

Aside from the students' educational attitudes, that relate to some extent back to achievement or academic perceptions students have about themselves, there is research on the link between tracking and non-educational, emotional and social elements like general self-esteem, depression and peer relationships (e.g., Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2005; Pinquart, Silbereisen & Grümer, 2014). Academic track students have the highest self-esteem and vocational students the lowest (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Vanfossen, Jones & Spade, 1987; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Self-esteem impacts a wide array of educational and non-educational outcomes. Self-esteem is for instance connected to mental well-being, even to suicidal thoughts (e.g., Wilburn & Smith, 2005). In education, self-esteem relates to both performance and non-performance aspects. The relation between self-esteem and academic performance is rather inconsistent (e.g., Filozof et al., 1998; Marsh & O'Mara, 2008), yet self-esteem does impact future career ambitions (Chiu, 1990; Filozof et al., 1998) and test anxiety (e.g., Hembree, 1988). Educational tracking impacts global self-esteem through social acceptance/rejection and relative gratification (Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012).

2.3 Tracking and society

The societal outlook on tracks might help to explain the track differences found above, both for educational and non-educational attitudes. Most western nations are knowledge-based societies characterized by a lower demand for manual labor due to technological changes (Nixon, 2006). Such societies attribute the highest status to academic tracks, since they provide training specifically for more desirable knowledge-based higher education and jobs (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Vocational education is valued the least since it leads

to less desirable blue collar, agricultural or service jobs (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005). This differential status, being the extent to which groups are admired or respected by others (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017), is particularly clear in systems that have rigid distinctions between the tracks and separate students for their entire curriculum. Vocational education even carries a stigma (Spruyt et al., 2015). Stigma entails the devaluation or dehumanization by others, based on an attribute or social category that is societally less desirable (Goffman, 1963; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Due to stigma and stigma-related stress, people can experience lower self-esteem (Link & Phelan, 2001), a higher sense of futility (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Spruyt et al., 2015), decreased test performance (Baysu et al., 2016), depression (e.g., Fischer & Holz, 2007), discrimination (Major & O'Brien, 2005), it might even lead to worse physical health (Ahmed, Mohammed & Williams, 2007) and more risk-taking behavior (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008; Borrell et al., 2010). Stigma effects are even more likely in (vocational) education, as stigma is more impactful when the stigmatized group is believed to perform poorly (e.g., Major & O'brien, 2005).

People have the ability to cope with low status and stigma through differential identification with the stigmatized social category (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Compas et al., 2001; Woodcock et al., 2012). Yet, despite the existence of status differences and stigma in hierarchical education, there is only limited research that has investigated the agency students have in coping with these through an identity framework. Spruyt and Kuppens (2015) do argue that educational tracks can be studied as separate identities, based on (1) the centrality and authority of education as a status allocator, (2) the awareness of students of their position within the educational hierarchy, as their educational position is referenced in non-educational contexts such as the media and political discourse, (3) certain opinions and behaviors being considered as characteristic to 'higher' and 'lower' educated people and as such connected to educational labels (Jackman & Muha, 1984). Track status and the way students incorporate this status into their self-image is particularly relevant as the educational label is impactful enough to transcend the school context and is even used by politicians and by society to attribute behaviors to people.

2.4 Tracking research and the collective identity framework

The collective identity framework of Ashmore and colleagues (2004) can provide a more conclusive answer as to whether tracks could be considered (social) identities by investigating

which elements of this framework have already been studied within tracking research, to what extent track characteristics align with this framework and which elements still need to be investigated more closely. Ashmore and colleagues (2004) start from the idea that there is no set definition of what a social or collective identity is (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Ashmore et al., 2004), which makes it rather difficult to establish whether or not something can be catalogued as a social identity. They do, however, provide nine components that are instrumental to a collective identity: (a) self-categorization, (b) an affective dimension, (c) evaluative dimension, (d) relative importance, (e) attachment, (f) social embeddedness, (g) behavioral involvement, (h) the contents and meanings of a social identity, and (i) context.

(a) Self-categorization is the precondition to allow for any other effects of collective identity (Phinney, 1995). Self-categorization is, as the term suggests, considering the self as a member of a social identity category (Deaux, 1996). Yet self-categorization is not a mere yes- or no, people can self-categorize partially (Huddy, 2001). This can depend on the extent to which a person agrees with the core values of a group and the meaning someone attaches to the group identity (Huddy, 2001). Additionally, self-categorization is not fixed but can change over time and depends on context. There is an established line of research on school identification (e.g., Finn, 1989; Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Maxwell et al., 2017). Yet there is only limited tracking research that explicitly looks at how students self-categorize with their track (e.g., De Pauw, Spruyt & Bradt, 2021). Tracking research by Van Praag and colleagues (2017) has shown that the extent to which students self-categorize can vary, with students sometimes trying to set themselves apart from fellow track members to preserve their self-image.

(b) Affective identification is a field mostly explored by organizational research, as affective identification can increase the willingness to invest time and effort into an organization, increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions (e.g., Edwards, 2005; Marique, & Stinglhamber, 2011; Tanis & Beukeboom, 2011; Johnson, Morgeson & Hekman, 2012; Stinglhamber et al., 2015). This affective component is the emotional attachment to a group and how somebody feels about their relationship to the group. This can be in terms of emotional attachment, membership and sense of belonging (Edwards, 2005). The extent to which people affectively identify can depend on personality traits and having experiences that cause positive affective states

(Herrbach, 2006; Johnson, Morgeson & Hekman, 2012). Affective identification with an organization is not affected by pro-organizational communication cues (Tanis & Beukeboom, 2011). Affective and cognitive identification are mostly independent from each other (Johnson, Morgeson & Hekman, 2012). Cognitive identification is the knowledge that an individual is part of a group (Van Dick et al., 2004). Affective identification items include feelings of pride, happiness, wellbeing within the group and disappointment if group membership would end (Johnson, Morgeson & Hekman, 2012). Tracking research has studied differences in sense of school belonging between students in different tracks (e.g., Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012) but not focused on sense of track belonging as far as we know.

(c) The evaluative component of identification breaks down into two parts: internal and external evaluation. The first can be labeled as private regard, the extent to which individuals positively or negatively evaluate their own ingroup (Sellers et al., 1998). The second is public regard, the extent to which individuals feel that society views their ingroup positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998). The looking glass self by Cooley (1902) suggests that there is a link between both types of evaluative identification. Individuals allow their ingroup evaluation to be influenced by the societal evaluation of the ingroup, therefore looking at the self through the lens of society. Yet a considerable amount of research has shown that these are either weakly or not at all correlated (e.g. Crocker et al., 1994; Ashmore et al., 2004). When they experience negative public regard, people have a range of coping strategies which can counteract this, which will be discussed when we look at Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). It is important to note that private regard is not necessarily related to identity importance either, people can feel positively about an identity without this identity becoming salient or self-defining (Ashmore et al., 2004). In terms of tracking research, Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck and Kavadias (2015) showed that technical and vocational students are aware of the societal stigma their track has, so public regard is relevant to tracking research, as it informs students' sense of futility. Private regard has not been studied yet with respect to track position, as far as we are aware of.

(d) Relative importance is the value people attach to identity characteristics and attributes when shaping their self-definition (Cheek et al., 1994). Cheek and colleagues (1994)

distinguish three distinct identity attribute categories which can impact the relative importance of an identity: personal, social and collective attributes. They state that certain people might generally attach more importance to one or multiple of these attribute categories over the other for their self-perception. Personal identity consists of the private conceptions people have about themselves (e.g., hopes and dreams), social attributes are relational, created through roles and relationships. The collective component relates most closely to educational tracking, as collective attributes are related to social categories and shared identities, such as religion, nation and community. There is currently no research that we are aware of on the relative importance of the track identity compared to other identities yet, as track identification research is still in the process of outlying what constitutes a track identity in the first place.

(e) Attachment or interdependence is the feeling that the fate of the group overlaps with the fate of the individual (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004). Tracks are rather abstract groups, as they are a trait shared among thousands of people across many schools and regions. So therefore, it might seem that this group has no clear 'fate'. Previous research (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008; Spruyt et al., 2015; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015) did however show that students' sense of futility, the extent to which students feel they can exert control over their success, is track dependent, with lower status tracks feeling less control. These students might therefore feel that their professional fate is attached to the (lack of) opportunities provided to their track by society.

(f) Social embeddedness is an entirely relational aspect of identification. Social embeddedness are the relationships people form through group identification and might lose when no longer being a member of the ingroup (Ashmore et al., 2004), making the strength of identification not only cognitive or affective, but also relational (Hardy et al., 2011). Previous tracking research already showed the influence tracking has on which people a student develops friendships with and the strength of these friendships, indicating that the social embeddedness of vocational students is seemingly weaker than those in other tracks (Demanet, Agirdag & Van Houtte, 2012).

(g) Behavioral involvement are all behaviors that are performed within the group, promote the group or are in line with group values (e.g., Phinney, 1992; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). A major sign of behavioral involvement with a national identity is language (Ashmore et al., 2004). Immigrants adopting the language of the host country is considered a pivotal step in acquiring the hosts' national identity (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Behavioral involvement helps identity formation, especially if the performed activities are infused by values (e.g., Yates & Youniss, 1996). Previous tracking research has shown differential study involvement between tracks, with the track that holds academic values in a higher regard having students that show higher study involvement (Van Houtte, 2006a, 2017). Mizrachi and colleagues (2009) show that track membership can also be connected to the way students dress and the extent to which they (allegedly) display social solidarity. Therefore, track values permeate into behavior.

(h) Contents and meaning of the identity: this breaks down into the narrative and ideology of an identity and self-attributed characteristics. It has to be noted that, in the context of stereotype threat, students do not have to agree with (negative) ascribed characteristics of their ingroup in order to be impacted by them (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). Identity narrative can be broken down into the personal and group story (Ashmore et al., 2004). The personal story encapsulates the mental image people have about how they relate to the social category they identify with (e.g., Schoofs & Van de Mieroop, 2018; Cuda, 2022). This story is shaped by experiences from the past, hopes for the future and is purely personal. It also allows for people to outline the extent to which they associate or distance themselves from certain identity aspects which are a part of the group narrative (e.g., Schoofs & Van de Mieroop, 2018; Cuda, 2022). This is likely to differ between students of different tracks as for instance in Belgium, not all students choose voluntary to move towards the vocational track. This causes the vocational track to be home to both students with a genuine interest in a vocational future and students who have (negative) experiences 'going down' the educational cascade (e.g., Van Praag et al., 2015), which likely leads to very different personal stories of students with their track.

The group story is a shared narrative based on ingroup experiences, societal representations of the group and shared beliefs of group history (Liu & László, 2007). The sources for the societal representations can be formal and unified, through mission statements for example, and informal and more diffuse, for example conversations and oral history (Brown, 2006; Liu & László, 2007). These representations have already received considerable attention in tracking research. Tracking research describes a societal image articulated by teachers, politics and society of students from different tracks as valuing different types of social and cultural capital, students from more academic tracks to be more tolerant and more politically involved, whereas vocational students are valued less by society, despite the jobs for which they prepare being perceived as valuable to society (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Eurobarometer, 2011; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). The group narratives in status hierarchies are often shaped or bent in favor of the dominant group, as their power allows them to have more control over the communication of narratives and helps them to consolidate or even grow their power in the future (Ashmore et al., 2004). For instance in Belgian secondary education, the power of academic education comes from the fact that graduating from an academic track leads to higher education and the societally most coveted jobs (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Vocational education on the other hand is less esteemed based on future jobs. This difference in value is expressed through societal stigma aimed at vocational students (Spruyt et al., 2015). The power difference is even further consolidated as educational position and its accompanying narratives are not only employed in the educational context, but also communicated by the media and political discourse (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015), often by people that are a product of academic education. Vocational education's own group narrative is clearly affected by its lower status position. Tracking research has shown that vocational education develops cultures of futility, being a shared believe among students of the same school or track that they do not have (as much) control over their success as those in other tracks (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). Vocational education is however not powerless in developing its group narrative. Certain vocational programs have shown to develop an alternative story, in which 'book smarts' were not considered as the only relevant type of intelligence, through cultivating independence and the creativity to find

solutions for any type of situation as alternative forms of intelligence that were at least equally important (Korp, 2011). This story helped vocational students to protect their self-esteem against negative experiences with the more academic parts of education (Korp, 2011). The study of self-attributed characteristics looks at the degree to which group characteristics are considered as a part of the personal identity. Any of the elements discussed above could be identified with to different extents by students.

(i) Context: Lastly, we will discuss several contextual elements which have been shown to be impactful on ingroup identification within an educational setting. It is however important to keep in mind that the influence a context can have on identification depends on the strength of identification. The strongest identity bonds are (almost) not affected by context (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1997). Mavor and colleagues (2017) constructed a framework for the connection of the self, social identity and educational contexts. The development of educational social identities takes place on several levels. Firstly, there are the personal preferences of the students. If they feel that the school fulfills their personal needs, being the need for autonomy, relatedness and feeling competent, this will increase their identification with this school (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Greenaway et al., 2017). Secondly, students can identify with classmates or students they share a group project with (e.g., Monaghan & Bizumic, 2017). Thirdly, the school climate influences the development of the identification of the students with their school (Reynolds et al., 2017). This research mainly focuses on the beneficial effects of educational social identification on academic performance (Cruwys et al., 2017; Mavor et al., 2017). Previous educational research on the connection between the self and the educational social identity has mostly focused on the school context. There is ample research that investigates the context in which tracking occurs, looking, among others, at the development of friendships and school structure (e.g., Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Yet this research has not yet made the explicit connection with the development of a students' track identity.

This outline of track related identity research based on the framework by Ashmore and colleagues (2004) shows that there are certain aspects like self-identification, social embeddedness, identity narrative and behavioral involvement that have already been studied. This seemingly indicates that there is a basis to consider tracks as a collective identity,

but that there is still room to investigate certain identity components that have not received proper attention yet. Studying these would help to create a profound knowledge on how tracks behave like other collective identities and which components and (f)actors are relevant to track identification.

2.5 Tracking and social identity theories

Ethnic and national identity research has a long standing tradition of studying identities in the context of status hierarchies. Different elements of Ashmore and colleagues' framework (2004) are incorporated in each of the four major ethnic/national identity theories from the last few decades. These are Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978, 1981), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987), Identity Theory (IT; Stryker, 1980/2000) and Cross' nigrescence model (1971, Cross, Parham & Helms, 1991). SIT and SCT originate from social psychology, the nigrescence model can be situated within psychology, whereas IT has its roots in sociology.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1981) at its core assumes that being part of an identity always provides positive self-worth to an individual, regardless of the contents of this identity. These positive effects are partly achieved through uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Identities allow for the reduction of uncertainty and the stress this uncertainty causes by providing a framework for behavior, interactions and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2000), thereby reducing the available options in certain situations and partly taking away personal responsibility for choices by attributing them to what is prototypical for the identity. When an identity is characterized by a lack of clarity in terms of its internal structure and external boundaries, this is less effective (Hogg & Terry, 2000). If the societal outlook on an identity is negative, which might threaten the inherent benefit of ingroup membership, people will try to cope with this through several possible strategies. Firstly, they might change the basis on which intergroup comparison is done to be more favorable to the ingroup, possibly through altering the group narratives (Tajfel et al., 1979). When it comes to educational tracking, students do this by developing an anti-school culture and attaching value to non-educational domains like work, dating and being cool instead (Rosenbaum, 1976; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2016). By doing this, they also devalue the source of stigma (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Secondly, people can strive for societal change to upset the societal hierarchy so it comes to favor the ingroup (van Zomeren, Spears & Leach, 2008). Thirdly, the Rejection-

Identification model argues that ingroup members of stigmatized or threatened groups can buffer the negative effects of this stigma through increased ingroup identification (Branscombe et al., 1999). In contrast, there are, however, other coping strategies that rely on disidentifying from the stigmatized group to protect the self-image. Firstly, people can distance themselves from a low social status identity in order to preserve self-esteem and diminish the impact of stigma, by eliminating the sense that the stigma is a threat to the self (Steele, 1997; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Woodcock et al., 2012). Secondly, individuals might try to abandon the ingroup and migrate to a more favorable ingroup (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1997). The choice of coping strategy depends on the available options: if group migration is impossible, people will look more towards societal change, especially if they consider the societal hierarchy as being illegitimate. Alternatively, low status group members might try to alter the basis for intergroup comparison, if the societal hierarchy is considered legitimate. These coping mechanisms imply a big importance of public group status (Sellers et al., 1998).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) originated in the 1970s as a grand theory. There are some critiques on the theory, the oldest being that the observations have been made in small groups in a laboratory setting without deep meaning attached to the identity (e.g., Bornstein et al., 1983), which has been tackled in the 1990s (Hornsey, 2008). Another criticism is that SIT is better suited to explain ingroup favoritism than outgroup derogation tendencies (e.g., Brewer, 1979). Despite these critiques it has stood the test of time and has become a fundamental theory in discussing intergroup relationships (Hornsey, 2008).

Linking Social Identity Theory (SIT) to Ashmore's identity framework (2004), it studies self-categorization, evaluative identification, both in terms of private and public regard, and the ideology/narrative behind an identity. Self-categorization is, as stated before, a necessary condition for any type of identification and is therefore present in all identification theories. SIT is the main framework to discuss students' identification with their educational track here. As educational tracks are part of a status hierarchy that even transcends the school context and is used by society and politicians, it seems necessary to study the evaluative component of tracks as a social identity. Previous tracking research has shown that, partly due to the status hierarchy, being part of the vocational track is detrimental to students' self-esteem, academic attitudes, sense of futility and other aspects of students' self- and educational image

(e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012; Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015; Van Houtte, 2017). Yet previous research mostly includes track membership as either a mere categorization variable, or as representing educational values that students can choose to dis-identify with (e.g., Carbonaro, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012; Nouwen & Clycq, 2019). Tracks are however rarely considered as identity categories with which students can (positively) identify. If the basic assumption of SIT is true for educational track, that is that ingroup membership will always provide benefits to a persons' self-worth regardless of ingroup status (Tajfel et al., 1978, 1981), studying track identification could provide an interesting avenue to see if the (negative) effects of tracking listed above can to some extent be buffered by students based on their track identification.

Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) is, as the name suggests, mostly concerned with self-categorization, through looking closely at the relationship between the individual and the social identity category (Turner et al., 1987). The extent or likeliness that a person identifies with an identity depends on a range of factors, such as the context, the accessibility of the identity in a given situation, how closely an individual aligns with the group and the extent to which their own behavior fits with prototypical group behavior (Oakes, 1987; Oakes et al., 1991). In SCT, social identities are not fixed cognitive structures people have in their repertoire and they can simply call on depending on the situation, but what the identity means is also variable over time and context.

One of the basic principles of SCT is depersonalization. When people define themselves as a member of a group, they would start self-stereotyping, seeing themselves as similar to the characteristics this group is defined by (e.g., Turner et al., 1987). Depersonalization also causes certain behaviors to be considered as group behavior by the individual, rather than personal behavior. When it comes to tracking, it might be the case that anti-educational attitudes, which have been observed to a larger extent in the vocational track (e.g., Van de Gaer et al., 2006), could be considered by students as group behavior, rather than the students' personal responsibility. Secondly, whether people feel like they 'fit' with an identity depends on the extent to which they are, in a given situation, more similar to other ingroup members than to outgroup members. If they are more similar to outgroup members, the ingroup identity becomes unfit for that given situation (Turner, 1985; Turner & Oakes, 1986, 1989). Yet, in situations where there are differences between the personal and the ingroup attitudes or

values, people have several strategies to reconcile these differences, rather than immediately disidentifying (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, 1991). SCT can also be used to study the self-definition of a person. More specifically, the group characteristics a person chooses to identify with can be an indication of what this person considers as relevant to his/her self-image (e.g., Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Turner et al., 2006). These choices can differ depending on the context. For tracking, it has been shown that within school tracking increases the impact of track position on students' self-esteem (Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). It might therefore be the case that the salience of track identity depends on whether students are educated in schools that either provide one or multiple tracks.

Connecting the self to an ingroup through self-categorization has been shown to impact a wide range of outcomes at the personal level. Some of these outcomes might seem highly personal. This range is too wide to fully discuss here. One of the main motivations for and benefits of self-categorization is uncertainty reduction, which is situated in both SIT and SCT. Through self-stereotyping and depersonalization, behavioral choices can be attributed to the group instead of to the self. For educational tracking in systems with multiple orientations, it would be interesting to see if tracks that are clearly aimed at either higher education or the labor market provide more identity clarity than those with a dual orientation towards both higher education and the labor market.

Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory originate from the same assumptions and theoretical perspective. While some lump these together in the 'social identity approach' (e.g., Hogg & Smith, 2007), we maintain the distinction between these two theoretical frameworks as they have a different focus: SIT is primarily focused on the interplay between different social groups and subsequent dynamics, whereas SCT focuses more on the categorization process and how the individual positions him/herself within a social category. Linking SCT to Ashmore's identity framework (2004), it incorporates self-categorization, the attribution of identity characteristics to the self and the social identity being implicitly important. The process of self-categorization is characterized by depersonalization, which is essential to self-categorization. Social identities are implicitly important in SCT since they take a place within a personal hierarchy of what identities are important within a given situation. People are not necessarily consciously aware of the status hierarchy they construct, but it is

readily available when the individual feels the need to identify with a certain identity (Ashmore et al., 2004).

Identity Theory (IT) originates from the works of Stryker (1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and Burke (1991; Burke & Stets, 1999). It has its origins in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism looks at how interactions are shaped by society through the symbolic meaning that is attached to language and behavior. Shared meanings allow for people to use language and gestures based on how they assume their interaction partner will interpret them (Mead, 1934). IT's core focus is on role based identities, how they become salient and how certain social identities take priority over others depending on the situation. IT is more behavior focused, whereas SCT is focused on how the self connects to established identities and SIT explores the emotional attachment to an ingroup and the consequences this can have, like the development of ingroup favoritism. This ingroup attachment is also studied concerning its possible impact on between-group dynamics. Linking IT to Ashmore's identity framework (2004), it incorporates the self-categorization, social identities are implicitly important and people are socially embedded and behaviorally involved in the identity. People opt to invoke an identity within a given situation, showing its implicit importance. This identity is enacted through role-expected behavior, and it is socially embedded since it permeates through this behavior into a person's social relations (Ashmore et al., 2004). Educational tracks are rather abstract (identity) categories, to which certain behavioral characteristics are attributed. However, before studying how behavior is tracked and which identities might be competing with each other within concrete interactions and contexts, research should first establish more clearly if tracks are relevant identity categories for students (and teachers), towards their self-image and their outlook on other tracks. Only once this is established, should future research create or observe situations in which this identity category is invoked and investigate which behavior is considered as an expression of this identity by both the actors and the societal narrative. IT would then be a relevant framework to study tracked behavior and to outline which identities might compete with the tracked identity in different contexts.

Nigrescence model (Cross, 1971, 1991) is a multistage theory on 'becoming Black' that is unique in the sense that it is a rather linear model and focuses on the steps involved in adopting an existing identity. It moves from unadopted, the identity being either no part of

one's personal identity or the aforementioned identity carrying very low importance, through 'encounters', being one or multiple identity related events which have a profound impact on how the individual views the identity. It then moves into immersion-emersion, wherein a person becomes deeply involved in the identity in terms of social group, behavior, learning about the identity and 'diving into it'. Lastly, there is the Internalization stage that shows an acceptance of an identity. (Cross, 1971, Cross, Parham & Helms, 1991; Vandiver et al., 2001; Worrell, Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Nigrescence theory is mostly used when studying minority or oppressed identities. It involves a negotiation of the self with the low status of the identity, as people have to make a (conscious) effort to move away from mainstream thinking which views this identity as negative and find a way for themselves to get to know, possibly get involved with, and accept the minority or oppressed identity. Additional examples can be seen in sexuality and gender research (e.g., DuBois et al., 2002; Haddad, 2019). The nigrescence model incorporates almost all elements of Ashmore's social identity framework (2004). This is possible as it is an almost all-encompassing stage theory, which has the benefit of longitudinal study of a minority identity through their narratives, ideologies, behaviors and social groups.

Since the nigrescence model is explicitly aimed towards minority or oppressed identities, it could only be applied to vocational education. This would limit the scope of our research focus on track identities. It is also difficult to study 'becoming vocational' if it has not been established yet whether being vocational is an identity, accompanied by a social group and track specific behaviors which are recognized or accepted as being prototypical by group members. It might be the case that the vocational label is attached to students by society, but there is no active development of a community which defines what constitutes vocational behavior, customs and values.

2.6 Patriotic and chauvinistic identification

So far, we have given an outline on why educational tracks could be considered social identities. Yet there are still elements from Ashmore and colleagues' framework (2004) that have not been (extensively) studied in the context of tracking. As tracking often invokes a status hierarchy, it seems important to investigate the evaluative component of track identification more closely, particularly since the public regard component of tracks has already been shown to be influential towards students, in terms of their sense of futility (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). Yet while it has been established that there is

a societal status hierarchy in education (Van Noord et al., 2019), there is far less research that looks at how students view this hierarchy. In general, status hierarchies are considered more legitimate by those who hold higher status. Within the low status group, people who identify more with their ingroup and people who have higher self-esteem consider the status hierarchy as more legitimate (Brandt et al., 2020). The educational status hierarchy caused by tracking is considered legitimate by students across countries and grouping systems (Van Noord et al., 2019). This legitimacy does however not necessarily mean that students will adopt this hierarchy into their own perception of tracks. So there is room to investigate students' personal opinion on all tracks.

Following Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), all students can benefit from ingroup identification, regardless of the status of the ingroup. Yet current research often looks at the relationship of students with a low status track as predominantly negative, showing a desire to disidentify or to distance themselves from fellow track membership in order to maintain a positive self-image (e.g., Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002; Van Praag et al., 2017; Nouwen & Clycq, 2019). When looking at the field of national and ethnic identity research, there are concepts that study a positive identification with the ingroup, which could be useful when investigating the ways in which track identification could benefit students' general self-image, despite the hierarchical context of educational tracking. These concepts could therefore help outline whether the base assumption of SIT is applicable to educational tracking. The two identity concepts that were selected were patriotism and chauvinism. Both encapsulate feelings of ingroup positivity, but where patriotism considers this irrespective of attitudes towards outgroups, chauvinism concerns ingroup positivity based on a sense of superiority that comes from comparing the ingroup with outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008). Studying both concepts can shed a light on whether students' opinions on their track are rooted in the status hierarchy or exist irrespective of this hierarchy.

Patriotism is a positive ingroup evaluation based on ingroup pride and does not elicit hostile outgroup attitudes (Raijman et al., 2008). Patriotism is often connected to mental wellbeing, for example higher patriotism lowers the impact of racist experiences (Bynum et al., 2008) and heightens self-esteem (Davis et al., 2017). Patriotic attitudes decrease antagonism and might even stimulate feelings of unity towards outgroups, regardless of whether the ingroup is dominant or a minority (e.g., Stevens et al., 2014; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte,

2019). Patriotism is considered a fundamental aspect of a group or nation, as it causes ingroup members to feel loyalty and attachment to the nation (e.g., Livi et al., 2014; Wang & Jia, 2015). Sometimes patriotic feelings are stimulated by nations through education and media outlets (e.g., Flowerdew & Leong, 2007; Piwoni, 2015; Curren & Dorn, 2018; Leite et al., 2018). These can even be strengthened by friendly rivalry, for instance through international sports competitions (Poulton, 2004). While previous research has broken down patriotism into several sub-dimensions, like ethical, constitutional and civic patriotism (e.g., Habermas, 2001; Laborde, 2002; Kodelja, 2011), we will only consider patriotism as a general sense of pride, since the educational track is already a fairly specific identity to study, compared to the broader national identity which could benefit from being broken down into sub-dimensions. Patriotism is studied in ethnic identity research (e.g., Sellers et al., 1998), national identity research (Kelman, 1997), the intersection of national and ethnic identities (e.g., de Figueieredo & Elkins, 2003; Carter & Pérez, 2016), politics (e.g., Hanson & O'Dwyer, 2019) and even economic decision making (Balabanis et al., 2001).

Chauvinism is an attitude that stimulates positive ingroup feelings by distinguishing the ingroup from meaningful outgroups through feelings of ingroup homogeneousness and superiority, leading to exclusionary and hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008). Chauvinism is different from other, positive forms of ingroup identification like ingroup favoritism or bias, since it is a more conflict-oriented identification, rooted in the idea that the ingroup is superior on certain characteristics. Ingroup bias refers to making choices that benefit the ingroup more than outgroups, based on a more positive sentiment towards the ingroup. This can be both through favoring the ingroup or derogating the outgroup (Tajfel et al., 1971; Brewer, 1979; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). The chauvinism measure does not look at favoring behavior, but is purely about attitudes of supremacy based on the idea that if more people were like the ingroup, the world would be a better place. Chauvinistic feelings can be caused by the societal status ladder, as the highest status group might allow their self-perception to mirror the higher status society attributes to them, increasing their feelings of superiority (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Reflected appraisal, the process through which people come to see themselves as how they perceive significant others to see them, effectively acting as a looking glass for the self, might likewise lead to a more negative self-perception in lower

status groups through internalizing their lower public status (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Wallace & Tice, 2012).

Chauvinism is usually studied in relation to feelings of threat, namely a competing (ethnic) identity threatening the majority identity, the perceived threat to welfare by migrants or the 'male chauvinist' who through his devotion to a male dominated world threatens the position of women in society (e.g., Woods, 1976; Coenders et al., 2004; Van der Waal et al., 2010). In times of conflict or perceived threat, chauvinism can also act as a defense mechanism by stimulating a 'my group first' mentality and employing outgroup derogation to fight back against the outgroup (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). Ethnic and national identity research shows that chauvinistic attitudes increase prejudice and feelings of antagonism towards outgroups (e.g., Stevens et al., 2014; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). Stereotyped views of the threatening outgroup increases welfare and nationalist chauvinistic attitudes (Hjorth, 2016; Hagendoorn & Pope, 2017). Chauvinism is generally studied from the viewpoint of the dominant group. For example, studies on nationalism and ethnicity often only include the perception of dominant national citizens vis-à-vis vulnerable outgroups like immigrants (e.g., Raijman et al., 2008). At the same time, chauvinism has also been observed in lower status groups, as chauvinism can be a mechanism to resist a lower place on a status ladder (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019), by dismissing the elements on which they are esteemed lower and highlighting ingroup superiority and homogeneity. The derogatory element of chauvinism includes, for political chauvinism, the denial of the right for minority members to be educated and entertained in their own language, or to form political parties (Latcheva, 2010). It also includes the use of discriminatory language and labels (e.g., Sithole, 2022). The suggestion that chauvinism might be observed in both groups that are societally praised and lowly esteemed, raises the question whether the concept of chauvinism might be given a different meaning depending on which group holds these chauvinistic attitudes. Chauvinism and patriotism do not correlate with each other in a problematic way and can therefore be studied alongside each other (Ariely, 2012).

2.7 Tracking and social actors

The development of students' attitudes is influenced by a few key actors. Firstly, parents have a crucial role in the initial track choice of students (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Parental track preferences could give students an indication of which tracks they should consider acceptable

(Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Research on the role of parents in the context of educational tracking primarily focuses on the transition from primary to secondary education (e.g., Maaz et al., 2008; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Korthals & Dronkers, 2016). Crosnoe (2001) found that parents give their children more autonomy over time and argues that students becomes less reliant on their parents' help and advice when they grow older, which could explain the limited research on the parental influence in tracking at later ages. Secondly, students who develop cross-group friendships might exhibit lower prejudice through mutual perspective-taking and empathizing (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). For these students, their track identification might be based less on between-group comparisons and chauvinistic attitudes. Lastly, teachers are essential in shaping students' attitudes, as shown by previous research (e.g., McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Thornberg et al., 2022). We assume this will also be the case for students' track attitudes, especially since teachers are to some extent tracked themselves (Amitai, 2021).

Student-teacher relationships have been studied widely, concerning a myriad of outcomes, spanning many decades. Student-teacher relationships are important to students' academic, social, behavioral and emotional development (e.g., McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Thornberg et al., 2022). McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) identify three theories that are at the core of most student-teacher relationship research: self-determination theory, attachment theory and ecological systems theory. Only self-determination theory will be discussed, as the other two have only limited relevance to educational tracking. Self-determination theory (SDT) states that human beings are 'inherently active, intrinsically motivated and oriented toward developing naturally through integrative processes (Deci & Ryan, 2012: 417). Human beings naturally strive towards feeling autonomy, relatedness and have a desire to feel competent. There are, however, external influences that can counteract or diminish these intrinsic desires, like monetary rewards as external motivation (e.g., Deci, 1971). SDT breaks down into five sub-theories which we will not discuss deeper (see Ryan & Deci, 2002). Self-determination theory in educational research has, among others, focused on students' engagement, motivation, feelings of competence and autonomy (e.g., Levesque et al., 2004; Reeve, 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2016), These could be linked to student-teacher relationships, for instance the extent to which behavioral control and care of teachers affects students' misbehavior, engagement and satisfaction (Nie & Lau, 2009; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012), how these

relationships can affect behavioral motivation, for instance their tendency to intervene when witnessing bullying (Jungert, Piroddi & Thornberg, 2016) and how giving students freedom and autonomy gives room for their intrinsic motivation (Brooks & Young, 2011; Van Houtte, 2021).

We will briefly look at the three main needs of students outlined in SDT, relatedness, autonomy and competence, and see how these connect to tracking. Elffers (2013) draws the connection between these three needs and student engagement for vocational students. She states that if a school environment succeeds in creating a climate that makes students feel connected with their fellow school actors, and creates feelings of autonomy and competence, it stimulates student engagement. Students in technical/vocational schools have a lower sense of belonging, which can be explained by lower faculty trust in them (e.g., Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012). Teachers have to show involvement through demonstrating interest in their students to stimulate students' sense of relatedness, which would then lead to students being more open to adopting teachers' goals and values (Wentzel, 2016). This teacher involvement is more impactful towards academic track students' motivation than to their technical track counterparts (De Naeghel et al., 2014). Teachers can also engage in student autonomy supportive behavior by giving students freedom to make choices (Han, 2021). Teachers in vocational tracks tend to focus more on structure and behavior control and less on educational demands and creating an ambitious and engaging environment in which students can make their own free choices, leading to a lower quality in instruction (Van Houtte, 2006a; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012; Andersen, 2018). According to Dumont and colleagues (2017), students in lower status tracks generally hold lower feelings of competence. In conclusion, the needs specified by SDT are likely more fulfilled in the academic track than in the vocational, or to a lesser extent the technical track.

Teachers can be influential in how students perceive themselves. Teachers have been shown to shape students' views on a wide range of subjects, for example interest in educational subject matters (Ardies et al., 2015), students' sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993, Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012), school engagement (Quin, 2017) and even non-educational attitudes like ethnic prejudice (Vervaet, Van Houtte, & Stevens, 2018). Teachers are also shown to be role models for students. Feelings of sharing a certain trait with the teacher, being gender, ethnicity, religion, or caste, all positively affect students' performance and

educational attitudes (e.g., Zirkel, 2002; Rawal & Kingdon, 2010; Paredes, 2014). So while there is no prior research on the extent to which students consider their teachers' opinion relevant towards their track identity, it can be assumed they are also role models for their students based on their shared track membership. Yet the acceptance of this role models' opinion by students is not guaranteed. Students tend to accept teachers as authority figures in their school, out of respect, to show their appreciation towards teachers as guardians or to avoid punishment (Yariv, 2009). Teachers' authority is limited however. Issues that overstep teachers' authority include violating civil rights, intervening in personal matters and causing moral dilemmas (Yariv, 2009). It could be argued that the teachers' personal opinion on tracks, and how students should view their own and other tracks is a strictly personal matter and falls outside the authority of the teacher. But as this has not been studied yet there cannot be made any statements on the limits of teachers' authority concerning track opinions. Teachers also communicate and act as role models when it comes to values (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Educational tracking might trigger certain values in teachers that they communicate to their students, as the imposed societal hierarchy might invoke feelings of injustice towards 'lower' track students who are considered less valuable by society. This could lead to communication that goes against this negative societal evaluation to instill the value of all students being equally important in the more vocational tracks. At the same time, teachers who value 'merit', academic values and societally rewarding jobs might communicate in superior ways about the more academic tracks to emphasize these values, which are most relevant to the academic track.

2.8 Teachers as tracked individuals

Teachers experience the benefits and burdens of being tracked, in a similar way to their students, and become 'tracked' themselves to a certain extent (Achinstein, Ogawa & Speiglman, 2004). This is especially the case in educational systems such as those in the USA, where ability grouping for teachers is a competitive model where the class you teach is based on your performance relative to your colleagues (Finley, 1984; Talbert & Ennis, 1990; Kelly, 2004b). There are also several job positions within a school(group) a teacher can be officially promoted to afterwards. This (lack of) competition is tied to the organization of tracking. Belgian education, for instance, does not inherently create this sense of competition. Elchardus and colleagues (2010) observed that Flemish teachers search less for promotions or

higher labor positions than comparably educated peers. Additionally, there are only limited promotional opportunities in Belgian education. The teaching career in Belgium is therefore generally a 'flat' career with mostly horizontal movement (Lortie, 1975; Elchardus et al., 2010).

One of the main burdens of being tracked is the differential public status awarded to each track. Teachers are also affected by the public status of the tracks they teach. The societal focus on higher education makes teachers in vocational education courses feel that their subject does not matter and their job is considered less valuable than that of their academically oriented colleagues (Gore & Morrison, 2001). In the United States, research shows that teachers look down on their colleagues who teach in lower status tracks (Finley, 1984). Additionally, vocational education teachers feel that the challenges associated with the diverse educational and personal backgrounds of their students, motivating their students, and trying to bridge the gap between curriculum and future workplace does not receive the social recognition it deserves, causing increased job frustration (Boldrini, Sappa & Aprea, 2019; Amitai, 2021). As teachers experience different status based on their track to the extent that it causes them job frustration, it might be the case that they employ differential track identification to deal with this status. To our knowledge, track identification has not yet been studied with teachers, but this theoretical framework has outlined the ways in which differential track identification could benefit someone's self-image in the context of a status hierarchy.

One of the ways people can avoid status loss is to move away from the disadvantaged status group (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1997). Combining this idea with the fact that academic track students display more pro-school attitudes could lead us to assume that the academic schools are the most desired by teachers. This is not necessarily the case. Less study-oriented attitudes do impact teachers' job satisfaction to a certain extent (Van Houtte, 2006b), but it does not mean that teachers view their bond with these students less positively (Spilt & Koomen, 2009). An important driver of teachers' track preference concerns their preferences in student-attributes. Vocational and technical track schools experience the highest teacher mobility to other tracks, based on their students exhibiting a higher sense of futility and these students being perceived as less teachable (Amitai, 2021). Students' sense of futility and teachers' perception of the students' teachability are more impactful on teacher mobility than students' performance (Amitai, 2021; Van Eycken, Amitai & Van Houtte, 2023). At the same time, the

personal-social behavior of technical and vocational track students is rated more positively (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Amitai, 2021). So, generally speaking, academic education is more attractive to teachers, yet teachers who put an emphasis on student-teacher communication may prefer teaching in technical or vocational education.

3 Research context: Belgium

We have to note that while this dissertation is based on data collected in the schoolyear 2017-2018, there is an ongoing educational reform in Flanders' secondary education that started after that schoolyear (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). In section 3.1 we will describe the structure of Belgian secondary education at the time of the data-collection. In section 3.4, we will give an overview of the educational reform that is taking place. While the contents of this reform will not be a part of any of the empirical chapters, we will discuss the implication of these reforms on the findings of this research in the discussion section.

3.1 General description

Belgian secondary education is organized by two entities, being the Flemish government for the Dutch-speaking Flemish region and the Dutch-speaking schools in the Brussels Capital Region, and the Francophone community government for French-speaking schools, which are situated in Wallonia and partly in the Brussels Capital Region (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019; Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2019). Secondary education starts in the year students turn 12 years old, after completing six years of primary school. If students successfully complete primary education, they get to start in year 1A, students who did not successfully finish primary education start in year 1B. Year 1B is a remedial program, in which some of the core contents of primary education are repeated. It also educates at a slower pace than year 1A. Successfully finishing this year leads into either 1A, in a few cases straight into year 2A, or into the vocational preparation year 2B. This year is less theoretically oriented than year 2A and gives an introduction (14 hours/week) to several vocational domains. Years 1A and 2A have a communal program and elective courses. In year 1A, 27 hours/week are communal and 5 hours/week are elective. In 2A, the communal program consists of 25 hours/week, the elective program is 5 hours/week and 2 hours/week are attributed to remediation. So while there is no formal tracking in the first two years of secondary education in Belgium, these elective programs informally already apply curriculum differentiation, both in terms of subject matter and the level at which it is taught. This first differentiation happens at a fairly early age when comparing it with other nations/systems (OECD, 2013). While the Flemish and Francophone systems are fairly similar, they do show some differences: in the Francophone system, when students do not succeed in their first two years, they are rerouted to remedial

programs which aim to tackle students' individual issues and reinstate them in the communal program afterwards. The Francophone system also relies heavily on grade retention. The Flemish system is more willing to let students 'move down' to more vocationally oriented programs instead of applying remedial programs (Onderwijskiezer, 2021).

From the third year onwards, students are divided into tracks they choose based on educational interest and grades. In the third through sixth year of Belgian secondary education (USA & UK: Grades 9–12) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; GOV.UK, 2023), students are offered four tracks: academic, technical, vocational or arts. These are the same for the Flemish and Francophone community. The academic track prepares students for higher education. The technical track provides both general and technical-theoretical programs. The vocational track focuses on training students for a craft (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). The arts track has programs that prepare for higher education and programs that prepare for the labor market, which is similar to the technical track. Only 2.2 percent of students were enrolled in the arts track in 2017, therefore we opted to not include it in this dissertation, due to limited sampling opportunities.

Belgian education provides both within- and between school tracking (Gamoran, 2010). Generally speaking, Belgian schools are considered categorical if they provide either one track or are technical/vocational schools (e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Multilateral schools provide a combination of the academic track with the technical, arts or vocational track. Students who successfully graduate from the sixth year of secondary education in the academic, technical or arts track are awarded a diploma that grants them free entry into higher education. Vocational education only gives a 'certificate' after six years of secondary education, which does not provide entry into professional or academic bachelor programs (European Qualification Framework (EQF): level 6). This certificate does allow entrance into EQF level 5 programs (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). In order to obtain a diploma, these students have to complete an additional seventh year of secondary education with a stronger focus on academic skills (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019a).

3.2 Relevance of Belgium as a research context

Some of the characteristics that are typical for Belgian secondary education make it a particularly interesting research context to study track attitudes. Firstly, Belgian tracking is

characterized by its rigid character. There are clear divisions between the ability groups, with students being separated entirely from students of other tracks for all courses of their education (Gamoran, 1992). There is no education in heterogeneous or mixed-ability groups (Van Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012; Chmielewski, 2014). These clearly defined ability groups allow society to attribute stereotypes to tracks (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015; Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). In systems where track boundaries are not as rigid track characteristics are less defined, which will likely lead to less stereotypical societal views on tracks, as stereotypes are oversimplified group characterizations (Durante & Fiske, 2017). Secondly, Belgian education provides both within- and between school tracking (Gamoran, 2010), allowing researchers to investigate whether track membership is more salient when students are in the presence of students from other tracks on a daily basis (e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012).

Thirdly, a typical feature of tracking in Belgium is the 'cascade-effect' (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). Moving 'down' from an academic to a more vocational track is common, whereas movement from more vocational to more technical or academic tracks is possible in theory but rarely occurs in practice (Van Praag et al., 2015a). This causes a so-called 'cascade', whereby students 'aim high' by trying the more academic track first, and eventually 'go down' to 'lower', more vocational tracks (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). This leads to vocational education not only being associated with societally less desirable jobs but also being the destination of students who 'failed' in more academic tracks (Van Praag et al., 2015a). This cascade suggests a status hierarchy, wherein the academic track is considered the 'norm' and most valuable. Due to this 'cascade' with its rigid boundaries between tracks and the fact that tracking in Belgium has a very public nature, vocational tracks are attributed lower status and more stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Its public nature leads to not only students and teachers formulating track opinions, but parents and the general public as well. These opinions are reflected in the fact that parental track preferences influence students' initial track choice (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Due to education being an important status allocator and the aforementioned public character of tracks, politicians even use these labels in public discourse, going as far as attributing personality traits to track membership (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). These elements seem likely to lead to high track membership salience,

probably higher than in systems that opt for more diffuse differentiation, less rigid mobility and tracks with a lesser public character.

Fourthly, the existence of the technical track, with its dual finalities, could provide additional interesting insights. The societal views on both the academic and vocational track, as the extremes of the status ladder, are probably more outspoken than those on the technical and arts tracks. This intermediary status might alter the extent to which students feel societal judgement. Additionally, if the tracks' identity is less outspoken as well, this might interfere with the potential uncertainty reduction a track identity could provide.

Fifthly, in terms of admission to higher education, the Belgian system has more freedom than performance based admission systems like in The Netherlands and the UK (Studiekeuzelab, 2023; Study in the UK.org, 2023). An important distinction between Belgian secondary education and systems that are more restrictive in their higher education admission policy is that in Belgium there was, at the moment the data for dissertation were gathered, no centrally administered testing in secondary education, which makes it considerably more complex and less reliable to restrict students' entry into higher education based on their performance in secondary education. The lack of performance based admission could decrease the importance of achievement in secondary education. Additionally, this lack of performance based admission might seemingly decrease status divisions within the academic track, as students are not in direct competition for coveted positions in higher education. Yet there is still a hierarchy in the academic track, as programs providing 'higher' mathematics (8 or 6 hours per week) and programs providing the Latin and/or Greek language are more highly esteemed than humanities, modern languages and economics programs.

Sixthly, the inclusion of both the Flemish and Francophone education system should help us gain insight into whether track identities are context dependent, as both systems share a lot of similarities but have a different societal context and slight differences in educational organization. The Flemish region relies more on downward vertical track mobility, while the Francophone system applies more remedial programs and relies more on grade retention. The Flemish system therefore enforces the idea that the vocational, and to a lesser extent the technical track, are the destination for struggling students, more than the Francophone system. As a result, there will likely be larger status differences between the tracks. Societally, Flanders markets itself as a 'knowledge economy', which is reflected in the higher proportion

of people with a higher education degree. In Flanders, 56.2 percent of people between 30 to 34 year old hold a higher education degree, compared to 44.3 percent in the Francophone community (Economisch Adviescomité, 2020; Statbel, 2023). This difference implies that the status loss of not graduating in the academic track will be higher in Flanders than in the Francophone community. Studying both contexts allows us to give a first indication of the transferability of our research findings.

Seventhly, Belgium ranks among the least residence-based admission-systems in the OECD studied countries due to being densely populated, but also among the least performance based admission systems (OECD, 2013). This might be due to the fact that Belgium has mostly public education, wherein all students are free to apply to any school within the track they qualify for without any other formal or monetary restrictions. Admission restrictions are present at the track-level. Yet while there are informal status differences between schools (Demeuse & Friant, 2011; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013), this organization eliminates the need to differentiate between public and private schools in analysis. Research on tracking in Belgium is therefore less likely to be impacted by school-level effects than tracking research in nations that have more restrictive school-admission policies.

3.3 Teachers in Belgian secondary education

When we focus on teachers, there are certain characteristics of Belgian education that stimulate track loyalty without eliciting internal competition between teachers and as such might strengthen the (affective) bond of teachers with their track over time. Firstly, in a tracked system like Belgium we do not assume a competition between teachers for coveted classes or pupils because there are no formal differences or benefits to teaching in different tracks. There are also no promotional options that are based on teaching performance or track placement. This lack of promotional options would cause teachers with ambitions of promotion or with a desire to have more variation in their career to leave the teaching profession (Sadovets, 2021; Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). Additionally, the system of 'tenure' (Kelchtermans, 1993) rewards teachers with employment security if they stay within the same school(group) for the duration of their career, further encouraging school loyalty. In schools that only provide one track, this would imply track loyalty as well. The limited vertical mobility and tenure system will make it more likely that Belgian teachers identify with their track, as there is no incentive to leave their track behind for personal gains and teachers will therefore

spend more time in one track. Previous research has already shown that Belgian teachers become tracked to some extent (Amitai, 2021).

Secondly, the public nature of tracking could stimulate conscious track membership for teachers from the start of their career. This track choice can be made through choosing track specific subject matters in the teacher education program or looking for schools that offer specific tracks when applying to schools for employment. Teachers might be motivated to opt for one track over the other, based on student characteristics (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Amitai, 2021). The public nature of tracking could increase teachers' own sense of being tracked as well. Additionally, teachers might feel the need to buffer students' negative experiences of being part of a 'lower status' track more in a system where track stigma can be experienced outside the school context than in systems with less explicit tracking.

Thirdly, as there was no centrally administered testing in Belgian education at the time of the data-collection, performance based comparisons between teachers cannot be done objectively. Student performance is assessed through the schools' own examination, which is based on governmental educational standards and teacher developed tests. In other ability grouping systems (like in the US) teachers attain status from the classes they teach, which can change on a yearly basis, and from the results they achieve with their students, which can be compared through centrally administered testing. These comparisons can cause teachers to see their track as a (temporal) validation of their own merit (Finley, 1984). This is in stark contrast with Belgian secondary education, where teachers are not encouraged by the system to aspire teaching the highest performing children. This will likely cause teachers to base their track choice more on the student characteristics they prefer and on intrinsic motivation to teach a certain track.

3.4 Flanders' educational reform

The initial philosophy behind this reform was developed in the Monard-report (2009), which proposed a more comprehensive start to secondary education, through letting students gain experience in several fields. This should allow students to make more informed choices at the end of their second year of secondary education. It also wished to reach this more comprehensive start by limiting the number of options in the first two years of secondary education, as in the pre-reform system the elective programs caused informal curriculum

differentiation in both content and the level at which it is taught. The choice for these programs effectively acted as a direct precursor to the track choice students had to make at the start of their third year (Monard, 2009). Additionally, the Monard-report (2009) proposed to abolish the academic-technical-arts-vocational track divisions and focus on domains of interest as the defining differentiation of secondary education instead.

After several years of discussion among policy makers, the philosophy of this reform shifted to (1) providing more structure and clarity in the myriad of educational programs by clustering them into domains, (2) formulate new educational goals for each year that are aimed at providing quality education for all students, goals that should allow students to strive for 'excellence' within their chosen domain. These goals are both program-specific and personal-developmental (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). This reform was implemented for the first and second grade in the year 2019-2020, for the third and fourth grade in 2021-2022 and for the fifth and sixth grade in 2023-2024. Within this reform, programs label themselves as 'higher education oriented', having a 'dual orientation' and a 'labor market orientation'. The 'higher education oriented' programs contain programs situated in the academic, technical and arts track. The 'double orientation' programs contain technical and arts track programs and the 'labor market orientation' only includes vocational track programs.

Students who graduate in a 'labor market' program but wish to start a bachelor degree have to complete an additional seventh year that explicitly prepares them for higher education. The other programs do provide a diploma that allows entry into higher education. All programs are catalogued in eight 'domains': (1) Language and culture, (2) STEM, (3) Arts and creation, (4) Agri- and horticulture, (5) Economy and organization, (6) Society and wellbeing, (7) Sports, (8) Food and catering industry. This division into program orientations and domains gives schools the framework to organize themselves either through horizontal differentiation by only providing one orientation, or through vertical orientation, by providing programs from multiple orientations, but focusing on one domain (Beerens, 2023). On top of these program orientations and domains, the track labels are maintained, in which the academic track programs are characterized as more abstract and cross-domain, whereas the technical and arts programs are labelled domain-specific (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). The retention of the track labels is a clear deviation from the philosophy of the Monard-report (2009).

4 Research objectives

4.1 Teachers' role in students' track identification

Throughout the theoretical framework it was clear that there is a long tradition of research on educational tracking, showing it as instrumental towards student performance, educational attitudes, but also in how students view themselves and their educational career. There are a lot of actors that play a fundamental part in this: society, in its role of status allocator; teachers through student-teacher relationships and their differential attitudes and pedagogical aims depending on tracks; and parents in how they influence track choice. Yet, within this research tradition we identified a few processes that are not properly explored, but would be of added value to the field of tracking research. Firstly, educational research clearly showed that teachers themselves are tracked to some extent (e.g., Gore & Morrison, 2001; Amitai, 2021). At the same time, teachers can be considered as role models for students, as they share a trait with students and teach certain values (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Yariv, 2009). Prior research has, to our knowledge, not yet combined these two strands of research. Therefore the first research objective (RO1) of this dissertation is to study whether teachers' experience of being tracked can be related to the development of students' positive track identifications?

This research objective breaks down into two parts. Firstly, it looks at teachers' experience of being tracked. The first empirical study looks into this experience by investigating how teachers' job satisfaction might be affected by the public regard of the track they teach (chapter 6.1). Previous research has shown that mostly vocational track teachers feel that their own job is considered less valuable (e.g., Gore & Morrison, 2001), they feel looked down upon by colleagues (Finley, 1984) and the specific challenges their track presents them with are not sufficiently recognized by society (Boldrini, 2019; Amitai, 2021). In this study we examine teachers' experience of the way society looks at their students, rather than teachers' personal experiences with colleagues or how society views their job. If this societal outlook on their students affected teachers' job satisfaction, it would show how strong this public perception is. Additionally, it would draw a direct connection between the experiences of students and teachers, as they would both be affected by the public status of the students.

Secondly, research objective one looks at how teachers influence students' positive track identification. The second empirical study investigates whether teachers' chauvinistic track

communication affects students' ingroup chauvinism (chapter 6.3). This research question is based on (1) the fact that teacher communication is impactful towards students (e.g., Ardies et al., 2015; Quin, 2017) and (2) the possibly shared experience of being tracked might affect the extent to which teachers communicate chauvinistically about their track. If teachers attached their own personal job satisfaction to the public regard of their students, this would give an indication of why teachers opt to communicate about track status. This study looks at chauvinistic teacher communication in particular.

While it is possible that teachers would want to stimulate a feeling of track pride/patriotism in their students, it seems less likely that teachers would specifically stimulate feelings of chauvinism when they have no personal motivation to do so, as chauvinism comes at the cost of increased between-group divides through exclusionary and derogatory behavior. The motivation to communicate chauvinistically might depend on whether teachers experience high or low track status. If teachers experience high track status, chauvinistic communication might be an expression of the belief that by 'succeeding' within an educational system that emphasizes academic prowess, their students are indeed superior to those that do not live up to the academic standards of their track. If teachers experience low status, chauvinistic communication might be motivated by a desire to devalue the source of this low status and a desire to strongly emphasize elements on which the ingroup can be superior instead. Chauvinistic communication might also be motivated by personal spite, with this communication being an (unconscious) emotional expressions of frustration with the low societal esteem for their track.

4.2 Track identification, self- and group evaluations

Tracking research that focuses on students has clearly shown that students' self-image is influenced by tracking (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). This relationship contains several dimensions that have already been studied. The achievement dimension has been studied frequently, and the relation between self-esteem and academic performance is rather inconsistent (e.g., Filozof et al., 1998; Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). The interpersonal dimension is more clear, with students in the high status academic track having generally higher self-esteem than students in the vocational track, due to differences in social acceptance/rejection and relative status gratification (Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Previous research on the relationship between self-

esteem and tracking does not focus on the way in which students identify with their track. We believe there are valuable insights to gain from studying track identification, as coping research showed how differential identification can alter the impact of group status on the individuals' self-image (e.g., Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998; Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; van Zomeren, Spears & Lach, 2008). In the theoretical framework we argued to look more closely into positive identification types in particular. This choice allows us to shed a different light on the relationship vocational students in particular have with their track, which is currently seen as mostly negative (e.g., Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002; Van Praag et al., 2017; Nouwen & Clycq, 2019). This leads us to part one of the second research objective (RO2a): is students' positive track identification relevant towards their general self-image?

This research objective is the subject of the fourth empirical study, which specifically focuses on the relationship between students' chauvinistic track attitudes and their general self-esteem (chapter 6.4). As track chauvinism breaks down into two components – social and cognitive chauvinism (chapter 6.3) –, including both types of chauvinism deepens the research question, since students from different tracks might attach their sense of superiority to different aspects of the track identity. This assumption aligns with Social Identity Theory, wherein people can try to alter the basis for between-group comparison to favor the ingroup (Tajfel et al., 1979). In chapter 6.2 we investigate whether chauvinism and patriotism are unique identification types and if they differ in the ways they affect ingroup track evaluation. This gives us more insight into students' positive ingroup identification.

While Van Noord and colleagues (2019) have shown that students consider the societal status hierarchy as legitimate, there is, to our knowledge, no research that studies if students internalize this hierarchy to the extent that it shapes their evaluation of all tracks. This would be relevant as the internalization of this status hierarchy might indicate that students view other tracks as inferior, and feelings of superiority invoke derogatory and discriminatory behavior towards those outgroups that are considered inferior (e.g., Raijman et al., 2008). This leads us to part two of the second research objective (RO2b): is students' positive track identification relevant towards their evaluation of all tracks? This research objective is the central focus of the second study (chapter 6.2).

4.3 Social and contextual (f)actors

Tracking is inherently social. While track choice might on the surface seem like a personal choice based on interests and capabilities, it is in fact a social choice influenced by parents and society (e.g., Bauer & Riphahn, 2006; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Once students are part of a track, there are a few social actors that influence their educational experience. Firstly, society imbues each track with a certain status, which is clearly felt by students and they are even confronted with this status in non-school contexts (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). Secondly, students' personal educational attitudes like their self-esteem and study involvement are also influenced by which tracks students interact with on a daily basis (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Lastly, the influence of teachers on students can barely be understated, affecting students' social, behavioral and emotional development (e.g., McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Thornberg et al., 2022). The experience of tracking also affects how students develop their friendships (Demanet, Agirdag & Van Houtte, 2012). The last research objective is aimed at acknowledging the relevance of social actors in tracking and investigating how they relate to track identification in particular. Not investigating the influence of social and contextual elements might wrongfully identify results related to the second research objective (RO2) as being caused by track identification, while these results might be caused by these social and contextual (f)actors instead. Research objective 3 (RO3) is formulated as: what social and contextual (f)actors affect positive track identification and the relationships between positive track identification, general track attitudes and self-image?

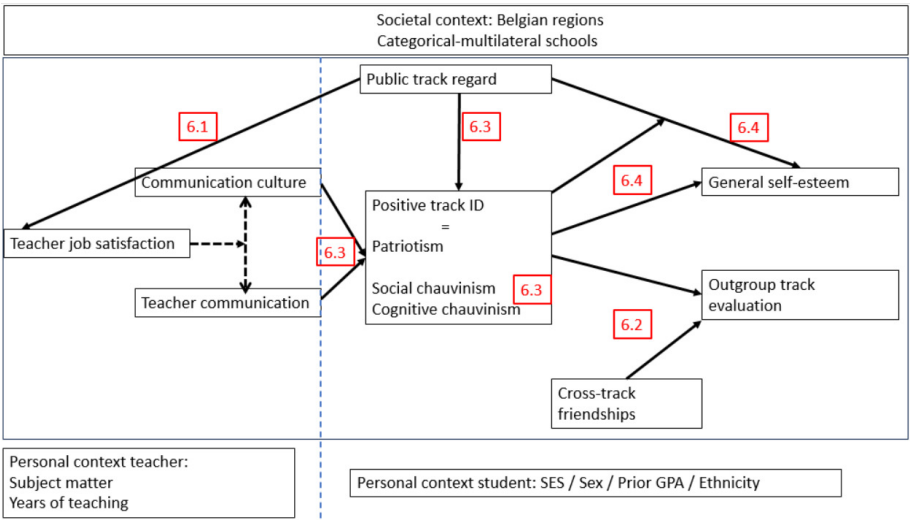
This third research objective will be investigated across all studies. The contextual factors that are relevant to Belgian secondary school students that are included in this research are school-structural features, the educational-language regions and the public status of tracks. The idea behind their inclusion is that school structure could be impactful due to the intergroup contact theory, as multilateral schools allow for daily informal contact with students from other tracks (Allport, 1954). Region is included since there are slight differences in tracking between the two Belgian regions. Its inclusion allows us to account for possible differences based on these regions and might give a first slight indication of the extent to which our findings are transferable between different national contexts. The public status hierarchy of tracks is part of the core of this research. The existence of a societal status hierarchy is instrumental to the

development of group identification. If there were no tracks, there would be no identities to identify with. If these groups had free mobility and equal status, there would likely be significantly less chauvinistic identification, as this is often inspired by a threat to a groups' status (e.g., Coenders, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2017). The first category of social actors are students' cross-track friendships. These provide a foundation for cross-track interactions that are based on equal status, which is not the necessarily the case for interactions based on school structure. The second category of social actors are teachers, who are known to be an influential voice towards students' students attitudes (see chapters 6.1 and 6.3) (e.g., Ardies et al., 2015; Vervaet, Van Houtte & Stevens, 2018).

4.4 Tracking and identity research

Lastly, this research further opens a new line of research, in which ethnic/national identity concepts are applied to track identities. But in order to do this, we first have to show that tracks are relevant to students and to some extent fit within a social identity framework. Previous tracking research has already done this for aspects like self-categorization, social embeddedness, identity narratives and behavioral involvement (Korp, 2011; Demanet, Agirdag & Van Houtte, 2012; De Pauw, Spruyt & Bradt, 2021). This research adds to this line of research through its focus on the evaluative identification aspect in particular. The evaluative identification aspect can be broken down into internal and external evaluation and is directly connected to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). The internal evaluation aspect is captured by studying the relevance of both track patriotism and track chauvinism on track identification. The external evaluation aspect is captured by studying the relevance of public regard towards students' self-image (Sellers et al., 1998). Figure 1 represents the research goals, as expressed through relationships between key concepts. The numbers indicate the chapters in which these relationships are studied.

Figure 1: Conceptual model dissertation



5 Methodology

5.1 Quantitative approach to the central research question

The main research question of this research is: How does positive ingroup identification with an educational track interact with self-, ingroup- and outgroup attitudes, within the status hierarchy of Belgian secondary education? This research question could be approached in both a qualitative and quantitative way. In the conceptual model, we visualized the hypothesized relationships between the key concepts that are necessary to reach the research objectives. These research objectives are best approached in a quantitative manner as they are focused on relations of influence between the core concepts.

5.2 Data

We opted to work with the School, Identity and Society survey (SIS-survey; Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021), as it is the first survey to our knowledge that included items that treat track membership as a (social) identity. This survey was part of a mixed methods project, in which the quantitative phase was informed by an exploratory qualitative phase. In this qualitative phase 30 interviews were conducted in four schools, comprised of schools in the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking part of Belgium. It is rather unique to be able to study both Belgian regions within the same study, as this comes with practical challenges, some differences in the organization of secondary education and differences in the main research traditions in each region. Practically, the regions use a different language, so all surveys have to be translated carefully to avoid translation and interpretation errors of survey items. Additionally, there is loyalty from secondary schools to work mostly with institutions from their region or with institutions with whom they have good prior experiences, as schools feel they are in too high demand for educational research (e.g., Vervaet, Van Houtte & Stevens, 2018). In terms of research traditions, Flemish research focuses mainly on cultural features, like expectations, language and prejudice when studying inequality, while Walloon researchers primarily interpret ethnic inequalities as rooted in structural social class inequalities (Van Praag et al., 2019). The main aim of the SIS-survey was to study group-identities within an educational context, focusing initially on ethnic, national and religious identities. Rather surprisingly, the track identity was spontaneously brought up by students in the exploratory qualitative interviews as an important identity, which Charlotte Maene, who

performed the interviews described as follows: “They talked about their track as a form of important group membership that is informative about who they are, who they should be, and why their track is important in this regard. For these adolescents, tracking is a basis for identification. All students – irrespective of their track – felt the need to defend their field of study against negative views and stereotypes.” (Maene et al., 2022, p.63). This prompted the SIS-researchers to include survey items on track identities in their quantitative data-collection. Based on this qualitative phase, the track identity items could be tailored more specifically to what students themselves indicated as being relevant concerning tracks. These items were then designed to explore the characteristics, development and influence of the track identity, inspired by ethnic identity research.

The SIS-survey used a multistage stratified sampling approach. Schools were sampled to vary along three axes: educational system (i.e., Dutch-speaking or French-speaking), diversity of the student population (ranging from monocultural to multicultural schools) and track diversity (i.e., multilateral or categorical schools) (Maene, 2022, p. 69). The choice was consciously made to oversample students with diverse backgrounds (ethnic, national, religious and a range of tracks and school compositions), to ensure that background differences could be studied without running into issues of insufficient data on each subgroup. In addition, to allow a sociological perspective on the data, structural (range of tracks) and cultural contextual features (Dutch- and French-speaking schools) had to be incorporated in the design of the dataset. In the first wave, urban areas with a high number of inhabitants with a migration background were selected. This led to six areas in Flanders (Antwerpen, Gent, Genk, Leuven, Mechelen, Turnhout), the Brussels Capital and five regions in Wallonia (Charleroi, Liège, Mons, Tournai, Verviers). For logistical reasons, half of these were retained (Antwerpen, Mechelen, Genk, Charleroi, Verviers and the Brussels Capital). In order to achieve a minimum sample of 60 schools, 341 schools had to be contacted, due to a lower than usual response rate, compared to other Flemish educational research (e.g., Van Houtte et al., 2005). Within this selection of urban regions with high migration backgrounds, a further stratum was applied. Maene and colleagues (2021) tried to achieve a mixture of schools that provided academic education, technical-vocational education and multilateral schools, offering a combination of the academic with either the technical and vocational education. It was important for these multilateral schools that these different tracks were provided on the same

location, as different campuses for different tracks would not allow to study intergroup contact. For Brussels, both Dutch- and French-speaking schools were sampled on purpose. The SIS-researchers recruited schools from each tracking type in every region, yet this mix was not achieved everywhere because schools did not respond, particularly in Wallonia, where only two categorical schools could be included, compared to five multilateral schools (Maene, 2022). For Flanders and the Brussels capital, the main reason given by schools for non-participation was that they were over-demanded for research, and some Brussels schools also stated that they did not consider organizing a survey feasible in their school climate and that they felt that the third year students were not old or mature enough to answer questions regarding identity. Schools in Wallonia generally hold a more color-blind approach to diversity which made them more resistant to the topic of this survey, and schools in Liège explicitly stated that they preferred to participate with research from the Université de Liège. This eventually led to 4540 surveyed students in 64 schools.

The principals of each school were contacted, stating the purpose of the survey, although staying somewhat vague on the central research topic, as has been done previously in research on racism or discrimination (e.g., D'hondt, 2015). Involvement in the study required filling in a survey by the students of the third year of secondary education, estimated at one hour to complete, the teachers and the principal themselves. Students' consent was obtained both from the students and from their parents through an opt-out consent form, as these students are minors. Additionally, the students were also asked for their voluntary participation. This led to an 80 percent response rate (*n*= 4584). The data collection took place from September 2017 to December 2017. There were no clear patterns in student non-consent based on gender or ethnicity. The study was, due to this stratified strategy and the response rates, not fully representative. In terms of ethnicity, there was an underrepresentation of Belgians without foreign roots (56 percent population, 36.7 percent sample), a considerable oversampling of Belgians with a foreign background, based on the birthplace of the grandparents or parents (33 percent population, 44.2 percent sample), and of non-Belgians (11 percent population, 19.1 percent sample) (Statbel, 2018; Maene et al., 2021). This oversampling was on purpose. For tracking, there was an overrepresentation of academic track students (41 percent population, 59.9 percent sample) and an underrepresentation of both technical (31 percent population, 22.8 percent sample) and

vocational students (25 percent population, 17.3 percent sample). The arts track was not included in the survey as they represent only 2.2 percent of the secondary school population (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). For sex there was a slight underrepresentation of boys (52 percent population, 49.1 percent sample). Concerning the arts track, we are aware that not including them in our study does not allow us to discuss the full educational spectrum of tracks in Belgium. In terms of educational status and position within the cascade system, the arts track is to some extent comparable to the technical track, with finalities in both higher education and labor market, but with a clear focus on the artistic component (Onderwijskiezer, 2023).

Teacher data were also gathered from September to December 2017, through an anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaire, with an estimated time of only 20 minutes. The survey was personally distributed by Maene to the third-grade teachers, the researcher explained the overall research theme and goal during a meeting in the staff room (Maene, 2022). Every teacher received the questionnaire together with a return envelope to guarantee anonymity. Teachers who were absent received the survey, the envelope and information in their mailbox. The teacher survey received considerable criticism, mainly in Francophone schools, aimed at the formulation of certain ethnic identity questionnaire items that went against their own color-blind approach to diversity. This resistance does not relate to the tracking items used from the teacher survey, so content-wise we do not expect bias for any of the analyses for this research, yet this resistance is reflected in the response rate. In total, 324 teachers across 43 schools filled in the survey. Since there were about 1600 teachers across 64 schools invited to participate, a response-rate of 20,25 percent was achieved. Caution in interpretation is advised, since there are some divergences between the sample and the teacher population: an overrepresentation of younger teachers (25 percent of survey compared 13.32 percent in the workforce) and an underrepresentation of teachers between 50 to 59 years old (16.5 percent in survey, 24.7 percent in the workforce) (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). Another relevant parameter concerning age would be teachers' years of experience within the profession, to account for lateral entrants into the teaching profession at later ages. Yet neither the Flemish nor Walloon government do provide detailed numbers on this parameter, so this parameter does not shed an additional light on the representativity of the sample. The sex distribution of the sample is in line with the teaching population: 38.3 percent

of the teachers were male (*n*= 92), 61.7 percent were female in the survey (*n* = 148), in 2017–2018 63 percent of Flemish teachers were women (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). In terms of gender division per track and subject matter, to possibly discern between generic course teachers and track-specific course teachers, the government does not provide accurate information to compare this with the sample.

5.3 Variables

All dependent variables and the key independent variables which are present across multiple empirical chapters are discussed here. The other independent variables will be discussed in their respective empirical chapters.

5.3.1 Dependent variables

Teacher job satisfaction was measured by items selected from the Job Descriptive Index, which consists of 18 items (Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969). There was a mixture of positive and negative items, with for instance 'my job is useful', 'healthy' and 'challenging' on the one hand and 'my job is frustrating', 'it never stops' and 'is monotonous' on the other hand. The scale reflects teachers' general satisfaction with their teaching work. The negative items were recoded so a high score reflects a high job satisfaction. The items were rated from *absolutely disagree* (1) to *definitely agree* (5). The job satisfaction scale was obtained by calculating the sum score (ranging from 18 to 90) across the 18 items (*n* = 235; *M* = 62.89, *SE* = 6.94, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.66). Surveying scales with both positively and negatively worded items, while attempting to reduce acquiescence bias, can affect the covariance structure of a scale (Zhang, Noor & Savalei, 2016). An EFA seems to mostly confirm the effects of differently worded items. In a three factor Varimax solution, there is one factor on which all positively worded items load, one where almost all negative items load. The only two items that do not fall in line are 'my work is irritating' and 'frustrating' which load on a separate third factor. This might be considered as 'job anger' which might not fit in with job satisfaction. But for we opted for the theoretically established foundation of this scale, rather than altering it due to the results of this EFA, particularly since we work with a small sample size in the teacher survey which might lead to more statistical errors than prior large scale research using the same construct.

Students' track evaluations: measuring students' feelings towards their own and other tracks, formulated as: 'Express your feelings towards the following groups on a scale from 0 (totally negative) to 100 (totally positive). Fifty means you are neutral towards that group'. For the total sample the academic track is most highly rated with an average score of 76.25 (*n* = 4540; *SD* = 24.13), followed by the technical track at 71.16 (*n* = 4540; *SD* = 21.45), and the vocational track at 56.98 (*n* = 4540; *SD* = 28.67). This 'feeling thermometer' is widely used to measure group evaluations, and is a good indicator of global in- and outgroup attitudes and shows high correlations with measures that use multiple items to measure the same attitudes (e.g., Verkuyten, 2005).

Students' track chauvinism. Students were presented five statements on how they view their track compared to other tracks. These statements were formulated based on the explorative qualitative interviews of the SIS-survey and inspired by research on national and ethnic chauvinism. Items previously used in national and/or ethnic chauvinism research, like 'the world would be a better place if people were more like the X-group' and 'Generally, [country] is a better country than most other countries' (e.g., Raijman et al., 2008) were not included as these can seem rather broad, whereas the explorative qualitative interviews gave the basis to break down sense of superiority into more detailed characteristics, more explicitly linked to education but inspired by the same underlying sentiment as previously used items. Items commonly used in welfare chauvinism research did not translate very well to the educational context. Van der Waal et al. (2010) operationalized welfare chauvinism as: 'Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?'. The studied items were therefore more inspired by national/ethnic chauvinism research, rather than welfare chauvinism. The statements had five answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5): (1) 'students in my track are smarter than those in other tracks', (2) 'have more capabilities than those in other tracks', (3) 'are cooler than those in other tracks', (4) 'my track is harder' and (5) 'more creative'. The goal of these items was to measure students' sense of track superiority (i.e., track chauvinism). To validate its conceptual difference with students' public track regard, we included the items of these two measures in an exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis included a total of eight items for which two factors explained 51 percent of the variance (KMO = 0.859). The factor analysis showed that

students' track chauvinism and students' track public regard are conceptually distinct. The factor loadings for track chauvinism ranged from 0.623 to 0.861, except for the item 'my track is harder' which had a factor loading of 0.450. Another exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation was performed to test whether the items that should constitute chauvinism and patriotism loaded on unique factors (Table1). The factor analysis included a total of eight items for which two factors explained 68.48 percent of the variance (KMO = 0.784). These items distinctly loaded onto two unique factors, in line with the theoretical expectations. The first factor solely includes the five items that are theoretically considered as chauvinism items, with loadings ranging from 0.537 to 0.868. The non-chauvinism item with the highest factor load was 0.095. The same distinction is present in factor two, which only included the three patriotism items, with factor loadings ranging from 0.876 to 0.921. The highest loading for a non-patriotic item in this factor is 0.259. Track chauvinism and track patriotism are therefore conceptually distinct.

Table 1: exploratory factor analysis: chauvinism and patriotism items.

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
I am happy to be part of this track.	0.048	0.921
I am proud to be part of this track.	0.095	0.900
I have a good feeling about my track.	0.058	0.876
Students from my track are smarter than those from other tracks.	0.829	0.110
Students from my track have more capabilities than those from other tracks.	0.868	0.078
Students from my track are more creative than those from other tracks.	0.824	-0.027
My track is harder than the other tracks.	0.537	0.259
Students from my track are cooler than those from other tracks.	0.735	-0.043

Since it is the first time, to our knowledge, that track chauvinism is employed as a statistical construct, we had to test whether the five chauvinism items that were surveyed are one scale that is consistent in meaning across all three tracks, if some items have to be omitted or if this breaks down into different constructs of chauvinism per track. This was studied through measurement invariance (MI) testing. If the constructs achieve MI across tracks, it gives more credibility to track chauvinism meaning the same to all students, regardless of track, which allows between track comparisons. We tested MI through MPlus (Geiser, 2013). Following the guidelines on reporting MI-testing by Van de Schoot and colleagues (2012) and Putnick and Bornstein (2016), we started from the full five item model and tested for configural, metric and scalar invariance across the tracks (Table 20). Configural invariance means that for all studied groups, the same items load on the same factors. When achieving metric invariance, these items also have equivalent factor loadings. Scalar variance means that the intercepts of these items are also invariant across the different groups for the studied factors. For all models, the model fit was tested through the CFI, RMSEA and SRMR indices. CFI should achieve values larger than 0.90 and preferably larger than 0.95 (van de Schoot, Lugtig & Hox, 2012). RMSEA should be smaller than 0.08 and preferably smaller than 0.05. Initial analysis showed no MI when all five chauvinism items were included (chapter 6.3). When comparing between the different invariance models, they all differ significantly in terms of their chi-square ($p \leq 0.001$).

Therefore, based on the modification indices which indicate which pairs of item intercepts are non-invariant, the 'students in my track are more creative' item was deleted, as its correlation modification indices (40.9 and 27.6) were considerably higher than those of the other variables, with values ranging between 20 and 14. The new scale with 4 items does not achieve MI yet, but it does already show a non-significant chi-square difference between the configural and metric model (p= 0.142), which is an improvement over the 5-item model (see empirical chapter 6.3).

When looking at the modification indices to delete an additional item, there were no clear values that stood out, the correlation of the 'smarter' and 'more capable' items (27.710) and 'my track is harder' with 'cooler' (27.714) gave the highest values, but were too close to base a decision on. As the first deleted item was 'students are more creative', it seemed theoretically more coherent to try and eliminate 'student in my track are cooler' next, as these

two could be considered non-cognitive, whereas my track is 'harder', students have 'more capabilities' and are 'smarter' all pertain to cognitive skills.

The new three item scale did achieve metric MI which is already stronger than configural invariance. In terms of model fit, the CFI (1.000), RMSEA (0.017) and SRMR (0.018) are all within the desired threshold values (Chen, 2007; van de Schoot, Lugtig & Hox, 2012). As the three item model did not achieve scalar invariance, partial scalar invariance was tested. Partial scalar invariance testing is done by constraining all intercepts and then unconstraining one intercept. This can show which intercepts are invariant and which problematically variate between the studied groups. All partially unconstrained models achieve a desirable CFI, the models that unconstrain 'my track is smarter' and 'more capable' achieve a good RMSEA, but none of the models achieve a good SRMR. So the model fit of these unconstrained models is not unequivocally good. Table 21 (empirical chapter 6.3) presents a comparison of the partially unconstrained models with the three item model that achieved metric invariance. The p-values indicate that none of the partially unconstrained models are invariant compared to the metric model ($p > 0.05$), therefore there is no partial scalar invariance achieved.

The question remained whether there were any viable alternative chauvinism constructs from an empirical point of view, to make sure that any non-theoretical models might not provide a better basis for analysis. As Tables 2 and 3 show, deleting either 'students in my track are smarter' or 'have more capabilities', in favor of retaining 'students in my track are cooler' did not achieve any level of M.I. Deleting 'my track is harder' did achieve metric invariance, which is on par with the selected model (called alternative chauvinism going forward). Additional partial scalar invariance testing (Table 4) shows that it also does not achieve partial scalar invariance. In terms of their model fit indices (Table 3), when unconstraining one intercept at a time, all three models show good CFI, unconstraining 'smarter' had ideal RMSEA, unconstraining 'more capabilities' showed decent RMSEA and 'cooler' did not achieve the desired cut-off value RMSEA-value of at least smaller than 0.05 (Van de Schoot, Lugtig & Hox, 2012). For the SRMR, only unconstraining 'smarter' remained within the suggested cut-off values (Van de Schoot, Lugtig & Hox, 2012). Broadly speaking, the model fit indices of alternative chauvinism are not distinctly better than those for cognitive chauvinism. We therefore have no empirical reason to prefer alternative chauvinism or any alternative composition over the cognitive chauvinism scale.

Table 2: Testing alternative three item chauvinism models

	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
'Smarter', 'more capabilities' and 'cooler' model						
Configural	0.000	0	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Metric	5.323	4	0.256	1.000	0.015	0.014
Scalar	261.245	8	0.000	0.941	0.145	0.072
'more capabilities', 'cooler', 'harder' model						
Configural	0.000	0	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Metric	27.391	4	0.000	0.990	0.062	0.029
Scalar	676.823	8	0.000	0.709	0.236	0.107
'Smarter', 'cooler' and 'harder' model						
Configural	0.001	0	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Metric	26.063	4	0.000	0.990	0.061	0.027
Scalar	673.237	8	0.000	0.695	0.235	0.118

Table 3: Alternative chauvinism ('smarter', 'more capabilities', 'cooler): three item model, unconstrained item intercept

	χ^2	Df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
'Smarter'	16.010	6	0.014	0.998	0.033	0.027
'more capabilities'	58.927	6	0.000	0.988	0.077	0.054
'Cooler'	287.534	6	0.000	0.934	0.177	0.114

Table 4: Partial scalar invariance testing: comparison of unconstrained alternative Chauvinism to Metric Invariance Model

	χ^2-Diff	Df-diff	p
'Smarter'	10.687	2	0.005
'more capacities'	53.604	2	0.000
'Cooler'	282.211	2	0.000

While we strictly adhered to the measurement invariance demands posed to the chauvinism construct, measurement invariance testing is not *the* standard practice in sociology (yet) and has some discussion attached to its implementation. There are two sides, on the one hand that measurement invariance should always be tested when comparing groups and that without achieving (partial) scalar invariance it is impossible to make conclusive statements on these variables (e.g., Putnick & Bornstein, 2016; Meuleman et al., 2023). On the other hand, researchers warn that adhering too strictly to measurement invariance testing limits the opportunities for comparative research and that statistically sound measures cannot be a replacement for theoretically sound measures (e.g. Welzel et al., 2021; Robitzsch & Lüdtke, 2023). Measurement invariance aims to identify and account for whether certain items act differently in different contexts. These can act differently for a myriad of reasons: translation errors, differential interpretations in different nations. This method is often used in international comparative research. The following examples show the added value that applying measurement invariance testing has. One example comes from Billiet (2013), wherein an international comparison of religiosity based on the European Social Survey included an item on attending religious services, which for the Islam is a gendered item, wherein women attend less services, which does not make them less religious per se. In other religions religiosity is more connected to attending services. So if this was not controlled, the results risked to be interpreted wrongly. Meuleman and colleagues (2023) stress the importance for variance testing in international comparative research to also account for possible translation errors. They use the example of Inglehart and Welzel (2005), wherein the support for military rule in Vietnam was initially misinterpreted, as it turned out that due to translation errors, they were asked about 'the role of the military', rather than 'the military'

in general, making between country comparisons with nations asked about 'the military' less valid.

What is important, in our opinion, about these previous examples is that measurement invariance is a tool to uncover errors or risks for misinterpretation which might have also been uncovered by controlling more stringently for the possible translation or misinterpretation errors between cultures when designing a survey. We therefore opt to follow the stance of Robitzsch and Lüdtke (2023) regarding measurement invariance testing: while measurement invariance testing is a valuable tool when investigating latent factors, violations to invariance should not automatically lead to alterations of the included items or even unquestioned deletion of items. This should only be done if there are additional theoretical or substantive reasons for these alterations. Additionally, item-deletion is even more complex when comparing more than two groups, as different groups might differ on different variables, whereby the choice for which item to delete might once again become a biased or theoretical choice, rather than solely a statistical choice.

When constructing the 'social' and 'cognitive' chauvinism measure based on measurement invariance, we believe we did follow the stance of Robitzsch and Lüdtke (2023). When there was no clear best statistical solution for going from a four-item to a three-item scale, we chose a theoretical approach. Additionally, there are theoretical motivations as to why social and cognitive attitudes might act differently between the academic and the other tracks (see chapter 6.2 and 6.3). Lastly, based on a factor-analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha's combined with these theoretical arguments, we found sufficient support for including social chauvinism, despite the fact it was not achieving measurement invariance. The added value of measurement invariance testing for these empirical chapters was that it made us aware of the relevant distinction between the two types of chauvinism, reflected in their differing effects on general self-esteem, the importance of looking at chauvinism as consisting of sub-dimensions rather than one unified concept and to consider this as an open invitation to future research to look more deeply into relevant items that should be added to the study of social, cognitive and possibly other types of track chauvinism.

Since tracking was the main grouping type that was discussed theoretically, whereas the region (Dutch-speaking or French-speaking) was only included as a control variable, we decided to only test measurement invariance with the tracks as comparative groups. Yet

measurement invariance testing originates from national and cultural comparative research, so we decided to re-test measurement invariance with region as the grouping variable, to account for possible translation errors or interpretation differences between the regions. The results (Table 5) show that cognitive chauvinism achieved scalar invariance ($p > 0.05$), meaning that this construct is allowed to be compared between the regions without restrictions or reservations. Therefore track chauvinism is split into cognitive (n= 4426, M = 2.6, SD = 0.91) and social chauvinism measure (n= 4448; M = 2.37; SD = 0.99).

Table 5: measurement invariance testing of regional differences: cognitive chauvinism

Cognitive chauvinism						
	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Configural	0.000	0	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Metric	2.549	2	0.280	0.999	0.025	0.024
Scalar	2.925	4	0.570	1.000	0.000	0.022

General self-esteem was measured by a Likert-scale inspired by the 10 item Rosenberg Self-Concept Scale (see section 11.2, appendices; Rosenberg, 1963), consisting of seven items, as selected for the RADISS 2 survey (D'hondt, 2015; D'hondt, Maene & Stevens, 2023) (1) 'In general, I am satisfied with who I am', (2) 'Sometimes I think I am not good for anything', (3) 'I think I have a couple of good qualities', (4) 'I do not have many qualities to be proud of', (5) 'I am a valuable person, at least equally valuable as others', (6) 'I take a positive stance towards myself', (7) 'I will never do as good as most others'. The items had five answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5). The negatively worded items were recoded so a high score represented high self-esteem. To validate these items as belonging to the same construct, we included all seven items in a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA for the whole sample showed that all negatively formulated items had a factor loading of .50 or lower, whereas the positively worded items have factor loadings between .53 and .70. As stated with teacher job satisfaction, survey-scales with both positively and negatively worded items can affect the covariance structure of a scale (Zhang, Noor & Savalei, 2016). As the Rosenberg scale has been applied successfully on a wide range of research for decades

and with the fact that the only difference in the Varimax factor-analysis is between the negatively and positively worded items, which do not seem to discuss distinctly different aspects of self-esteem, it seems reasonable to attribute these separate factor loadings to the wording of the items, rather than assuming that the Rosenberg self-esteem scale contains two unique constructs. The combination of positively and negatively worded items also affects the goodness of fit indicators (*RMSEA*= 0.143;*CFI*= 0.837; *AIC*= 140.212).

The Cronbach's Alpha of this scale (0.780) would not improve if any of the items would be omitted. Therefore all seven items are included in the self-esteem scale for analysis (M = 3.55, SD = 0.691, α = 0.780). When rerunning these CFA for each track separately, the same pattern emerges, with good factor loadings for the positively worded but not for the negatively worded items. The difference in factor loadings is more pronounced in the vocational track (lowest loading 0.08) than in the technical (0.34) and academic track (0.48). The Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.661 for the vocational track to 0.800 for the academic track. The means for the three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < .05$).

5.3.2 Key independent variables

Educational system: to control for possible region/policy differences, a dummy variable is created with Flemish education, which included 36 surveyed schools (counting 2659 students) as the reference category. The Walloon education has 28 included schools counting 1925 students. Schools in the Brussels Capital Region fall under one of these systems depending on the principal language of education, being Dutch for the Flemish category and French for the Walloon category.

School structure: it is common in Belgian educational research to consider general (academic) schools on the one hand and technical-vocational schools on the other hand as categorical schools, to most accurately reflect the Belgian educational landscape (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015). Any combination of academic with either technical or vocational education provided in the same school or campus can be considered a multilateral school. Alternatively, only schools (or campuses) providing one track can be considered as categorical schools. We made this last choice when teachers were involved, as the teacher survey actually had fairly similar sample sizes for this categorization of categorical (n= 91) and multilateral school teachers (n = 137). If we would use the same categorization on the students survey we would

get the following: 39.2 percent of students would be in a categorical school, 60.8 percent in multilateral schools, compared to the 58.9 percent categorical and 41.1 percent multilateral school students in the actual operationalization. When broken down per track, the most important differences can be found in the technical and vocational track. Only 8.9 percent of the sampled technical track students are in purely technical schools and only 11.5 percent of vocational students are in a single track school. These very low numbers could be indicative of the fact that single track technical and vocational schools rarely occur in Belgian education. We will not make conclusive statements on that since the sampling was stratified and oversampled academic track students. So while it might have been theoretically interesting, the fact that single track technical and vocational schools might just not be a relevant group in Belgian education and that this operationalization would go against standard practice in secondary education research in Belgium, made us opt against this operationalization type for the student data. The relatively low sample (n =92 technical; n = 81 vocational) might also put the analysis at risk for biases or limit the statistical power of our sample. The study focusing on teachers' job satisfaction (chapter 6.1) was explicitly labeled as more explorative due to its low sample size and response rate, so we feel that is more reasonable to try this different operationalization of categorical schools with the teacher survey than the student survey.

Prior GPA was measured by asking students to self-report which average grade they obtained in the previous school year. As there is no guarantee students are still part of the same track as the one in which they achieved the reported GPA, prior GPA is used as a general indicator of educational success. This was scored as a percentage (n = 3705; M = 67.57; SD = 12.67). Students in the academic track had the highest average GPA (69.98), technical track students had the lowest (62.28) and the vocational track students scored in between (65.10). The three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < 0.05$). As there were no centrally administered standardized tests in Belgian education at the time of the data-collection we have to rely on self-reported GPA, which does raise questions of validity due to possible cover-up and memory issues in students (Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015b). Yet, it is the best measure we have.

Ethnic background: ethnic background was operationalized as a dummy variable with Belgian natives and Western Europeans as the reference category and all other backgrounds grouped in the dummy category. Throughout educational research there is a wide range on how ethnic

background is categorized (Batruch et al., 2023). Since ethnic background is a control variable for this dissertation and the inclusion of multiple categories would make the discussion of ethnic background rather complex, we opted for a simplified solution with only two categories. The choice to include Western Europeans in the majority category is in line with the Belgian definition of 'ethnic minority students' as not having at least one (grand)parent being of non-Belgian or Western European descent (e.g., Timmerman, Hermans & Hoornaert, 2002; Brans et al., 2004; Boone & Van Houtte,2013).

Socio-economic status (SES) is based on students' reports of parental occupation, which was matched to the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, De Graaf & Treiman 1992; *M* = 48.18, *SD* = 16.71). Ideally, the SES measure would be based on parents' own reporting, but due to the limitations of the SIS-dataset we use student reported parental occupation. Student reports do generally seem a good indicator of parental SES (e.g., Ensminger et al., 2000; Lien, Friestad & Klepp, 2001). Students were also allowed to give a brief description of parental occupation so the researchers had more information to determine parents' jobs. The highest occupational score of both parents was retained as the students' SES indicator. Academic track students have the highest average SES (*M* = 50.16, *SD* = 17.31), followed by the vocational (*M* = 44.57, *SD* = 14.62) and the technical track (*M* = 44.43, *SD* = 19.44). The technical and vocational track did not differ significantly, but they both differ significantly from the academic track.

5.4 Analytical strategy

Educational research commonly operates at one or multiple levels: students (level 1), are grouped into classes (level 2), which are a part of schools (level 3), which can even be part of subnational educational systems (level 4). For this research, we opted to study two levels within a multilevel analysis framework: the student- and school-level. We opted not to include the classroom level for empirical and theoretical reasons. The SIS-survey includes 504 classes, of which 294 have less than 10 students, 199 even have 5 or less students. These numbers are too low to confidently perform multilevel analysis on (Austin, 2010). Theoretically, classes are not straightforward to include either: while a class is one unified group of students in theory, these students are often grouped with students from other classes (within the same track) for certain courses in practice, especially if the classes are rather small. This makes the class as a unit not necessarily representative of the lived experiences of its students. The subnational

educational systems in Belgium were included where deemed necessary, but only as a control variable and not as a new level within our multilevel approach.

All multilevel analysis are performed using HLM6. A hierarchical regression analysis was opted for when feasible, as the addition of one or few independent variables at a time provides more insight in the interplay between these independent variables and how their relationship to the outcome variable changes through the addition of the other variables. The order in which these variables were added was theoretically determined, starting with the broad category of tracks, followed by the control variables and then the theoretically discussed independent variables were added one by one (Lewis, 2007). Any interaction effects were modeled only after all other independent variables were included.

6. Empirical chapters

6.1 Empirical Chapter 1: One does not simply track students: the relationship between teachers' perceived public track regard and their job satisfaction in a context of rigid tracking.

6.1.1 Abstract

Although there is a wealth of research on the educational and broader outcomes of tracking in education, there is virtually no research that investigates teachers' track identities on such outcomes. Building on research that focuses on the determinants of teachers' job satisfaction, tracking outcomes and social categorization theory, this study tests the relationship between the perceived public regard of a teachers' track and their job satisfaction, in a Belgian context of within- (vocational, technical and general education tracks) and between-school tracking (multilateral versus categorical schools). Data of the Belgian SIS (School, Identity and Society)-survey, a large-scale dataset gathered in 2017, containing the self-reports of 324 teachers, clustered in 43 secondary schools is used to test particular hypotheses regarding this relationship. The results of a multilevel analysis show that the relationship between teachers' public track regard and their job satisfaction varies according to the track they teach and whether they work in a categorical or multilateral school. The findings highlight the importance of carrying out further research on tracked identities in education.

6.1.2 Introduction

Ability grouping in education and tracking as a grouping method have been at the center of debate for decades. Ability grouping stems from the idea that teaching students in homogeneous ability groups leads to better results through curricula and teaching methods that are adapted to the students' ability level (Hallinan et al., 2003). Tracking (US, Belgium) or streaming (UK) refers to a situation in which students are taught an entirely different curriculum depending on their ability group and preparing for disparate futures, while setting or banding refers to a situation in which students are differentiated in ability groups for specific subjects (Gamoran, 1992).

Previous research shows that students in the 'lower' technical and vocational tracks are disadvantaged, because these tracks are associated with lower quality of instruction (Page,

1991), lower levels of student motivation and can facilitate a culture of futility in its students (Saleh et al., 2005; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015). Due to a generally lower societal valuation of non-academic tracks in knowledge-based societies, the choice for a 'lower track' is more often a negative one, instead of a choice based on interest and ability (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). When lower track students study at the same school as academic track students they develop even stronger anti-school attitudes through increased status deprivation (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009).

6.1.2.1 Teachers and student tracking: student characteristics and societal evaluation

Teachers also experience effects from ability grouping. First, due to the effects of tracking on students, teachers teaching in lower status tracks are more likely to experience a group of students that is motivationally and ethnically more diverse (Gamoran, 2010; Van Praag et al., 2015a), shows a higher incidence of deviant behavior among students (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008) and is characterized by a culture of futility (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). This less study-oriented culture of their students leads to lower job satisfaction in vocational track teachers (Van Houtte, 2006b). Teachers change their expectations and behavior towards students based on track: they have lower expectations for 'lower track' students, develop a 'culture of futility', might try to create a more supportive environment in these tracks and shift away from a focus on instructional to more administrative and disciplinary tasks (Chmielewski et al., 2013; Hallinan, 1994; Kelly & Carbonaro, 2012).

Although research has focused on the effects of tracking on student and teacher outcomes, there is, to the best of our knowledge, almost no research that investigates how perceived society-wide judgements about tracks influence teachers who belong to such tracks. This possible association can be motivated by the observation that in many societies, lower tracks are perceived in a more negative way (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010; Smet, 2010) and the related idea that track-membership (as a student or a teacher) constitutes a clear societal identity (Hyland, 2002). The theoretical concept to study this public evaluation is public regard, meaning 'the extent to which individuals feel that others view their educational track positively or negatively' (Sellers et al., 1998, adapted for educational track). The influence of public regard is especially plausible for teachers since it has been shown by Ihme and Möller (2015) that future teachers allow their self-assessment to be affected by public evaluation.

This article focuses on this gap in the literature by studying the relationship between teachers' perceived public track regard and their job satisfaction in a Belgiancontext of within and between school tracking. In addition, by investigating the effect of (perceived) society-wide evaluations of tracks on teacher's job satisfaction, this study adds to existing research that focuses primarily on school and classroom characteristics and processes in explaining variance in teachers' job-satisfaction.

6.1.3 Theoretical framework

6.1.3.1 Teachers' job satisfaction

Teachers job satisfaction is seen as the teacher's assessment of his/her (emotional) need fulfillment in the present (Evans, 1998, 2001). The importance of job satisfaction is twofold. On the one hand it influences teachers' teaching practice and how they bond with students, since lower teacher satisfaction decreases teachers' involvement in maintaining positive interactions with their students (Sava, 2002). On the other hand, research shows that teachers' job satisfaction affects their career mentality. Lower job satisfaction can result in higher job turnover (Van Dick et al., 2004a, 2004b) and the stressors that result in lower job satisfaction can also lead to burn-out (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Wolpin, Burke & Greenglass, 1991). At times it has been suggested that teachers' job satisfaction might also influence student achievement (Miller, 1981), but recent work by Caprara et al. (2006) and Kincade (2013) found no relation between teacher job satisfaction and student achievement.

Based on previous research we can identify three categories of factors that influence teachers' job satisfaction: personal, structural and cultural factors. Personal factors include, among others, teachers' instructional performance (Klusmann et al., 2008), the feeling of contributing to the growth of students (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006), the importance of working with youth and love for the subject matter taught (Lortie & Clement, 1975), the perceived view of society on teachers (Rhodes et al., 2004), the quality of the relationships teachers develop with principals, students and parents (Johnson et al., 2012; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012), and their sense of self-efficacy (e.g., Judge & Bono, 2001; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Steca, 2003; Collie et al., 2012), referring to how competent they feel in performing the major work tasks, which also heightens the commitment to the teaching job (Coladarci, 1992).

School-structural factors connected with teacher job satisfaction entail school facility quality like proper heating, clean classrooms and quality of learning material (Buckley et al., 2005) and work conditions like organizational support (Hulpia et al., 2009; Lent et al., 2011), job demands (Kittel & Leynen, 2003) and administration control (Ma & MacMillan, 1999).

Lastly there are cultural factors shown to be related to teacher job satisfaction, for which we define culture as a fairly stable set of taken-for-granted assumptions, shared beliefs, meanings, and values that form a kind of backdrop for action (Smircich, 1985). First there are (school-)culture factors shaped among colleagues, like the balance between autonomy and collegiality between teachers (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000).

Secondly there are factors directed by the school leadership, such as the principal leadership style steering the school culture (Anderman, Belzer & Smith, 1991; Bogler, 2001) and the opportunity for decision participation (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995). Thirdly there are cultural (dis)satisfiers due to the student composition, as for instance, racial mismatch leads to less satisfaction in white teachers (Mueller et al., 1999; Renzulli et al., 2011; Stearns et al., 2014). Furthermore, as studied in Flanders, tracked student groups might result in more satisfied teachers in the academic track, because of the more study-oriented student culture in the academic track compared to the other tracks (Van Houtte, 2006a). Lastly there are cultural factors which cannot be assigned to one specific group within the school, such as a supportive school culture and a willingness from the school to innovate (Aeltermans, Engels, Van Petegem & Verhaeghe, 2007) and the openness of the school culture to implement social-emotional learning (Collie et al., 2012). Most research on teachers' job satisfaction focuses on a multitude of personal factors, coming from the personal assessment of and experiences on the job. In contrast, there is less variety in structural (dis)satisfiers, being mostly school facility factors. The research into school cultural (dis)satisfiers shows influence from explicit school policy, student body composition and implicit interactions between different school actors.

6.1.3.2 Ability grouping

Ability grouping is a common practice in education. A brief overview by Maaz et al. (2008) shows that different nations choose different grouping systems. The largest differences are between the extent of differentiation (tracking, banding or setting), implicit or explicit tracking and within or between school tracking. Ability grouping practices lead to different student

compositions per track in terms of social background, ethnicity and study orientation (Tan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2006a). Borman and Dowling (2008) showed the importance of schools' socioeconomic composition, average student achievement level and schools' racial/ethnic composition on teachers' job retention through job satisfaction. Tracked education is characterized by a convergence of more lower socio-economic status students and more ethnic minority students in the lower tracks (Gamoran, 2010). So, the student composition per track differs in a way that has already been shown to influence teachers' job satisfaction. Students' more diverse socio-economic, ethnic and educational background in technical and vocational education makes us hypothesize that academic track teachers will have the highest job satisfaction, followed by technical and eventually vocational track teachers.

6.1.3.3 Social Categorization Theory on teachers' professional identities

Beijaard et al. (2004) showed that a professional identity consists of several subidentities for teachers. These include, for example, being a subject matter specialist, didactical expert and pedagogic expert and are performed in social contexts like interacting with the student body, their colleagues or the school organization (Beijaard et al., 2000; Vloet, 2009). Aside from these teaching specific identities we add the tracking context as an organizational identity within the global teacher identity. The place of track identity in the teaching profession can be integrated in the Social Categorization Theory (SCT) (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). The SCT states that an individual can identify him- or herself (1) with his or her own career (personal level), or, on a group level, with (2) different subunits within his/her organization (e.g., work groups, departments), or (3) with the organization as a whole. We shall put aside career identification since we do not expect this to differ according to the educational tracks a teacher identifies with. In this study the track can be considered as a subunit within the educational organization.

Van Dick et al., (2004a, 2004b) already applied the SCT in the German educational context. They distinguish three dimensions of social categorization: (1) a cognitive component, which is the knowledge of being a member of a certain group, (2) an affective dimension, which is the emotional attachment to that group, and (3) an evaluative aspect, which describes the value connotation assigned to that group from inside and/or outside. These can be linked to concepts more often used in identity research, for which we rely on the overview on collective

identity theories by Ashmore et al. (2004): (1) self-categorization as identifying yourself as part of a particular social grouping, (2) sense of belonging which is seen as emotional attachment and affective involvement with the group or category one is a member of and (3) private and public regard. These latter concepts, developed by Sellers et al. (1998) are based on the evaluative component of identity, where private regard is the self-evaluation of one's own social category and the public regard is the perceived evaluation of one's social category by others.

Van Dick and colleagues (2004) found that teachers' job satisfaction was predicted by the evaluative components of team and career identification and by the affective dimension of school and occupational identification. This shows that collective professional identities have an influence on job satisfaction. The manner in which they do, depends on the identities a teacher attaches him- or herself to, the dimension through which he/she views that identity (cognitive, affective or evaluative) and on the context which gives more salience to certain identities. Van Dick and colleagues did not explicitly include the tracked educational context in their study so we cannot make assumptions about tracks based on their results. Yet, it could be argued that tracking identities can be studied through the SCT-framework since the different tracks (group level) are evaluated differently in terms of prestige by the public and therefore elicit differential public regard.

6.1.3.4 Public track regard

One of the factors that contributes to teachers' job satisfaction is the public regard of teaching (Rempel & Bentley, 1970). Ihme and Möller (2015) showed that future teachers' performance on a test dropped when confronted with negative stereotypes, whereas psychology students did not get affected by stereotypes. Rice (2005) suggests that this more influenceable self-perception derives from the fact that the teaching profession has little quantifiable markers of quality. The insecurity of teachers about their achievements and functioning causes them to attach extra importance to outsider evaluation.

Public track regard as the theoretical concept to capture this public evaluation has its origins in collective identity research in a racial context. The choice to link track identity with racial identity theory is made since both show differences between groups in terms of privilege, social esteem and differential levels of affective membership. This public regard overlaps with the public side of the evaluative aspect of the SCT as studied by Van Dick et al. (2004a, 2004b).

A public opinion on educational tracks is possible since tracks have fixed boundaries and often a clear public hierarchy.

In a knowledge-based society the highest value is attached to academic education, followed by technical education and, lastly, vocational education. Yet the size of the status differences differs at the country-level. In a 14-country comparison Andersen and Van de Werfhorst (2010) examined the differences in future occupational status between technically/vocationally educated students and those just finishing general secondary education. Belgium and the Netherlands show an average gap in occupational status, with technically and vocationally qualified students attaining less labor market status. This divide is significantly larger than the one in Scandinavian countries (Sweden and Norway) and Germany, where there is barely a difference. Eastern European labor markets on the other hand have double the gap in educational status between general and technically/vocationally educated students compared to Belgium.

The students' public status differences could affect the teachers' job satisfaction if teachers connect on a personal level with the negative/positive societal perception about their students. A way in which this societal image of the educational track can affect the teacher is through reflected appraisal, which states that people allow their self-perception to change based on what they assume other people think of them (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Whether someone allows the reflected appraisal to affect him/her might depend on the possibility for self enhancement, meaning that people attach importance to social identities that provide them with positive self-esteem (Hogg, 2006).

Based on the findings stated above and the sensitivity of teachers toward external evaluation we hypothesize that a higher public track regard will result in a higher job satisfaction due to self enhancement.

6.1.3.5 School structure

Educational grouping literature traditionally makes the distinction between within school ability grouping (in for example the United States, United Kingdom and Australia) or between school tracking in which each school provides one track (e.g., The Netherlands and Japan) (Chmielewski, 2014; Leicht, 2013; Ono, 2001). Yet in countries such as Belgium and Germany tracks are organized both between schools and within schools. So called 'categorical schools'

provide one track per school (academic or technical/vocational) and multilateral schools (or 'Gesamtschule' as they are called in Germany) have more than one track in the same school. Yet the distinction between tracks persists and there is no education in heterogeneous or mixed-ability groups (Chmielewski, 2014; Van Houtte et al., 2012).

This distinction between multilateral and categorical schools may have an influence on teacher job satisfaction when we consider that in multilateral schools pupils and teachers from the lower esteemed vocational track (informally) interact with those of the higher regarded technical or highest regarded academic track. Because of this the evaluative component of the SCT takes prominence with the multilateral school context providing confrontation with other track identities and heightening the visibility and salience of the tracked identity (Van Dick et al., 2004a, 2004b). This is in line with the reference group theory which sees visibility as a first necessary requirement for a group identity to have an influence on someone's norms, values and self-evaluation (Kelley, 1952, as cited by Richer, 1976).

The second requirement, meaningfulness of the group, is less clear but we assume this holds true most for the academic track teachers since they can gain positive self-evaluation from this comparison (Schwalbe & Staples, 1991). Van Dick (2001) adds that self-categorization is a necessary requirement for people to be affected by the evaluative or affective identification with identities. In multilateral schools teachers will be reminded of their tracked identity on a daily basis. In categorical schools it is less clear if they will attach as much significance to their tracked identity as those in multilateral schools or whether the school identity might take prevalence.

Taking the above into account we hypothesize that the effect of the public regard of tracks on job satisfaction will be amplified in the multilateral schools in comparison to the categorical schools since the (evaluative) differences in track identities are made clearer through interaction. This holds for both the positive public regard effects in academic track teachers and the negative effects in vocational track teachers.

6.1.4 Research context: Belgium

6.1.4.1 Secondary education structure

In the first two years of secondary education pupils have the choice between a general stream (the A-stream) and a remedial stream (B-stream) for those who did not successfully obtain a

qualification in primary education. The A-stream is in theory a common program for all students. Yet students have to choose elective courses in the first year already like Latin, modern sciences or technology, effectively preparing them for the official track choice they will make after the second year (Van Praag, Boone, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2015a). In an informal way, social characteristics play a part in the choice of these options. Boone and Van Houtte (2012) showed how rational action interpretations by parents cause more students from low SES backgrounds to not choose the academic stream regardless of educational performance.

From the third year onward, students are divided in tracks that they pick based on their educational interest but also based on the grade they obtain after two years. For the third until the sixth year of secondary education in Belgium (Grade 9–12 in the USA; year 10–13 in the UK), students choose between 4 tracks: academic, arts, technical or vocational. These are the same for both Flanders and Wallonia, the two regions of Belgium with their own ministry of education, being sampled in this study (Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding, 2019; Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2019; Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). The academic track is intended to give students a preparation to start higher education. The technical track has both general and technical-theoretical courses. The arts track offers art courses and a general education. Because of the small student population in the arts track (only 2.2 percent of the student population, Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b), this track will not be discussed any further in this paper. The vocational track focuses on training their students for a craft (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019).

A typical feature of tracking in Belgium is the so called ‘cascade’, which relates to the process where students in secondary education ‘aim high’, by trying the more academic courses and tracks first and eventually ‘go down’ to ‘lower’, more technical courses and tracks. This (parental) choice is heavily influenced by societal assumptions with respect to the tracks involved (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). This hierarchy not only indicates the curriculum but also the societal status attributed to the tracks (Smet, 2010). In practice there is barely any upward track mobility in Belgium, confirming the cascade movement pattern and status differences. The clear track hierarchy with its rigid boundaries allows for an evaluation of tracks by the general public and subsequently of the students within the tracks. If teachers

internalize their track identity, they are subject to the same evaluation as other members of their track.

6.1.4.2 National context, tracking and teacher identity

The structural and employment factors of Belgian secondary education promote loyalty to a track without eliciting internal competition between teachers and as such should strengthen the (affective) bond of teachers with their track over time. To highlight which aspects of Belgian education facilitate this bond between track and teacher we make a comparison to teacher tracking in the United States, where there is already some research on teachers' careers taking the track context into consideration. The United States educational literature views ability grouping for teachers as a competitive model where the class you teach is based on your performance relative to your colleagues (Finley, 1984; Kelly, 2004a; Talbert & Ennis, 1990). This is mostly because there is only within school tracking with teachers not being bound to a specific track for multiple years or setting where students are differentiated within their class (Gamoran, 1992). There are also several job positions within a school(group) a teacher can be officially promoted to afterwards. Therefore, a competitive mode within the same school with competition between teachers is enabled.

In a tracked system like Belgium we do not assume a competition between teachers for coveted classes or pupils because firstly, in categorical schools there is no internal upward or downward mobility between tracks. Secondly, even multilateral schoolteachers are often bound to their track by the track specific course they teach. Thirdly, Elchardus and colleagues (2010) observed that Flemish teachers search less for promotions or higher labor positions than comparably educated peers. As such the teacher career is typically seen as 'flat' with mostly horizontal mobility (Becker, 1952). Fourthly, there is no mandatory central examination in or between schools so performance comparisons between teachers cannot be done objectively. In other ability grouping systems (like in the US) teachers attain status from the classes they teach, which can change on a yearly basis, and the results they achieve with their students. They also search (upward) mobility opportunities more quickly to advance their career, therefore seeing track or set membership as a (temporal) validation of their own merit (Finley, 1984). The track identity of Belgian teachers is more likely to become a fixed part of their professional identity over time because of the lack of 'ambitious' mobility to other job positions in the school system. The system of 'lifelong employment' (Kelchtermans, 1993),

which rewards teachers with employment security if they stay within the same school(group) for the duration of their career, further encourages track loyalty. Lastly the rigid tracking could stimulate conscious track membership for teachers from the start of their career. This track choice can be made through choosing track specific subject matters in the teacher education or looking for schools that offer specific tracks when applying to schools for employment.

What unites the academic and vocational track but sets the technical track apart is the clarity of their public identity in Belgium. Where the academic track is widely regarded as the highest achieving, with a clear orientation to higher education, on top of the cascade and with more students from a higher socio-economic status background, the vocational track has its finality in the labor market, with a mixture of students who achieve the least academically, are less aligned with the ideas of academic achievement and have a more diverse social background (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2015a; Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). Both of these tracks offer their own challenges for teachers, but they have fairly clear identities. The profile of the technical track is less straightforward: it has a dual finality in both higher education and the labor market, is for some students not their final track but an intermediate step in the cascade effect and the social mixture is less predictable as well.

6.1.5 Methodology and methods

6.1.5.1 Sample

The data was gathered from September to December 2017 by inviting 1600 teachers across 64 secondary schools to take part in an anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The schools were selected by means of a multistage sampling with a focus on attitudes about cultural diversity as well as educational diversity present within the overall Belgian educational system. Therefore, in a first stage, urban areas with a history of migration were randomly selected. For each city, the schools were divided in strata based on the combination of school tracks that are offered. This led to a division of purely academic schools, technical-vocational schools and schools offering both an academic track and a technical or vocational track. Afterwards, schools were randomly selected from each stratum. The principals in all schools distributed an information letter in Dutch and/or French to all the teachers teaching in the third year since there was also data-collection on third year students for the overarching

research project, informing them about the research theme, the day the survey would be distributed and the anonymous and voluntary participation in the study.

The survey was personally distributed by the researcher to the third-grade teachers, the researcher explained the overall research theme and goal during a meeting in the staff room. Every teacher received the questionnaire together with a returnenvelope to guarantee anonymity. Teachers who were absent received the survey, the envelope and information in their mailbox. The teacher survey received a lot of critique, which mainly had to do with the political sensitivity of certain survey questions and asking teachers to explicitly acknowledge or reflect on stereotypes. This pushback does not relate to the tracking items used, so content-wise we do not expect bias in terms of the current research topic of this paper, yet it does reflect in the response rate. In total, the cooperation of 324 teachers across 43 schools was considered valid for analysis. As a result, a response-rate of 20 percent was achieved.

Caution in interpretation is advised, since there are some divergences between our sample and the teacher population: an overrepresentation of youngest teachers (25 percent of survey compared 13.32 percent in the workforce) and an underrepresentation of teachers 50 to 59 years old (16.5 percent in survey, 24.7 percent in the workforce) (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). This might have an influence, yet current findings on the effect of years of experience on job satisfaction is inconclusive (e.g., Crossman & Harris, 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Van Houtte, 2006b). The sex distribution of our sample is in line with the teaching population: 38.3 percent of the teachers were male (N = 92), 61.7 percent were female (N = 148) in the survey, since in 2017–2018 63 percent of Flemish teachers were women (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). In terms of gender division per track and subject matter the government does not provide us with accurate information to compare this with the sample.

6.1.5.2 Variables

Teacher job satisfaction was measured by using the Job Descriptive Index (see section 11.3 appendices; Smith et al., 1969). This scale consists of 18 items. The scale reflects teachers' general satisfaction with their teaching work. The items, after being recoded when necessary, were rated from *absolutely disagree* (1) to *definitely agree* (5), with the highest score indicating the highest level of job satisfaction. The job satisfaction scale was obtained by

calculating the sum score (ranging from 18 to 90) across the 18 items (Table 6, *N* = 235; *M* = 62.89, *SE* = 6.94, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.66).

The *track membership of teachers* is measured by a self-reporting item in which teachers could state which track they associate themselves most with. There are 243 teachers who associate themselves with one track, being academic (N = 103), technical (N = 74) or vocational (N = 66). Some teachers indicated that they cognitively associated with several tracks. The majority of these teachers combined the academic and technical track (n = 38), followed by a group of teachers that instructs all three tracks (n = 19). Due to limitations of the measurement instrument of 'public track regard', the teachers who indicated multiple tracks were omitted from the analysis.

To measure the *public track regard of teachers*, they were asked to evaluate 3 statements on how students from other tracks evaluate the track in which they teach. The items were formulated as follows: (1) pupils from other tracks look down on my track (2) pupils from other tracks have a higher esteem than pupils in my track (3) pupils from different tracks see the pupils from my track as social outcasts. These items were measured by a 5-point Likert-scale rating from 1 being 'absolutely disagree' to 5 'definitely agree', which were recoded so a high score equals a high public regard. The public track regard scale was obtained by calculating the sum score across the 3 items (ranging from 3 to 15) (Table 6, *N* = 234; *M* = 10.27; *SE* = 2.90, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84). Divided per track this gives the following mean scores for teachers: academic track 12.41 (*SD* = 1.98), technical track 9.64 (*SD* = 2.25) and vocational track 7.61 (*SD* = 2.14), with all three groups differing significantly from each other at the 5 percent level.

The school structure indicates whether a school is categorical or multilateral. Strictly, the former are schools offering only one track, while multilateral schools offer multiple tracks on the same campus. To create this division, the student-data was followed and not the official government data since the latter does not take into account schools' different campuses. There are 16 categorical schools/campuses offering one track (N = 91 teachers; 12 academic, 2 technical and 3 vocational schools/departments) in our sample and 21 multilateral schools/campuses (N = 137) offering a combination of tracks (academic-technical, academic-vocational, technical-vocational, academic-technical-vocational). In previous research, the Belgian technical-vocational schools are considered as categorical (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015), which reflects the most common way to organize technical and vocational education.

For the purposes of our research, however, they are categorized as multilateral schools since our focus is on the contacts of teachers with those from other tracks in the same school, not on how schools are generally organized.

We measured *years of teaching* in general and not age to account for people moving into the teaching profession after a career in a different sector. The answers are skewed to the right with 35.3 percent of teachers reporting 6 years of experience in schools or less, meaning that teachers with less experience are overrepresented in our sample. This is a moderate skewness of 0.704. (Table 6, *N*= 243; *M* = 13.52; *SE* = 10.62).

Table 6: Teacher job satisfaction, public track regard, school structure, years of teaching, sex subject matter – frequencies, means, standard deviations, comparisons by tracks

Variable (N = 243)	Total		Academic (N= 103)		Technical (N= 74)		Vocational (N= 66)		Difference
	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	F or Cramer's V
Teacher job satisfaction (N= 235)	62.89	6.94	61.67	7.22	62.90	6.92	64.75	6.19	3.975*
Public track regard (N = 234)	10.27	2.90	12.41	1.98	9.64	2.25	7.61	2.14	105.707***
School structure (N= 228)	39.9		60.4		19.0		28.1		0.208**
Years of teaching (N= 243)	13.52	10.62	13.33	10.89	15.49	10.69	11.86	9.94	2.100
Sex (N= 242)	38.4		54.5		28.8		24.2		0.285***
Subject matter (N= 241)	50.6		40.8		57.5		58.5		0.170*

The *sex* distribution per track is: a majority of male teachers in the academic track, (55 men to 46 women), where in the technical and vocational track there were far more female teachers in our sample (21 men to 52 women and 16 men to 50 women respectively). We have no explanation for this strong difference and cannot state with certainty if it is attributable to the sampling or a reflection of the educational landscape since the government does not provide detailed information of teacher sex per track.

The relevant divide in *subject matter* for this research is whether teachers teach a subject that is specific for their track or a general subject, since teachers might develop a stronger

connection with their track if the subject matter is more clearly connected with the track. Being a track (non-)specific subject teacher is measured by a self-reported yes or no question. A track specific subject teacher, teaching a course that is typical for his/her track (e.g., in Social Technical Sciences that would constitute the courses on natural science, social science and food), was coded as 0 (N= 122), a general subject teacher as 1 (N=119). For the ease of reading this will be referred to as 'subject matter' from here on. Table 7 provides bivariate correlations between all studied variables.

Table 7: Bivariate correlations

Variables	Teacher job satisfaction (N= 235)	Public track regard (N = 234)	School structure (N=228)	Years of teaching (N= 243)	Sex (N= 242)	Subject matter (N= 241)
Teacher job satisfaction (N= 235)	/	-0.003	0.035	0.046	0.186**	-0.122
Public track regard (N = 234)	-0.003	/	-0.292***	0.021	-0.167*	0.080
School structure (N= 228)	0.035	-0.292***	/	0.055	0.039	-0.028
Years of teaching (N= 243)	0.046	0.021	0.055	/	0.017	-0.131*
Sex (N= 242)	0.186**	-0.167*	0.039	0.014	/	-0.024
Subject matter (N= 241)	-0.122	0.080	-0.028	-0.131*	-0.024	/

* $p < 0.05$.; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

6.1.5.3 Design

To start with, we performed an ANOVA to examine whether there are differences in job satisfaction between the tracks, testing the track satisfaction hypothesis. A second ANOVA was run to test whether there is a difference in terms of variance of the public regard measure between the tracks. Since we theoretically assumed that the academic track would be esteemed the highest, vocational the lowest and the technical track holds an intermediate position, it might be the case that the technical track is the only track truly showing variance in public regard, whereas the other two are clearly perceived as either positive or negative.

This would influence how the results of the public regard measure should be interpreted. The Levene's test for homogeneity of variance analysis gives us clarity on these possible differences in variance. Thirdly, we ran a multilevel null model to divide the variance between the teacher and the school level, informing our choice for multilevel analysis in subsequent models. This and all subsequent multilevel models are run with HLM6.

The self-enhancement hypothesis will be studied through a hierarchical multilevel regression model with job satisfaction as the outcome variable (Table 8). Model A tests for the tracks by adding dummies for the technical and vocational track, with each having the academic track as reference category. Model B adds the control variables sex, years of teaching and subject matter. Model C includes public track regard and Model D adds the interaction terms of technical and vocational track with public track regard.

The school type interaction hypothesis has school structure as its central concept, since we study the effect of school structure on the relationship between public regard and job satisfaction, for each track separately (Tables 9 through 11). For the academic track, the majority of participating teachers work in categorical schools (N=62, 15 schools; compared to 41 teachers across 12 multilateral schools), whereas in the vocational track most of the sampled teachers were teaching in a multilateral school (N= 46, 15 schools; compared to 20 teachers across 5 categorical schools). For technical track teachers we created dummy variables which compare technical track teachers who work in categorical schools (N=19, 5 schools) to those who work in multilateral schools and encounter academic track teachers on the one hand (N= 9, 2 schools) or vocational track teachers on the other hand (N= 39, 9 schools). This should allow to discern if technical track teachers experience differing effects of public track regard depending on which colleagues they interact with. The teachers in academic-technical-vocational schools (N= 7, 1 school) were omitted because the different effects of interacting with academic and vocational counterparts will probably cancel each other out. Model A contains the three control variables (years of teaching, gender and subject matter), model B adds the public track regard measure, model C school structure at the school level and model D the cross-level interaction between school structure and public track regard.

For the models testing the self enhancement hypothesis the continuous variables public track regard and years of experience are centered on the total sample. The school type interaction

hypothesis is studied for each track separately, so the continuous variables are centered on these groups. In all analyses we treat variance components randomly to start with, but we fix them in subsequent models when they are non-significant ($p > 0.05$). This choice is informed by our dataset: due to the at times lower number of cases per school, we do not wish to burden the power of our data if it does not give extra information to interpret.

Table 8: The Association between Track, Sex, Subject Matter, Years of Teaching, Public Track Regard and Job Satisfaction: Results of Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression (HLM 6) with Job Satisfaction as Outcome (N= 207).

Variables	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Intercept	61.821***	61.428***	61.141***	61.658***
Technical track (ref. = academic track)	1.021 (1.200)	0.885 (1.033)	1.464 (1.432)	-16.666** (5.262)
Vocational track (ref. = academic track)	2.693* (1.250)	2.115 (1.252)	4.118* (1.919)	-0.196 (5.180)
Sex (ref. = male)		2.349** (0.815)	2.086* (0.830)	2.435** (0.783)
Subject matter (ref. = track specific)		-1.210 (0.625)	-1.140 (0.747)	-1.116 (0.714)
Years of teaching		0.048 (0.048)	0.043 (0.051)	0.049 (0.054)
Public track regard			0.439 (0.291)	-0.105 (0.311)
Technical track*public track regard				1.710*** (0.455)
Vocational track*public track regard				0.243 (0.543)
Variance components				
Intercept	2.500	8.976	1.066	1.577*
Technical track	7.786			
Vocational track	10.856			
Sex		3.241		
Subject matter		0.213		
Years of teaching		0.010*	0.016	
Public track regard			0.359	

* $p < 0.05$.; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

6.1.6 Results

The ANOVA on teachers' job satisfaction per track [F (2, 232) = 3.975, p = 0.020] indicates that there are two contrasting tracks: the vocational teachers are significantly more satisfied with their job than their academic counterpart (p = 0.016). The technical track teachers do not differ significantly from the academic track teachers (p = 0.745) or the vocational track teachers (p = 0.351). Secondly, the Levene's test for homogeneity of variance test on public regard compared between the three tracks was not significant (p = 0.608), meaning that there is no significant difference in the variance between the tracks. Thirdly, the multilevel null model showed significant variance at the school level in job satisfaction. The intraclass correlation coefficient indicated that 7.14 percent (p = 0.013) of the total teacher job satisfaction is based at the school-level, therefore multilevel analysis is advised to account for possible school-level effects.

Model A in the multilevel modelling (Table 8) confirmed what is shown in the ANOVA: the vocational track teachers are significantly more satisfied with their job than their academic counterparts. This effect disappeared when the control variables were added (model B) but returned when adding public track regard in model C. Model B showed a significant effect of gender, with women being more satisfied than men. This gender effect remained, regardless of adding public track regard in model C. Public track regard is not significantly related to job satisfaction in general. Model D shows that public track regard does have different effects for the different tracks. The significant interaction term states that technical track teachers have a significant positive effect of public track regard, whereas the academic and vocational teachers do not. In model D the technical track teachers are significantly less satisfied than their academic counterpart when controlling for the effect of public track regard on technical track teachers. Only the effect of years of experience on job satisfaction differed significantly between schools (variance components) in model B.

Table 9: The Association between Public Track Regard, School Structure and Job Satisfaction: Results of Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression on Academic Track Teachers (HLM 6) (N= 91).

Variables	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Intercept	61.723***	61.825***	62.497***	62.510***
School Level				
School structure (ref.= categorical schools)			-2.292 (1.785)	-2.682 (1.746)
Teacher level				
Sex (ref. = male)	1.294 (1.460)	0.933 (1.535)	1.165 (1.429)	1.434 (1.325)
Subject matter (ref. = track specific)	-0.220 (1.405)	0.405 (1.386)	-0.054 (1.386)	-0.038 (1.407)
Years of teaching	0.066 (0.091)	0.098 (0.092)	0.100 (0.089)	0.090 (0.098)
Public track regard		0.100 (0.371)	-0.132 (0.356)	-0.311 (0.501)
School structure*public track regard				0.167 (0.705)
Variance components				
Intercept	26.937*	33.748*	24.566**	17.539***
Sex	9.401	12.658*	6.548	
Subject Matter	0.565			
Years of teaching	0.111***	0.116***	0.101**	0.135***
Public track regard		0.287		

* p < 0.05.; **p < p =0.01; ***p < 0.001.

The multilevel model for the academic track showed no significant associations with job satisfaction (Table 9). Based on the variance components we do see that job satisfaction differs significantly between schools and so does the effect of teacher experience on job satisfaction. This model fails to confirm the school type interaction hypothesis for the

academic track, since the effect of public track regard is not significant, nor is its interaction with the school structure.

The analysis of the technical track (Table 10) shows a significant positive influence of being a track specific subject matter teacher on the job satisfaction of technical track teachers compared to their general subject colleagues, in every model. Sex and years of teaching experience are not significantly associated with job satisfaction. School structure has no significant effect either. Public track regard has a positive significant effect on teachers in models B and C but, when adding the interaction terms with school structure, this significance disappears in model D. The effect of public track regard on teachers' job satisfaction differs significantly between schools, as indicated by the variance components. Yet this school level difference is not caused by the difference between categorical and multilateral schools, as this variance component remains significant in models C and D with the addition of school structure. The interaction between school structure and public track regard is not significant in any direction. Our findings disprove the school structure hypothesis for the technical track.

The analysis for the vocational track (Table 11) show that neither public track regard nor school structure have a significant effect (model B and C respectively). The interaction between school structure and public track regard is significantly positive (model D), meaning that teachers in multilateral schools show a positive correlation between public track regard and their job satisfaction, whereas for teachers in categorical schools there is no significant association between public track regard and job satisfaction. Of the control variables in the vocational track model (Table 11), only sex shows a significant effect in which female teachers are more satisfied, across all models. These findings do show proof for the school structure hypothesis in the vocational track.

Table 10: The Association between Public Track Regard, School Structure and Job Satisfaction: Results of Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression on Technical Track Teachers (HLM 6) (N= 55).

Variables	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Intercept	63.046***	62.939***	62.306***	62.123***
School level				
School structure Cat <> Tech/Voc. (ref.= cat school)			0.933 (1.675)	1.040 (1.670)
School structure Cat <> Acad/Tech. (ref.= cat school)			1.149 (2.327)	2.721 (2.799)
Teacher level				
Sex (ref. = male)	1.695 (1.961)	1.579 (1.535)	1.608 (1.548)	1.723 (1.548)
Subject matter (ref. = track specific)	-3.460* (1.792)	-3.696* (1.500)	-3.692* (1.503)	-3.497* (1.515)
Years of teaching	-0.089 (0.092)	-0.111 (0.070)	-0.108 (0.071)	-0.115 (0.072)
Public track regard		1.125* (0.484)	1.159* (0.486)	0.427 (0.822)
PubReg* CAT<>Tech/Voc.				0.908 (0.994)
PubReg* Cat <> Acad/Tech.				2.337 (1.730)
Variance components				
Intercept	5.323	1.675	1.055	0.800
Sex	2.084			
Subject Matter	0.512			
Years of teaching	0.016			
Public track regard		1.595*	1.498*	0.962*

* p < 0.05.; **p < =0.01 *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 11: The Association between Public Track Regard, School Structure and Job Satisfaction: Results of Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression on Vocational Track Teachers (HLM 6) (N= 61).

Variables	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Intercept	61.268***	61.384***	60.898***	60.831***
School level				
School structure (ref.= cat schools)			0.219 (2.088)	0.372 (1.851)
Teacher level				
Sex (ref. = male)	4.086* (1.772)	3.910* (2.422)	4.724** (1.713)	4.839** (1.656)
Subject matter (ref. = track specific)	-0.324 (1.385)	-0.326 (1.398)	-0.358 (1.495)	-0.120 (1.445)
Years of teaching	-0.007 (0.090)	-0.091 (0.091)	0.011 (0.080)	-0.010 (0.076)
Public track regard		-0.129 (0.411)	0.258 (0.359)	-0.571 (0.492)
School struc*public regard				1.599* (0.663)
Variance components				
Intercept	22.151*	2.676	6.235*	3.661
Sex	6.983			
Subject Matter	1.116			
Years of Teaching	0.031*	0.030		
Public track regard		0.381		

* $p < 0.05$.; ** $p <$ =0.01; *** $p < 0.001$.

6.1.7 Discussion

The central objective of the present study was to examine if teachers' job satisfaction was influenced by tracked education, through the public regard of the track a teacher teaches, in a context of within and between school tracking. The track satisfaction hypothesis stated that academic track teachers would be the most satisfied and vocational track teachers the least for a myriad of reasons. The self-enhancement hypothesis suggested that job satisfaction

would be influenced by public regard. And the school type interaction hypothesis assumed that the effects of public track regard would be amplified in multilateral schools compared to categorical schools through meaningful interaction with colleagues highlighting status differences. Our results show that the track satisfaction hypothesis cannot be confirmed. The vocational track teachers are the most satisfied, not the academic track teachers, which contradicts previous research on job satisfaction in teachers (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Van Houtte, 2006b). These diverging results do raise questions. Looking at the rather small number of participants in our study there might have been a sampling bias, with more satisfied vocational track teachers being sampled more than in previous research. This could be attributed to an overrepresentation of female vocational teachers, who are more satisfied than their male colleagues. The gender difference only being significant in the vocational track could come from the fact that women are less sensitive to status differences than men (Schwalbe & Staple, 1991). The self-enhancement hypothesis is partly confirmed. Technical track teachers allow the public opinion to positively influence their job satisfaction. The school type interaction hypothesis is confirmed in vocational track teachers, since categorical school teachers experience no effect from public regard and multilateral school teachers experience a positive effect.

According to the self-enhancement hypothesis, the academic track teachers were expected to experience the largest benefits from the public esteem their track has, yet they show no significant impact of public track regard on their job satisfaction. An explanation as to why academic track teachers do not show results for public track regard, although their technical track counterparts do, is that they simply might not consider their track membership as an important collective identity (Kelley, 1952, as cited by Richer, 1976). This lack of importance might have to do with a lack of awareness. As Doane (1997) stated in terms of ethnicity, the dominant group (in this case the academic track) can take their position for granted and not be consciously aware of their identity, since they consider this as 'the norm'. As a result, they do not draw much satisfaction from how they think others look at them and it remains a 'hidden identity', especially if it is not contested or judged. Future research could further explore this hypothesis by considering other dimensions of teachers' track identities, such as the centrality of these identities for teachers from different tracks (Sellers et al., 1998).

The technical track teachers are the only group that show a significant influence of public track regard on their job satisfaction. Through the 'homogeneity of variance analysis' we ruled out the possibility that they are the only group to experience variations in how the public perceives them. This might have been the case since they hold an intermediary position in the academic status hierarchy, leading to a less uniform societal judgement than the highly esteemed academic and lower esteemed vocational track. Yet our results show that there is no significant difference between the tracks in the variance of experienced public track regard, so the explanation for the effect of public track regard has to be found in the interpretation of public regard by the technical track teachers.

The 'uncertainty reduction hypothesis' can explain why technical track teachers' job satisfaction is influenced by how they think society looks at them. This theory predicts that people reduce social uncertainty through group membership, yet if their collective identity category is characterized by a lack of clarity in terms of its internal structure and external boundaries, this is less effective (Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Given that technical track teachers are somewhat caught and considered as 'in-between', they might not consider their technical track identity as offering them a clear set of characteristics and instead rely more on how others look at them.

Although we expected vocational track teachers to show lower levels of job satisfaction due to how they think society perceives them, we did not find an effect of public regard on their job satisfaction. This can be explained by the positive distinctiveness hypothesis, which predicts that groups will reverse current status hierarchies when they cannot attain certain status markers (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979). As the academic status of the vocational track in a knowledge-based society like Belgium is clear and perceived negatively, teachers within this track can consciously put aside its place in the academic hierarchy and attach more personal relevance to those elements which make teaching in the vocational track unique and a source of satisfaction. Possible dimensions for positive distinction include: generally more personal closeness and developing rapport ('fraternization') with students (Stevens & Vermeersch., 2010), less interference from parents, the teaching skills required to teach more disadvantaged students in terms of socio-economic status and a more diverse student body in terms of ethnicity and educational history (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Hallinan, 1996; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2015b).

The assumption of positive distinction is strengthened by the fact that vocational track teachers do feel a significantly lower public track regard than those in the academic and technical track, but do not allow it to influence their job satisfaction. Crocker, Luthanen, Blaine and Broadnax (1994) saw a similar lack of connection between private group feelings and public evaluation of black college students, which they saw as a way of coping with discrimination and prejudice. Future research could dive deeper into the coping mechanisms applied by vocational track teachers in dealing with the public valuation of the vocational track in a cascaded educational landscape.

The results for the school type interaction hypothesis showed that the effects of public track regard are not influenced by school structure for academic and technical track teachers. With vocational track teachers, school structure does show a significant association with public track regard, but the contrast between categorical and multilateral schoolteachers is more pronounced than expected. Where in multilateral schools vocational track teachers have a lower job satisfaction when they experience lower public track regard, this association is not present in categorical schools. These results suggest that daily contact with teachers from other tracks makes the track identity more visible, turns it into a salient identity for vocational track teachers and, due to higher visibility of this track in this context, they attach importance to the public evaluation of their track (Kelley, 1952, as cited by Richer, 1976; Van Dick et al., 2004). Future research focusing on school dynamics might provide a more in-depth explanation for these results.

6.1.7.1 Limitations

The sample size is a limitation in using multilevel models. Studying cross-level interactions with a low number of level 2 groups (lower than 50) could lead to biased results, with level 2 standard errors being estimated too small, and as such might lead to false significant effects (Maas & Hox, 2004). The only track showing a significant cross-level interaction is the vocational, which has 20 schools, the other tracks displayed a similar number of level 2 cases (27 for academic and 16 for technical schools), yet these did not display significant cross-level interactions. So, although we have to take some precaution regarding the explanatory power of the dataset in a multilevel analysis, we still regard this as more accurate than the alternative of ignoring the group level effects of teachers nested in schools. Due to these limitations we present this analysis as indicative rather than conclusive.

The school type interaction models did highlight some significant differences between the tracks in job satisfiers, which constitute an interesting starting point for future research but lie outside the scope of the current paper. The first concerns why the nature of the chosen subject matter has an influence on the technical track teachers' job satisfaction. Secondly, there are also significant differences between the sexes in vocational track teachers, but our data did not show a representative distribution of gender, so follow up research on other data is better suited to make strong statements on gender differences.

6.1.8 Conclusion

Although there is wealth of research on teachers' job satisfaction, there is virtually no research that investigates how this is influenced by the public perception of the tracks in which teachers teach. This study builds on existing research by showing that teachers' job satisfaction is influenced by the public image of the track they teach, but also that this influence varies according to the status of the track and whether teachers work in schools in which they can interact with colleagues and students from other tracks. These findings underline the importance of considering tracks' effects on teachers' job satisfaction not only through eliciting different classroom dynamics (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2015b), but also through the tracks' public image. Additionally, the way in which identity theories such as hidden identity (Doane, 1997), the uncertainty reduction hypothesis (Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000), the positive distinction hypothesis (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979; Crocker, Luthanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994) and identity salience and visibility (Kelley, 1952, as cited by Richer, 1976; Van Dick et al., 2004) are able to provide an explanation for our results shows that teachers' tracked identities are important to consider in educational research on teacher outcomes and teachers' professional development more generally. Future research could build on our study by considering the particularities of tracks in the career attitudes of teachers, not only through the personal experiences of tracked classrooms but also through the identity aspect of tracking. There are possibilities to do this through studying the personal evaluation of tracks or the influence the centrality of a track identity has on a teacher, in addition to considering teachers' perceived public regard of the track they teach. Gaining knowledge on the identity categories teachers attach value to in their professional identity and the impact they experience from public

opinion gives us more concrete insight in what makes a conducive environment for satisfied teachers.

The idea of a seeing track membership as a possible identity, which was tested in this paper for teachers, could also be applied to students in future research. Students are in the formative years of their identity, so outsider evaluation of their status could have an even stronger effect on their self-evaluation and well-being than on teachers, who are affected by it less directly and only through their affective association with their students. Considering the identity aspect of track membership would allow for knowledge from identity research (for instance coping and bonding mechanisms with an identity) to be applied in cases of prejudices and discrimination against educational tracks.

6.2 Empirical chapter 2: Track prejudice in Belgian secondary schools: examining the influence of social-psychological and structural school features.

6.2.1 Abstract

While considerable research in education has established objective and subjective status differences between tracks and focused on the outcomes of ability grouping on students' educational and broader outcomes, there is virtually no research that explains students' variability in track valuation. This study relies on theoretical insights from social psychology, ethnic studies and school effects research to develop hypotheses about the influence of individual and school level features on students' track valuation. Data from The School, Identity and Society survey, involving 4,540 adolescents from 64 Belgian schools is utilised, using multilevel modelling. The findings show the relevance of social identity theory and social norms in students judging all tracks; and track chauvinism, patriotism and cross-track friendships in explaining variability in students' prejudice towards other tracks. However, these relationships vary according to the track position of the student. The conclusions discuss the implications of this study for future research and social policy.

6.2.2 Introduction

Educational systems widely apply homogeneous ability grouping to improve educational outcomes (Hallinan et al., 2003). More specifically, tracks (Belgium/US) or streams (UK) divide students into separate groups wherein they are taught different curricula and prepared for disparate futures (Gamoran, 1992). Research, however, has shown that tracking creates/enhances inequality for outcomes like achievement, deviant behaviour and sense of futility (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2006; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008, 2015).

In society, different statuses are assigned to these tracks due to the different employment opportunities they create (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Consequently, tracking can cause a 'cascade effect' wherein secondary education students 'aim high', by trying the academic tracks first and eventually 'go down' to 'lower', more practical, technical tracks (Boone et al., 2018). Students experience judgement based on track position, with vocational and technical students feeling 'looked down upon' (Spruyt et al., 2015).

Educational tracking can also lead to prejudice towards students, because people connect objectionable group qualities to certain tracks, leading to hostile or negative attitudes towards students solely based on these group qualities (Allport, 1954). Both teachers and students believe vocational students are not willing or able to fulfil educational expectations (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). Vocational students are, among other things, perceived by teachers as less confident (Ecclestone, 2004), more disinterested and disruptive (Van Houtte, 2017). Socially, these students are considered less refined (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). Based on these negative characteristics, society values vocational track membership negatively, which can lead to negative attitudes and prejudice towards vocational education.

Studying track prejudice is important, as psychological research shows that experiencing prejudice has both physical and psychological consequences (McCoy & Major, 2003). Threats against the ingroup result in lower self-esteem and depressed feelings, depending on how strongly someone identifies with the ingroup (McCoy & Major, 2003). Prejudice can also influence educational outcomes, as track stigma-consciousness leads to a higher sense of futility in students (Spruyt et al., 2015).

Despite the importance of track prejudice, there is virtually no research that tries to explain variability in students' track prejudice. Although track prejudice differences exist between countries (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010), there are no studies that aim to establish if students show prejudice towards tracks. In addition, there is no research that looks at individual and school factors that might inform students' track prejudice. In sharp contrast, there is a wealth of research that explains variability in ethnic prejudice in schools, looking at both individual (e.g. Stevens et al., 2014) and school level features (e.g. Vervaet et al., 2018). This study builds on this educational research by investigating the influence of individual and school-level features on students' track prejudice in the Belgian context.

6.2.3 Theoretical framework

6.2.3.1 Individual determinants of track prejudice

According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel et al., 1979) people show the most affinity with the social group to which they belong ('ingroup'), regardless of context. This ingroup favouritism is not automatically linked to people's (negative) evaluation of outgroups or the status distinctions among them (Brewer, 2001). The empirical evidence for ingroup favoritism

is ample, for example between national and religious groups (e.g. Cairns et al., 2006). Therefore, we hypothesise that, in general, students will show the most positive feelings towards their own track, regardless of its place in the societal status hierarchy.

Nationality and identity research shows that there are at least two ways in which people can positively perceive their ingroup, by being either chauvinistic or patriotic. Chauvinism is a positive ingroup feeling based on a sense of ingroup homogeneousness and superiority, leading to exclusionary and hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008). Chauvinism is usually studied in relation to feelings of threat, namely a competing (ethnic) identity threatening the majority identity or the perceived threat to welfare by migrants (e.g. Coenders et al., 2004; Van der Waal et al., 2010). In the context of educational tracking, the threatened status of vocational education students is a reflection of the lesser valued blue collar jobs they are trained for (e.g. Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Patriotism is a positive ingroup evaluation based on ingroup pride and does not elicit hostile outgroup attitudes (Raijman et al., 2008). Patriotism is often connected to mental wellbeing, for example higher patriotism lowers the impact of racist experiences (Bynum et al., 2008) and heightens self-esteem (Davis et al., 2017). Ethnic and national identity research shows that chauvinistic attitudes increase prejudice and feelings of antagonism towards outgroups, while patriotic attitudes decrease antagonism and might even stimulate feelings of unity towards outgroups (e.g. Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Stevens et al., 2014). In times of conflict or perceived threat, chauvinism can also act as a defence mechanism by stimulating a 'my group first' mentality and employing outgroup derogation to fight back against the outgroup (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019).

Chauvinism is generally studied from the viewpoint of the dominant group. For example, studies on nationalism and ethnicity often only include the perception of dominant national citizens vis-à-vis vulnerable outgroups like immigrants (e.g. Raijman et al., 2008). An exception to this is Carter and Pérez (2016), who studied pride and national chauvinism in both Whites and non-Whites in their opinions on immigrants. Their findings correspond with the general tendency of chauvinism causing feelings of hostility and patriotism leading to positive or at least neutral feelings towards outgroups for non-dominant groups. Linking these insights to educational track identification, more chauvinistic students are assumed to have more negative outgroup evaluations, whereas patriotism leads to neutral or positive outgroup

evaluations, called the track identification hypothesis going forward. These effects are hypothesised for all three tracks.

6.2.3.2 School determinants of prejudice

Social norms are rules that guide/constrain social behaviour, are generally known by members of the same group and shared through social networks, not enforced by law (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). For educational tracking, the societal norm on education and employment enforces thinking and acting in terms of a track status hierarchy, with academic education on top and vocational education at the bottom. Social norms not only guide behavior but can also become internalised values (e.g. Moss, 2003). Therefore, we hypothesise that students will judge tracks in accordance with the societal track hierarchy norm, but whether that is the case for all tracks or just the outgroups might depend on ingroup favouritism.

Educational research on ethnicity has shown that students' exposure to diversity is associated with lower levels of prejudice towards outgroups (Vervaet et al., 2018). Regarding educational tracking, this diversity is represented by schools that offer multiple tracks (e.g. the United States and United Kingdom) or schools that provide one track (e.g. Japan) (Chmielewski, 2014). Yet in countries like Belgium and Germany tracks are organised both between and within schools. So-called categorical schools provide one track and multilateral schools provide multiple tracks. Belgian education providing both is ideal to test the effects of school composition and mere exposure on tracked intergroup dynamics within the same (societal) status hierarchy.

We study the importance of school composition on track prejudice through the mere contact hypothesis. Exposure to an unknown stimulus, in our case students from another track, can lead to lower prejudice, by gaining familiarity with and a disappearing feeling of threat from the stimulus through neutral, positive, or sometimes even negative interactions (Zajonc, 1968). Bornstein's review (1993) confirmed that mere exposure is robust and reliable in lowering prejudice. The likelihood of social contact between students from different tracks will increase when both groups co-exist in the same school environment since co-existing fosters exposure (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015). Therefore, we hypothesise that the mere contact hypothesis takes effect more often in multilateral schools compared to categorical schools, causing lower track prejudices in multilateral schools.

Secondly, students can create between group friendships. A meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) indicates that cross-group friendships lower prejudice through mutual perspective-taking and empathising. Although it could be argued that it is more likely for students with the most positive outgroup attitudes to search for more cross-group friendships, the positive effects of cross-group friendships on reducing outgroup prejudice are real, even beyond initial outgroup attitudes (Titzmann et al., 2015). Therefore, we hypothesise that social interactions between tracks will lead to more positive sentiment towards each other. The extent to which these positive effects of school composition can be attributed to mere exposure or it leading to more cross-group friendships can currently not be specified.

6.2.3.3 Current study

This paper looks at how tracked students evaluate their own tracked ingroup and outgroups, and the social-psychological and school structural features influencing these judgements. In doing so we test the applicability of social-psychological theories (SIT, mere contact hypothesis) and ethnic studies concepts (patriotism, chauvinism). Since there is no prior application of these theories and concepts in educational tracking, the hypothesised directions of effect for the hypotheses will be adopted from their original fields. Gaining insight into track identification and possible track prejudices could help identify the impact ability grouping has on students' self-image and how they view outgroup students.

The literature led to three hypotheses. Firstly, the track status hierarchy hypothesis assumes that all tracks rate themselves the highest based on ingroup favouritism and other tracks according to the social hierarchy norm. Secondly, the track identification hypothesis expects patriotism to have a positive or neutral and chauvinism a negative influence on outgroup evaluations, while both positively influencing ingroup evaluation. Although most literature on patriotism and chauvinism adopts the dominant group's view, we expect these effects to be the same for the non-dominant technical and vocational track (Carter & Pérez, 2016). Lastly, the social influence hypothesis adopts the established effects of mere contact and between group friendship from identity research, assuming that any social interaction, through mere exposure and cross-group friendships, will stimulate a more positive outlook on the tracked outgroups.

6.2.3.4 Belgian education

Starting secondary education, students must choose either the general A-stream or remedial B-stream. The A-stream is considered the regular programme. Yet within this stream students must choose elective courses in the first year, such as Latin or technology, preparing them for the official track choice after the second year. From the third year onwards, students are divided into tracks they chose based on educational interest and grades. In the third through sixth year of Belgian secondary education (USA: Grades 9–12; UK: Years 10–13), students are offered four tracks: academic, technical, vocational or arts. These are the same for the Flemish and Francophone community (representing two separate educational systems), sampled in this study (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019; Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2019). The academic track prepares students for higher education. The technical track provides both general and technical-theoretical courses. The vocational track focuses on training students for a craft (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). Very few students are enrolled in the arts track, therefore it is not included in this study. A typical feature of tracking in Belgium is the 'cascade effect' (see introduction), which shows that the academic track is interpreted by students and parents as the educational standard. A clear track hierarchy with rigid boundaries and downward movement pattern shows the emphasis on status differences in this tracking system.

6.2.4 Methods

6.2.4.1 Sample

This study uses The School, Identity and Society (SIS) survey (Maene et al., 2021). The ethics committee of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University approved this survey in accordance with the ethical and confidentiality requirements. The dataset relies on a mixed-method research design (QUAL > QUAN). Qualitative explorative research was used to identify inductively which collective identities were important to Belgian secondary school students; the importance of tracking as an identity became apparent. Consequently, the quantitative survey included students' track identities.

The quantitative SIS-dataset contains 4,540 third year secondary school students. Sixty four schools participated: seven schools in Wallonia, 29 in Flanders and 28 in the Brussels Capital Region. The schools were selected through multistage sampling: first, cities with a history of

migration were randomly selected, and secondly the secondary schools were divided into strata based on their track variety. This led to a division of purely academic schools, technical-vocational and multilateral schools. Schools were randomly invited from each stratum to participate in the survey.

The data collection took place from September 2017 to December 2017. The school principals distributed an information letter to all pupils and their parents, informing them on the research theme, timing and the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study. This letter gave parents the option to permit their child to participate in the survey. In the Brussels Capital Region more parents (8%) withheld permission than in Flanders (6%) or Wallonia (6%). Of the students with parental consent, 80% participated by completing questionnaires which were distributed and filled out in their classroom. There was no pattern detected in the non-consent. This survey moment was monitored by a researcher, answering pupils' questions, and teachers, supervising pupils while respecting their privacy.

6.2.4.2 Variables

Dependent variable

Students' track evaluations: measuring students' feelings towards their own and other tracks, formulated as: 'Express your feelings towards the following groups on a scale from 0 (totally negative) to 100 (totally positive). Fifty means you are neutral towards that group'. For the total sample the academic track is most highly rated with an average score of 76.25 (Table 12, N = 4540; SD = 24.13), followed by the technical track at 71.16 (N = 4540; SD = 21.45), and the vocational track at 56.98 (N = 4540; SD = 28.67). This 'feeling thermometer' is widely used to measure group evaluations, and is a good indicator of global in- and outgroup attitudes (e.g., Verkuyten, 2005).

Independent variables, student level

Track membership: Students are part of only one track. There are 2,723 surveyed academic track students, 1,034 technical and 783 vocational track students.

Chauvinism: This 5-item scale is based on exploratory qualitative interviews that preceded the quantitative SIS-survey and aims at measuring students' sense of track superiority, through the items: (1) 'students in my track are smarter than those in other tracks', (2) 'are more

capable', (3), 'are more creative', (4) 'students in my track are cooler' and (5) 'my track is harder'. These were measured on 5-point scales with 1 signifying 'absolutely disagree' and 5 signifying 'totally agree', recoded so a high score represents high chauvinism. 'Students in my track are cooler' was omitted as it theoretically seems too distinct from the other, more academically oriented items. After performing a factor analysis for the total sample and per track, 'my track is harder' was omitted due to considerably lower standardised factor loading, below or around 0.5, whereas the other items scored above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006). Therefore, only the other three items were retained (Table 12, $N = 4458$; $M = 7.235$; $SD = 2.831$; $\alpha = 0.839$) (see Appendix 4). All three tracks differed significantly from each other at the 5% level.

Patriotism: To measure students' sense of track pride, the MIBI-teen scale (Scottham et al., 2008) was adapted. This contains three items: 'I am proud of this track', 'I am happy in this track' and 'I feel good about this track'. These were measured on 5-point scales with 1 signifying 'absolutely disagree' and 5 signifying 'totally agree' (Table 12, $N = 4413$; $M = 11.80$; $SD = 2.60$; $\alpha = 0.89$). In contrast with the feelings thermometer, which gives a general evaluation of a group, the patriotism and chauvinism scales allow us to look more specifically at how affective and evaluative ingroup attitudes affect both in- and outgroup evaluations (Sellers et al., 1998). All three tracks differed significantly from each other at the 5% level.

Cross-track friendships: students were asked what proportion of their friendships are with students from other tracks. These were rescaled to a dichotomous variable with 0 being a minority to half of their friendships, and 1 being more than half their friendships. Most students have mostly cross-track friendships ($N = 2073$; 54.7%), with a minority having less than half of their friendships across tracks ($N = 1720$; 45.3%) (Table 12). All three tracks differed significantly from each other at the 5% level. Table 13 provides bivariate correlations between all studied variables.

Table 12: Descriptive statistics for student-level variables– frequencies, means, standard deviations, and F-tests or Cramer's V comparing the academic, technical and vocational track

Variable (N= 4540)	Total		Academic (N= 2723)		Technical (N= 1034)		Vocational (N= 783)		Difference
	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	F-test or Cramer's V
Opinion on academic track (N= 4198)	76.25	24.13	83.34	17.99	67.37	26.71	60.97	29.38	373.26***
Opinion on technical track (N= 4181)	71.16	21.45	69.76	20.49	79.14	19.19	64.36	24.80	109.12***
Opinion on vocational track (N= 4236)	56.98	28.67	55.94	26.91	49.14	30.34	71.55	27.49	135.00***
Patriotism (N= 4405)	11.80	2.60	12.11	2.35	11.67	2.67	10.92	3.09	63.40***
Chauvinism (N= 4458)	7.23	2.83	6.83	2.76	7.65	2.81	8.08	2.83	74.10***
Cross-group friendships (ref.= less than half) (N= 3793)	45.3		59.8		20.4		27.3		0.362***
Sex (ref.= male) (N= 4540)	48.8		44.5		56.3		54.8		0.113***
SES (N= 4540)	48.08	16.65	50.11	17.28	45.51	15.78	44.40	14.42	52.74***

Table 13: Bivariate correlations

Variables	Evaluation of the academic track	Evalution of the technical track	Evaluation of the vocational track	Patriotism	Chauvinism	Cross-group friendships	Sex	SES
Opinion on academic track (N= 4198)	/	0.321***	0.046**	0.178***	0.002	0.032*	0.101***	0.057**
Opinion on technical track (N= 4181)	0.321***	/	0.309***	0.135***	-0.046**	-0.099***	0.030	-0.029
Opinion on vocational track (N= 4236)	0.046**	0.309***	/	0.061***	-0.080***	-0.016	0.048**	-0.015
Patriotism (N= 4405)	0.178***	0.135***	0.061***	/	0.167***	-0.001	0.061***	0.002
Chauvinism (N= 4426)	0.002	-0.046**	-0.080***	0.167***	/	-0.021	-0.178***	-0.050**
Cross-group friendships (N= 3793)	0.032*	-0.099***	-0.016	-0.001	-0.021	/	0.019	0.057**
Sex (N= 4540)	0.101***	0.030	0.048**	0.061***	-0.178***	0.019	/	0.024
SES (N= 4540)	0.057**	-0.029	-0.015	0.002	-0.050**	0.057**	0.024	/

* $p < 0.05$.; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

School level

School structure: this is a school level variable dividing schools into two categories: schools that do not organise the track studied in the outcome variable (scored as 0, reference category) and schools that do (scored as 1). The reference group is called 'separate schools', since they are separated from the studied outcome track, and the dummy is named 'same schools' (Table 14). The tracks organised in each school were established through official school websites or when school data were missing, self-reported student data.

Table 14: Descriptive statistics for school level variable: school structure

Variable	School structure relative to academic track		School structure relative to technical track		School structure relative to vocational track	
	No academic track	Academic track present	No technical track	Technical track present	No vocational track	Vocational track present
Academic track students	/	2723 100%	1648 60.52%	1075 39.48%	2425 89.06%	298 10.94%
Technical track students	496 47.96%	538 52.03%	/	1034 100%	308 29.79%	726 70.21%
Vocational track students	555 70.88%	228 29.12%	90 11.49%	693 88.51%	/	783 100%
No. of Schools	20	44	27	37	36	28

Control variables

Sex: Sex is almost equally distributed in our sample: 48.8% of the sample were male. The academic track had mostly girls (55.5%); in the technical and vocational track the majority were male (56.3% and 54.8% respectively). Previous research showed that male students are usually more prejudiced than women (e.g. Vervaet et al., 2018).

Socio-economic status: Students' SES is based on the profession of the parent with the highest occupational status, which was matched to the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom et al., 1992). The higher the score on the ISEI, the higher the SES. The scale theoretically ranges from 10 to 90. For our sample the minimum score was 15, the maximum 90, with an average of 48.08 (N = 4540, SD = 16.67) (Table 12).

6.2.4.3 Design

First, to study the track status hierarchy hypothesis, we ran a repeated measures ANOVA on the track evaluation measures. This allows to test for both ingroup favouritism and whether students evaluate tracks hierarchically. Through an ANOVA with a post-hoc Bonferroni test we checked if track evaluations differ between tracks.

To test the track identification hypothesis and the social influence hypothesis we ran hierarchical multilevel regression models using HLM6 software (Raudenbush et al., 2013). The hierarchical regression started with an unconditional model (Model 0); next we added students' track as dummies (Model 1). Students who are members of the track that is considered the dependent variable were used as the reference category for track

membership. Subsequently, patriotism (Model 2), chauvinism (Model 3), school structure and the control variables (Model 4) are added. The continuous patriotism, chauvinism and SES variables were grand mean centred.

In Model 5 we added the cross-group friendship variable, with Models 4 and 5 testing the social influence hypothesis. By adding the interaction term between track membership and patriotism in Model 6 and the interaction between track membership and chauvinism in Model 7, we can determine the direction and significance of patriotism and chauvinism on track judgement for all tracks. To do this we perform a simple slope analysis of the interaction effects in Models 6 and 7 (Aiken & West, 1991). The models with the evaluated track as reference category are given in Tables 15 to 17. For the simple slope analysis only the relevant interaction coefficients are given in the results section. The full tables of these simple slope analyses can be found in appendix 5 to 10. This regression was repeated three times, once for each track evaluation as the dependent variable, being the academic (Table 15), technical (Table 16) and vocational track evaluation (Table 17). All results in the tables are unstandardised, but standardised coefficients (y*) were also calculated to obtain comparable effect sizes and are presented in text. These coefficients were obtained by multiplying the regression coefficient by the standard deviation of the independent variable and dividing the multiplication by the standard deviation of the dependent variable.

6.2.5 Results

Before interpreting the repeated measures ANOVA, we control and, if needed, adjust for sphericity. Mauchly's Test showed that all three tracks violate the sphericity condition. To correct for this and since the Greenhouse-Geisser Epsilon was bigger than 0.75 in all tracks, the Huynh-Feldt results are given, following the sphericity corrections by Howell (2002) and Field (2013). The within-group difference is statistically significant for the academic $F(2, 4361) = 1405.69$, $p < 0.001$; the technical $F(2, 1708) = 382.29$, $p < 0.001$; and the vocational track students $F(2, 932) = 32.165$, $p < 0.001$.

The repeated measures ANOVA showed that all tracks rate their ingroup the highest. The academic and technical track follow the societal hierarchy, from most to least academic, in their judgement of the other tracks. Yet the vocational track goes against the societal hierarchy, with their own track rated highest, then the technical track and lastly the academic

track (Table 12). The differences in judgement by students between their highest and lowest evaluated track is similar for academic and technical track students (27.4 and 30 points respectively). This difference is considerably smaller within vocational track students, only 10.58 points. It is noteworthy that in their self-judgement, the societally highest perceived academic track rates itself the highest (83.34), 4.2 points more than the technical track's self-rating (79.14) and even 11.79 points more than the vocational students' self-rating (71.55).

When studying the ANOVAs on the track evaluations, with track membership as factor, the ANOVA on the evaluation of the academic [$F(2,4169) = 373.260$, $p < 0.001$], technical [$F(2,4152) = 109.126$, $p < 0.001$] and vocational [$F(2,4207) = 134.996$, $p < 0.001$] tracks all showed significant differences, meaning that between the tracks there are significant differences in how each track is judged. All mean differences were significant at the 0.1% level, tested through the Bonferroni post-hoc test. The intraclass correlation coefficients of the null-models of the academic, technical and vocational track evaluation indicated that there are significant differences at the school level in these judgements, with respectively 14.71 ($p < 0.001$), 5.94 ($p < 0.001$) and 5.85 ($p < 0.001$) percent of variance at the school level. Multilevel analysis is therefore advised to account for possible school-level effects.

Table 15 shows the judgement of the academic track by all three tracks. Model 1 indicates that the academic track's self-evaluation is significantly more positive than the evaluation of the academic track by their technical (y=-14.965; $p > 0.001$; y*=-0.260) and vocational counterparts (y=-23.436; $p < 0.001$; y*=-0.367). Patriotism has a significant positive association with track judgement (Model 2) ($y = 1.110$; $p < 0.001$; $y^* = 0.120$). Chauvinism (Model 3) does not show a significant effect on academic track judgement ($y = 0.212$; $p = 0.136$; $y^* = 0.025$). Adding school structure, sex and SES (Model 4) yielded one significant association, namely sex, with girls rating the evaluated group higher than boys ($y = 1.582$; $p = 0.014$; $y^* = 0.033$). Cross-track friendships (Model 5) were significant: students with mostly cross-group friendships show a more positive academic track judgement ($y = 1.920$; $p = 0.021$; $y^* = 0.040$). Adding cross-group friendships did not alter the effect of school structure, yet chauvinism did become significant ($y = 0.328$; $p = 0.049$; $y^* = 0.038$). Model 6 studied the interaction of patriotism with track membership. Patriotism has a significantly positive effect for academic track students on their ingroup evaluation ($y = 2.302$; $p < 0.001$; $y^* = 0.248$). According to the simple slope analysis, there is no effect of patriotism on evaluating the

academic track for the technical (y=-0.255; p = 0.571; y*=-0.028) and vocational students (y=-0.573; p = 0.280; y*=-0.062). Model 7 tested the interaction of chauvinism with track membership. The academic students rate themselves significantly higher when feeling more chauvinistic (y = 0.584; p < 0.001; y* = 0.069). The interactions show no significant difference between the academic and the other tracks for the effect of chauvinism. For the technical (y = 0.079; p = 0.807; y* = 0.009) and vocational students (y=-0.321; p = 0.658; y*=-0.038) chauvinism does not affect how they rate the academic track.

For the evaluation of the technical track by all tracks (Table 16), Model 1 indicated that the technical track's ingroup evaluation is significantly higher than the evaluation of the technical track by their academic (y=-9.652; p < 0.001; y*=-0.220) and vocational counterparts (y=-14.996; p < 0.001; y*=-0.264). Patriotism (Model 2) has a significant positive effect on the technical track judgement (y = 0.942; p < 0.001; y* = 0.114). Chauvinism (Model 3) initially showed a negative significant effect (y=-0.474; p = 0.002; y*=-0.063). The addition of sex, SES and school structure (Model 4) added no significant associations, nor did it alter any associations from Model 3. Model 5 showed a borderline insignificant effect of cross-group friendships on students' opinion of the technical track (y = 1.589; p = 0.054; y* = 0.037). Model 6 shows a significant positive influence of patriotism on technical students' ingroup judgement (y = 2.269; p < 0.001; y* = 0.275), which is significantly smaller for the other tracks. Based on the simple slope analysis, academic track students' patriotism has a significantly positive effect in evaluating the technical track (y = 0.790; p < 0.001; y* = 0.096), yet vocational students' patriotism has no effect (y=-0.035; p = 0.937; y*=-0.004). Model 7 shows that chauvinism has a significantly positive effect on the technical track's ingroup judgement (y = 0.541; p = 0.027; y* = 0.071); the effect of chauvinism is significantly different in the other tracks. For the academic track (y=-1.051; p < 0.001; y*=-0.139) there is a significantly negative effect of chauvinism on the evaluation of the technical track. No discernable effect is seen with the vocational students (y = 0.077; p = 0.857; y* = 0.010).

Table 15: The Association between Track Membership, Chauvinism, Patriotism, Cross-Group Friendships, School Structure and Evaluation of Academic Track: Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression (HLM 6) with evaluation of Academic Track as Outcome.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	83.576***	83.138***	83.221***	85.371***	81.913***	81.095***	81.905***
School level							
School structure (ref.= separate school)				-3.080	-0.959	-0.352	-0.860
				(1.871)	(1.804)	(1.795)	(1.864)
Student level							
Technical track (ref.= academic track)	-14.965***	-14.067***	-14.150***	-15.168***	-15.020***	-14.902***	-14.990***
	(1.246)	(1.321)	(1.277)	(1.610)	(1.588)	(1.509)	(1.629)
Vocational track (ref.= academic track)	-23.44***	-21.051***	-21.215***	-22.903***	-22.476***	-24.116***	-22.246***
	(1.464)	(1.639)	(1.542)	(2.121)	(2.083)	(2.268)	(2.130)
Patriotism		1.400*	1.107***	1.079***	1.114***	2.302***	1.128***
		(0.237)	(0.230)	(0.231)	(0.246)	(0.233)	(0.248)
Chauvinism			0.212*	0.281	0.328*	0.356*	0.584***
			(0.141)	(0.141)	(0.163)	(0.164)	(0.140)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)					1.920*	1.774*	1.873*
					(0.813)	(0.829)	(0.807)
Sex (ref. = Male)				1.582*	2.143**	2.123**	2.218**
				(0.626)	(0.695)	(0.656)	(0.694)
SES				-0.011	-0.017	-0.016	-0.017
				(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Technical Track*Patriotism						-2.555***	
						(0.514)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism						-2.877***	
						(0.556)	
Technical Track* Chauvinism							-0.505
							(0.334)
Vocational Track* Chauvinism							-0.905
							(0.722)
Variance components							
Intercept	11.508	7.149	6.492	11.112	10.948	8.112	9.939
Technical track	15.467	22.400*	20.529*	27.366*	26.574*	19.144*	29.002*
Vocational track	11.673	28.316	19.476	17.903	24.635	31.596	28.054

Patriotism	1.961*	1.772	1.775*	1.940*	0.781*	1.954*
Chauvinism		0.233*	0.232*	0.397**	0.449**	0.250**
Cross-track Friendships				9.221	9.402	8.578
Sex			2.993	2.816	1.834	2.836
SES			0.005	0.004	0.005	0.004

Note: All presented coefficients are unstandardized. *p< 0.05.; **p< 0.01; ***p< 0.001.

Lastly, we examine the evaluation of the vocational track by all tracks (Table 17). Vocational students show a significantly higher opinion of the vocational track than the academic (y=-16.708; p < 0.001; y*=-0.286) and technical track (y=-21.489; p < 0.001; y*=- 0.314), remaining significant throughout all models. Patriotism (Model 2) relates significantly positively with vocational track judgement in all models (y = 0.952; p < 0.001; y* = 0.086). Chauvinism (Model 3) initially shows a significantly negative effect (y=-0.934; p < 0.001; y*=-0.092). Neither sex, SES and school structure (Model 4), nor cross-track friendships (Model 5) show significant associations with vocational track judgement. Vocational students have a positive effect of ingroup patriotism on their track judgement (Model 6) (y = 2.116; p < 0.001; y* = 0.192). There is no significant effect of ingroup patriotism for the academic (y = 0.134; p = 0.606; y* = 0.012) and technical tracks (y = 0.817; p = 0.113; y* = 0.074) towards their vocational counterparts. In Model 7, the effect of chauvinism shifted from negative to positive (y = 1.259; p = 0.026; y* = 0.124). Chauvinism therefore has a significantly positive effect on vocational students' ingroup judgement. This is significantly different for the other tracks. There is a significantly negative influence of chauvinism on the academic students' judgement (y=-1.649; p < 0.001; y*=-0.163) of the vocational track. The technical students (y=-0.713; p = 0.130; y*=-0.070) show no significant effect of chauvinism.

Table 16: The Association between Track Membership, Chauvinism, Patriotism, Cross-Group Friendships, School Structure and Evaluation of Technical Track: Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression (HLM 6) with evaluation of Technical Track as Outcome.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	79.093***	79.609***	79.634***	77.675***	76.407***	76.751***	75.892***
School level							
School structure (ref.= separate school)				1.494 (1.691)	1.560 (1.649)	1.353 (1.626)	1.466 (1.655)
Student level							
Academic track (ref.= technical track)	-9.652*** (1.272)	-10.837*** (1.185)	-11.282*** (1.079)	-10.527*** (1.418)	-9.203*** (1.501)	-9.239*** (1.540)	-8.414*** (1.569)
Vocational track (ref. = technical track)	-14.996*** (1.675)	-14.101*** (1.686)	-14.490*** (1.634)	-13.926*** (1.581)	-14.615*** (1.475)	-15.667*** (1.479)	-14.221*** (1.470)
Patriotism		0.942*** (0.167)	1.033*** (0.154)	1.011*** (0.157)	1.029*** (0.161)	2.269*** (0.227)	1.005*** (0.160)
Chauvinism			-0.474** (0.146)	-0.439** (0.147)	-0.457** (0.165)	-0.442* (0.166)	0.541* (0.238)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)					1.589 (0.808)	1.413 (0.812)	1.715* (0.810)
Sex (ref.= Male)				0.877 (0.752)	1.170 (0.774)	1.162 (0.791)	1.139 (0.775)
SES				-0.021 (0.019)	-0.027 (0.022)	-0.027 (0.022)	-0.025 (0.022)
Academic Track*Patriotism						-1.479*** (0.337)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism						-2.305*** (0.517)	
Academic Track*Chauvinism							-1.600*** (0.337)
Vocational Track*Chauvinism							-0.461 (0.432)
Variance components							
Intercept	4.458	3.744	4.286	10.846*	22.263*	26.861*	22.012*

Academic track	33.878*	24.281*	18.220*	19.599*	26.957**	26.518**	29.763**
Vocational track	37.904	44.171	37.288	36.743*	24.888	18.323	21.950
Patriotism		0.556	0.493	0.532	0.471	0.369	0.441
Chauvinism			0.428	0.467	0.557	0.590	0.166
Cross-track Friendships					7.875*	8.172*	8.084*
Sex				9.440	9.000	11.166	9.423
SES				0.002	0.006	0.006	0.006

Note: All presented coefficients are unstandardized. *p< 0.05.; **p< 0.01; ***p< 0.001.

Table 17: The Association between Track Membership Chauvinism, Patriotism, Cross-Group Friendships, School Structure and Evaluation of Vocational Track: Hierarchical Two-level Multiple Regression (HLM 6) with evaluation of Vocational Track as Outcome.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	71.490***	72.573***	72.770***	69.924***	70.940***	73.745***	70.026***
School level							
School structure (ref.= separate school)				1.205 (1.738)	0.268 (1.851)	-0.670 (1.844)	0.561 (1.817)
Student level							
Academic track (ref.= vocational track)	-16.708*** (1.704)	-18.626*** (1.588)	-18.644*** (1.600)	-17.335*** (2.080)	-16.233*** (2.144)	-18.161*** (2.080)	-15.618*** (2.188)
Technical track (ref. = vocational track)	-21.489*** (2.156)	-22.802*** (2.094)	-22.125*** (2.225)	-21.703*** (2.158)	-21.231*** (2.177)	-23.356*** (2.119)	-20.391*** (2.201)
Patriotism		0.952*** (0.234)	1.083*** (0.222)	0.994*** (0.221)	0.736** (0.247)	2.116*** (0.496)	0.695** (0.245)
Chauvinism			-0.934*** (0.214)	-0.868*** (0.201)	-0.928*** (0.227)	-0.948*** (0.227)	1.259* (0.551)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)					-1.540 (1.091)	-1.575 (1.094)	-1.484 (1.113)
Sex (ref.= Male)				1.917 (1.048)	1.691 (1.083)	1.570 (1.094)	1.741 (1.085)
SES				-0.025 (0.027)	-0.038 (0.031)	-0.036 (0.031)	-0.037 (0.031)
Academic Track*Patriotism						-1.982*** (0.542)	
Technical Track*Patriotism						-1.302 (0.671)	
Academic Track*Chauvinism							-2.914*** (0.615)
Technical Track*Chauvinism							-1.970** (0.720)
Variance components							
Intercept	20.405***	9.666**	18.175**	30.769*	82.143***	71.257***	71.172***

Academic track	49.017**	55.519**	44.618**	48.510**	59.803**	55.203**	60.990**
Technical track	85.646**	78.419*	98.570**	88.762**	93.814**	88.246**	89.127**
Patriotism		1.351**	1.189*	1.106*	1.344*	1.243*	1.312
Chauvinism			1.137	1.011	1.225**	1.219**	0.803
Cross-track Friendships					17.051*	17.886*	17.875*
Sex				20.234**	19.450**	22.062**	18.438**
SES				0.009	0.013	0.013	0.014

Note: All presented coefficients are unstandardized. *p< 0.05.; **p< 0.01; ***p< 0.001.

6.2.6 Discussion

This paper looked at how tracked students evaluate their own ingroup and outgroups, and the social-psychological and school structural features influencing these judgements. The track status hierarchy hypothesis shows two clear tendencies. Firstly, every track prefers its own ingroup, in line with SIT (Tajfel et al., 1979). Additionally, social norms seemingly influence the judgement of academic and technical students, since they follow the societal hierarchy in judging the other tracks. Vocational students are the exception; they rate their academic counterparts the lowest. A possible explanation is that vocational students feel looked down upon by academic track students, leading to oppositional attitudes. Secondly, vocational students show less hierarchical division in track judgements, which can be linked to social norm theory. The societal norm enforces thinking in terms of hierarchy. Yet vocational students think less hierarchically, probably because they are 'the victim' of this norm. The track status hierarchy hypothesis is confirmed for academic and technical students, but not for vocational students.

In the academic track, rated highest by society, chauvinism and patriotism show the effects expected by the track identification hypothesis (e.g. Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Stevens et al., 2014). Chauvinism causes more positive ingroup and significantly lower outgroup evaluations. Patriotism causes more ingroup positivity and is significantly related with a positive judgement of the technical track. For the technical and vocational tracks patriotism and chauvinism both significantly positively influence their ingroup judgement, as expected. Towards the other tracks, their ingroup patriotism and chauvinism hasve no significant effects. Based on the standardised coefficients, the effects of patriotism on ingroup

judgement are generally stronger than those of chauvinism, whereas in the academic track, the effect of chauvinism on outgroup judgement is stronger than that of ingroup patriotism. These effects are smaller than the track differences, but still sizeable. The effects of the control variables are considerably weaker.

Interestingly, the negative effect of ingroup chauvinism on outgroup evaluation only occurs with the academic students, despite the vocational students being the most chauvinistic (Table 12). Vocational students being most chauvinistic is unexpected, as academic students are considered 'superior' in tracked education. Vocational students are placed at the bottom of the status hierarchy, making them more sensitive to their status position (e.g. Brown et al., 2011). This sensitivity can cause a defensive reaction by heightening chauvinism (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). To justify these feelings of superiority and feeling smarter, vocational students might attach more value to skills and labour experience than to 'being book smart'.

The negative effect of ingroup chauvinism on outgroup evaluations might indicate that academic students internalise the idea that other students failed to reach the standards of the academic track (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). For the technical and vocational track their higher chauvinism might only be employed to defend themselves against their lower societal valuation by strengthening their ingroup identification (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019).

The technical track's position is ambiguous, since this track is societally placed above the vocational track and they do rate vocational students lowly (49.14), but this does not seem connected to feelings of superiority towards vocational students. Attributing this to bad interpersonal relationships does not seem likely since vocational students rate technical students more positively (64.36) than academic students (60.97). Future research should look at how chauvinism and patriotism are interpreted and employed by different groups within a status hierarchy and the technical-vocational track dynamic.

The social influence hypothesis has two components. Positive effects of cross-track interacting were expected, but whether these would occur through mere exposure based on school structure, cross-track friendships, or both, was not specified. Having mostly cross-track friendships has a significantly positive influence on the judgement towards the academic track, and only borderline insignificant towards the technical track (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Titzmann et al., 2015). These effects are not replicated when evaluating the vocational track.

There is no association between school structure and the evaluation of any track, nor does the addition of school structure alter any cross-track friendship effects. These results go against the hypothesised effect of exposure on outgroup evaluation. Future research could study if there are differences between tracks in how they experience school composition and how school structure shapes their opinion of other tracks.

The first limitation of this paper is that friendships were surveyed in a general sense, being within track or between track, but the respondents could not specify with which tracks they have more friendships. Future research could look deeper into these friendships and clarify whether the lack of cross-group friendship effect on opinions about the vocational track is due to students having fewer vocational friends or due to other reasons. Cross-track friendships seemingly benefit the perception of academic and technical track students. Stimulating cross-track friendships, which can be done both in school and through leisure activities, could help reduce prejudiced thinking in Belgian education. The second limitation lies in the school structure variable. It asked whether students are part of a school that organises both their own track and the evaluated track. This does however leave variation in how school life is organised in the 'same schools' category. Some schools might facilitate close relationships between the offered tracks or stimulate a communal school culture, while others might separate the school life between tracks. So, although our results provide no proof for the mere contact hypothesis (Zajonc, 1968), they cannot deny its effect either.

Our findings suggest that track membership is meaningful for Belgian secondary school students and that status differences between tracks can structure how students look at their own and other tracks. While developing cross-track friendships can reduce track prejudice, this does not seem the case towards the vocational track.

Educators should devote extra attention to the connection students create with their track identity. Patriotism can for some lead to more positive outgroup attitudes. Chauvinism, to the contrary, causes feelings of superiority and a more negative perception from the highest regarded track towards 'lower tracks'. Postponing track choice and valuing other competences in a more comprehensive system could lower chauvinistic attitudes. Prior research has already shown the benefits of more comprehensive systems (e.g. Chmielewski, 2014), but we would like to stress this again based on the results of this study, as tracking seems to stimulate feelings of superiority and negative between-group attitudes. Additionally, our results show

that mere contact in school is not sufficient to change intergroup evaluations, yet friendships can do this. A difference between these two is that friendships are based on equal status, whereas for mere contact this is not always the case. Based on these findings, we propose that schools/policy makers should create more between-track contact based on equal-status, to lower prejudice and chauvinism (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Additionally, policy makers should advertise more that vocational jobs are well paid, in demand, enriching and require cognitive and technical skills to master, to counteract the negative image vocational education has. Educators should also pay extra attention to (vocational) students who receive outgroup derogation and to students internalising outside track judgement.

This study shows that students rank tracks in terms of status and sense prejudice towards other tracks, partly through how they see their own track. Given the need for young people to develop positive identities and the labour market shortage for highly motivated, technically skilled employees, more research is required to understand how young people, particularly in lower status tracks, can develop positive identities in school contexts. Future research can build on this study by developing more insight into the determinants of educational group prejudice in different (nationally specific) educational grouping systems, into how students cope with outgroup derogation experiences, based on the negative effects from chauvinism towards them, into the consequences of such experiences and the role played by teachers and school policy in this.

6.3 Empirical chapter 3: Students' chauvinistic track attitudes: the role of public track regard and teachers' chauvinistic communication in Belgian secondary schools.

6.3.1 Abstract

Although there is a wealth of research on educational tracking, little research investigates students' own track perception. Based on theoretical insights from ethnic and identity studies, we study how public regard and teachers' track communication affect students' chauvinistic track attitudes. Chauvinism is a less desirable way of identification, causing between-group prejudice and hostility. The School, Identity and Society survey, involving 4500 adolescents from 64 Belgian schools is analyzed, using multilevel modelling. The findings show that chauvinism breaks down into two concepts, cognitive and social track chauvinism. These are mostly employed by students who feel low public regard, as protection against their public status. Teachers' track communication correlates with students' track chauvinism, both through students' individual perception of teachers' communication and through schoolwide cultures of chauvinistic teacher communication

6.3.2 Introduction

The educational system in Belgium, like in many other countries, employs tracking in secondary education to provide more specific education to its students. Tracking is based on the idea that separating students in homogeneous ability groups leads to better academic results, since it allows curricula and teaching methods to be adapted better to students' ability level (Hallinan et al., 2003). Through tracking, students are prepared for disparate futures (Gamoran, 1992). In Belgium, this system is rigid and explicit, meaning that the general public knows the boundaries between the tracks. In a society focused on white collar jobs and with less favorable labor market opportunities for blue collar jobs, vocational, and to a lesser extent technical tracks are attributed lower public status (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Tracking affects students in many different ways. Firstly, tracking steers students' labor market opportunities, since academic tracks prepare students for higher education, whereas vocational education has a focus on the labor market. Secondly, tracking also affects a range of educational outcomes, as students enrolled in lower status-tracks show less motivation (Saleh, Lazonder & De Jong, 2005), more deviant behavior (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008) and lower educational effort (Carbonaro, 2005). Lastly, the public character of tracking causes

students in these tracks to be attributed different status by society (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Track status affects students since they tend to identify with their track (Yonezawa et al., 2002). These status differences can lead to lower self-esteem (e.g., Van Houtte, 2005; Ecclestone, 2004), when students in more vocationally oriented tracks feel looked down upon by society (Spruyt et al., 2015). Certain (vocational) tracks and courses are even labelled as 'dustbins' by teachers, parents and students themselves (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). These track labels also cause stereotype threat, with students opting for coping strategies like dropping out to counteract the negative stereotypes attached to vocational education (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Students in the positively viewed academic track on the other hand have a higher self-esteem, even more so in multilateral schools where they can compare themselves more directly to the educationally more 'deprived' tracks (Van Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012).

Despite the wealth of research on the educational and broader outcomes of tracking for students and the finding that tracks are attributed different social status, there is very little research that investigates how students develop their perception of their own track. Although little is known about the underlying processes that explain students' development of track identities, small scale, qualitative case studies show that vocational students cope with their lower track status by either rejecting core educational values, like working hard for school (Högberg, 2011) or by setting themselves apart from fellow track members and embracing these educational values (Van Praag, Demanet, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2017). These findings build on a rich tradition of sociological research that shows how working class (Willis, 1977), and racial/ethnic minority students (Mac An Ghaill, 1988) 'resist' a school system that treats them less favorably and instead search for positive identities elsewhere, by working, being cool and successful in dating (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2016; Willis, 1977).

However, very little research investigates if lower status track students can identify in a positive way with their track, even when their track receives differing societal praise. A possible way for students to achieve this can be through chauvinistic identification. Chauvinism[1] is a sense of ingroup superiority which devalues, discriminates, and derogates outgroups, and values what makes the ingroup unique (Raijman et al., 2008). Chauvinistic identification can be used as a strategy to counteract outsider judgement, so it might be a useful identification for vocational track students (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019), especially if this could help students at risk of dropping out to remain in education by feeling connected with their track, despite a negative societal judgement of them and their track. Chauvinistic attitudes might at the same time also be held by academic students, as a reflection of societal praise.

Prior research has established that teachers are an influential voice in students' educational and non-educational attitudes (e.g., Boone, Seghers, & Van Houtte, 2018; Ardies et al., 2015; Goodenow, 1993). Additionally, teachers are, to a certain extent, tracked themselves (e.g., Achinstein et al., 2004; Boldrini et al., 2019; Gore & Morrison, 2001). So, based on their own experiences of being tracked and observing how students are influenced by the public perception on tracks, teachers can, for instance, stimulate chauvinistic track opinions in students, in an effort to counteract (negative) societal judgement. This paper builds on a rich body of research on tracking, by investigating which factors relate to chauvinistic track attitudes in Belgian secondary school children. More specifically, this study looks at how students' track chauvinism is informed by the public perception of tracks and teachers' communication to their students on their own track.

6.3.3 Theoretical framework

6.3.3.1 Chauvinism and tracking

Chauvinism is an attitude that stimulates positive ingroup feelings by distinguishing the ingroup from meaningful outgroups through feelings of ingroup homogeneousness and

[1]Throughout this paper we will discuss the concept of chauvinism based on its academic definition and mainly focus on the factors that influence the existence and composition of chauvinism in the context of educational tracking. While we are aware that the public discourse on chauvinism as a concept is generally negative and chauvinism is often used in a pejorative way, we do not see it within the scope of this paper to discuss the merit of chauvinism as a concept or to present our opinion on how chauvinism should be used within the academic or public discourse.

superiority, leading to exclusionary and hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008). Chauvinism is different from other, positive forms of ingroup identification like ingroup favoritism or bias, since it is a more conflict-oriented identification, rooted in the idea that the ingroup is superior on certain characteristics. Ingroup bias refers to making choices that benefit the ingroup more than outgroups, based on a more positive sentiment towards the ingroup. This can be both through favoring the ingroup or derogating the outgroup (Brewer, 1979; Hewstone et al., 2002; Tajfel et al., 1971). The chauvinism measure does not look at favoring behavior, but is purely about attitudes of supremacy based on the idea that if more people were like the ingroup, the world would be a better place. Chauvinistic feelings can be caused by the societal status ladder, as the highest status group might allow their self-perception to mirror the higher status society attributes to them, increasing their feelings of superiority (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Reflected appraisal, the process through which people come to see themselves as how they perceive significant others to see them, effectively acting as a looking glass for the self, might likewise lead to a more negative self-perception in lower status tracked students through internalizing their lower public status (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Wallace & Tice, 2012). At the same time, chauvinism has also been observed in lower status groups, as chauvinism can be a mechanism to resist a lower place on a status ladder (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019), by dismissing the elements on which they are esteemed lower and highlighting ingroup superiority and homogeneity.

Mizrachi and colleagues (2009), while not explicitly calling it chauvinism, observe a sense of superiority in the 'lower tracks' compared to the more academic tracks in Israel. 'Lower track students' claim superiority based on undesirable personality traits in the other tracks, not based on academic performance/attitudes. These traits include the way students from different tracks dress, 'the higher tracks' ' perceived lack of social solidarity, and that high track students study so hard it makes them 'freaks' according to 'low track' students, rather than having fun like the 'lower track' students. The suggestion that chauvinism might be observed in both groups that are societally praised and lowly esteemed, raises the question whether the concept of chauvinism might be given a different meaning depending on which group holds these chauvinistic attitudes. The different sources of these tracks' chauvinistic attitudes might also be caused by what track characteristics students attach importance to.

Public perception is relevant to study in all grouping systems where the groups are explicit and publicly known. Public regard is the extent to which individuals feel that others view their group positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998). Public track regard is known to affect students on educational outcomes, it can alter educational motivation from a more individual to a more group-oriented feeling of accomplishment (Chavous et al., 2003) and public group regard can even affect personal self-esteem (e.g., Thomas et al., 2012). Additionally, according to the Rejection-Identification model, increased identification can be used to counteract low public regard (Branscombe et al., 1999). Chauvinism is expected to be higher for academic track students with high public regard, as their feelings of superiority are more confirmed by society, whereas for lower status technical and vocational tracks, a lower public regard could also increase chauvinism, invoking more protective feelings against judgement by others.

6.3.3.2 Chauvinism and tracking: the role of the teacher

Teachers can be influential in how students perceive themselves. Teachers shape students' views on a wide range of subjects, for example interest in educational subject matters (e.g., Ardies et al., 2015), students' sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993), school engagement (Quin, 2017) and even non-educational attitudes like ethnic prejudice (Vervaet, Van Houtte, & Stevens, 2018). Teachers are also shown to be role models for students. Feelings of sharing a certain trait with the teacher, being gender, ethnicity, religion, or caste, all positively affect students' performance and educational attitudes (e.g., Paredes, 2014; Rawal & Kingdon, 2010; Zirkel, 2002). Since teachers are seen as role models by students through a wide variety of traits they share with their students, it can be assumed they are also role models for their students based on their shared track membership. It is quite likely for teachers to communicate about tracks since they also experience the benefits and burdens of being tracked, in a similar way to their students and become 'tracked' themselves to a certain extent (Achinstein et al., 2004). Especially in educational systems such as those in the USA, where the assignment of classes to teachers is based on a competitive (performance) model between teachers, teachers' personal status attainment will be closely tied to tracking (Finley, 1984; Kelly, 2004a; Talbert & Ennis, 1990). Teachers experience the public regard of the tracks they teach. The societal focus on higher education makes teachers in vocational education courses feel that their subject does not matter and their job is considered less valuable than that of their academically oriented colleagues (Achinstein et al., 2004; Boldrini et al., 2019; Gore &

Morrison, 2001). In the United States, teachers are shown to look down on their colleagues who teach in lower status tracks (Finley, 1984). Additionally, vocational education teachers feel that the challenges associated with the diverse educational and personal backgrounds of their students, motivating their students, and trying to bridge the gap between curriculum and future workplace does not receive the social recognition it deserves, causing increased job frustration (Amitai, 2021; Boldrini et al., 2019).

Teachers hold a position of authority, so their expressed track opinion could be interpreted as very commanding. Students tend to accept teachers as authority figures in their school, out of respect, to show their appreciation towards teachers as guardians or to avoid punishment (Yariv, 2009). Teachers' authority is limited however. Issues that overstep teachers' authority include violating civil rights, intervening in personal matters and causing moral dilemmas (Yariv, 2009). It could be argued that the teachers' personal opinion on tracks, and how students should view their own and other tracks is a strictly personal matter and falls outside the authority of the teacher. Expressed chauvinistic track attitudes by teachers might affect students' track chauvinism, though, as students can consider their teachers as both a role model and a voice of authority.

The higher status attributed to academic tracks, combined with their students' more pro-school attitudes could lead us to assume that the academic schools are the most desired by teachers. This is not necessarily the case. Less study-oriented attitudes do impact teachers' job satisfaction to a certain extent (Van Houtte, 2006b), but it does not mean that teachers view their bond with these students less positively (Spilt & Koomen, 2009). An important driver of teachers' track preference concerns their preferences in student-attributes. Vocational and technical track schools experience the highest teacher mobility to other tracks, based on their students exhibiting a higher sense of futility and these students being perceived as less teachable (Amitai, 2021). On the other hand, the personal-social behavior of technical and vocational track students is rated more positively (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Amitai, 2021). Students' sense of futility and teachability are more impactful on teacher mobility than students' performance (Boyd et al., 2005). So, generally speaking, academic education is more attractive to teachers, yet teachers who put an emphasis on student-teacher communication may prefer teaching in vocational education.

The influential voice teachers have towards their students, combined with teachers' own experiences with the effect of track status, and the possible benefits of chauvinism for students' self-image, leads us to hypothesize that teachers will employ track chauvinistic communication to improve students' self-image. The extent to which teachers communicate about tracks might depend on the extent they feel students' self-image is threatened by track status. As the vocational track students are the most status disadvantaged, teachers might communicate more chauvinistically about their track to counteract its lower status. Educational grouping systems in which the academic track is considered the most desirable might cause academic education members to consider their track as 'the norm' or even as 'the regular trajectory,' and due to this feeling of 'normality' academic track students might not even be aware of their tracked identity. This would cause the track to remain a hidden, dominant identity, as has been shown in ethnic identity research with dominant groups (Doane, 1997). Hidden identity means that for members of the dominant group, their identity is less salient and they do not identify with it as consciously and explicitly since it is less visible. Academic teachers for whom track is a hidden identity are expected to communicate less about tracks. Yet, following social dominance theory, high track status students and teachers might put more emphasis on their track identity, as a source of status gains (e.g., Sidanius et al., 1997). Vocational, and to a lesser extent technical track teachers, are expected to show track chauvinistic communication as a defensive response to lower public regard.

6.3.3.3 Current study

In this study, we examine how students' track chauvinism is constructed, influenced by their perception of external opinions, being the public opinion on their track and their teachers' chauvinistic track communication. In doing so, we test the applicability of concepts and theories originated in ethnic studies and social psychology, such as chauvinism, public regard, social dominance theory, reflected appraisal, and theories studied previously in education, related to teachers as role models. As these concepts and theories have not been applied widely to educational tracking before, the expected directions of effects for the following hypotheses will be adopted from their original fields.

The theoretical framework leads to four hypotheses. Firstly, the chauvinism composition hypothesis assumes that track chauvinism can be broken down into two concepts. Chauvinism might tap into its cognitive component (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Wallace & Tice, 2012), and into

its social component (Willis, 1977; Mizrachi et al., 2009). Secondly, if chauvinism is one unified concept, the track chauvinism hypothesis assumes that the academic track students will have the highest chauvinism, since the studied educational tracking system is characterized by rigid boundaries, limited upward mobility raising the status of students who stay in the 'highest track', and a focus on academic achievement. Students who 'succeed' in this system could feel cognitively superior to students from the technical and vocational track who are considered 'less successful'. Yet if track chauvinism is hypothesized to occur in different status groups based on different sources, not solely based on educational prowess, all tracks might have fairly equal chauvinism. Thirdly, the direction of the effect of public regard on track chauvinism is track dependent. The public regard hypothesis assumes that, in the academic track, a high public regard will allow students to gain status from their track position which might lead to higher chauvinism through reflected appraisal (Sidanius et al., 1997; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). In contrast, in the vocational track, and to a lesser extent the technical track, a lower public regard will lead to more stereotype threat and might result in higher chauvinism, as chauvinism can be used to resist the threats of their lower status position (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This hypothesis might change if chauvinism breaks down into multiple concepts, as high public regard is assumed to be positively related to more cognitively inspired chauvinism, whereas low public regard might cause students to put more emphasis on personality based chauvinism. Fourthly, the teacher communication hypothesis assumes that in schools with track chauvinistic teacher cultures, expressed through teachers' chauvinistic track communication, students will develop more chauvinistic track attitudes. This is assumed regardless of whether there is one or multiple types of track chauvinism. Students can be assumed to take the opinion of their teachers into consideration, since their teachers can be seen as role models who also have the experience of being tracked.

6.3.3.4 Belgian context

There are five particularities of the Belgian educational context that must be taken into consideration for this study. Firstly, the Belgian tracking system can be typified as a 'cascade', secondly the tracks are explicitly connected to schools, thirdly teachers' track membership does not depend on their accreditation, fourthly Belgian secondary education has regional differences, and lastly tracking can be done either within or between schools. The dominant position of the academic track students is unquestioned in Belgium. This is established in the

organization of tracking. Students have the choice to start in either a general A-stream or remedial B-stream, reserved for those who did not obtain a primary education degree. Within this general A-stream students must choose elective courses already in the first year – such as Latin or technology, which serve as a preparation for the official track choice they will make after the second year (Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015a, b). When students choose their track officially in year three, they have the choice between the academic, technical, vocational and arts track. The academic track prepares students for higher education, the technical track consists of both general and technical-theoretical courses, and the vocational track focuses on training students for a craft (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019). The arts track offers art courses and a general education, but due to the low number of students enrolled in this track, 2.2% of the student population in 2019 (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b), the arts track will not be considered in this study. The most important aspect of this system for the current study is that once students are part of a track, moving 'down' to a more practical track can be done easily and is common, but 'upward' mobility towards more academic education is barely possible in practice. This causes a 'cascade', whereby students in secondary education 'aim high' by trying out the more academic track first, and eventually 'go down' to 'lower', more technical tracks (Boone, Seghers, & Van Houtte, 2018). This urge to 'aim high' at the start exemplifies that the academic track is valued the most. Track movement advise is based on students' performance. Student performance is assessed through the schools' own examination, which is based on governmental educational standards and teachers' estimation of students' skill, as there was no central examination in Belgian secondary education at the time of this study.

Secondly, tracks are explicit and publicly known in Belgian education. Schools can offer either one track or multiple tracks in the same school. There are countries characterized by within school ability grouping (for example the United States, United Kingdom and Australia) and countries which only organize between-school tracking, in which each school provides one track (e.g., Japan) (Chmielewski, 2014; Ono, 2001). In countries like Belgium and Germany tracks are organized both between schools and within schools. So-called 'categorical schools' provide one track per school (commonly academic or technical/vocational) and multilateral schools (or 'Gesamtschule' in German) provide more than one track in the same school. Yet the distinction between tracks persists and there is no education in heterogeneous or mixed-

ability groups (Chmielewski, 2014; Van Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012). Since the tracks provided by each school are publicly known, teachers can make a conscious choice to teach a certain track. This allows teachers to take the status of a track and the student characteristics they prefer into consideration when choosing their workplace, which should lead to a better fit between teacher and track. Public tracking results in more teachers who value the track they teach in for its unique characteristics and are invested in the track they teach, rather than looking for opportunities to teach in higher status tracks. The difference between one track and multiple track schools does not seem to affect students' evaluation of their own track (Dekeyser, Van Houtte, Maene, & Stevens, 2022), even though this does affect students in terms of study involvement, sense of futility and self-esteem (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015a,b; VanHoutte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012). These differences are caused by the difference in interacting, with students in multilateral school being confronted with other tracks on a daily basis, causing track membership to become more salient.

Thirdly, teachers' accreditation in Belgium has no influence on track membership. Belgian higher education is open to all students who successfully graduated and all courses can be chosen freely. When studying a general course (e.g., mathematics, French), students are trained and licensed to teach this in all tracks. The only exceptions are track specific courses, (e.g., Latin for academic track and hairdressing for vocational education). So, teachers can develop their track preference throughout their career, rather than it being solely based on course choice or personal educational history. Fourthly, Belgian education is divided in a Flemish-region governed and Walloon-region governed education. These systems are similar but show some differences: in the Walloon system, when students do not succeed in their first two years, they are rerouted to a program which aims to tackle their individual issues and reinstate students in the communal program afterwards. The Flemish system is more willing to let students 'move down' to vocational tracks or make students re-do a year instead of applying remedial programs (Onderwijskiezer, 2021). Lastly, Flemish research on within and between school tracking generally differentiates between categorical schools and multilateral schools, the former providing either academic or technical and/or vocational education and the latter providing a combination of academic with either technical, vocational or both types of education (e.g., VanHoutte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012).

6.3.4 Methods

6.3.4.1 Sample

The data for this study are drawn from the School, Identity and Society survey (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021). The dataset relies on a mixed-method research design (QUAL > QUAN). The measurement instruments vis-a-vis students' track identification are based on qualitative interviews with adolescents (N = 32) enrolled in their third year of secondary education. These qualitative interviews were conducted as a preparatory phase for the [Anonymized]-survey. The goal of the interviews was to unravel which social identities were important for these adolescents and how these identities were embedded in their overall school context (Maene, Thijs, & Stevens, 2021). Special attention went to the discourse/language the students used to talk about the identities and their social interactions with peers and teachers. The findings of these interviews were used to develop measurement instruments to investigate more in-depth the role of tracking as a social identity with multiple dimensions (Ashmore et al., 2004) and its embeddedness in the school context.

The quantitative dataset contains information on 4540 third year high school students: 64 schools took part, 7 schools in Wallonia (French speaking part of Belgium), 29 in Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) and 28 in the Brussel Capital Region (21 French speaking and 7 Dutch speaking). The schools were selected through multistage sampling: first cities with a history of migration were randomly selected and secondly the secondary schools were divided in strata based on their track variety. This led to a distinction between purely academic schools, technical-vocational and multilateral schools. Schools were randomly invited from each stratum to participate with this study. The focus on cities with a history of migration was a choice based on the more overarching topic of the dataset, but is not informed by tracking research. In total, 360 schools were contacted, from which 64 schools agreed to participate. Belgian educational research has a history of rather low school response rates, as many schools feel they are asked too often to participate in scientific research (e.g. Vervaet, Van Houtte, & Stevens, 2018). Yet even considering this over demand, the School, Identity and Society survey has lower response rates than other educational research in Belgium, possibly due to its focus on ethnic and national identities, which schools might consider as sensitive topics to survey. The response rate was lower in Brussels and Wallonia (18.3% and 11.3%

respectively) compared to Flanders (23%), possibly due to the lack of familiarity these regions have with Flemish research institutions.

The School, Identity and Society dataset is stratified. The objective for the School, Identity and Society survey was to generate a dataset that would allow to study adolescents' ethnic and track identities on a wide range of outcomes such as their intercultural, psychological and educational functioning. The dataset therefore had to include sufficient numbers of students from each educational track and a sufficient number of students with a migration background. In addition, to allow a sociological perspective on the data, structural and cultural contextual features had to be incorporated in the design of the dataset. This implied that schools had to be diversified on three axes: educational system (i.e. Dutch-speaking or French-speaking), diversity of the student population (ranging from monocultural to multicultural schools) and range of tracks offered (i.e. categorical or multilateral schools). In terms of ethnicity, there was an underrepresentation of Belgians without foreign roots (56% population, 36.7% sample), a considerable oversampling of Belgians with a foreign background, based on the birthplace of the grandparents or parents (33% population, 44.2% sample), and an of non-Belgians (11% population, 19.1% sample) (Statbel, 2018; Maene, Thijs, & Stevens, 2021). It was a conscious decision to oversample students with a migration background to enable studying the main objectives of the School, Identity and Society-survey. For tracking, there was an overrepresentation of academic track students (41% population, 59.9% sample) and an underrepresentation of both technical (31% population, 22.8% sample) and vocational students (25% population, 17.3% sample). The arts track was not included in the survey as they represent only 2.2% of the secondary school population (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). For sex there was a slight underrepresentation of boys (52% population, 49.1% sample).

The data collection took place from September 2017 to December 2017. The school principals distributed an information letter to all students and their parents, informing them on the research theme, timing and the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study. This letter gave parents the option to opt their child out of participating in the survey. Depending on region, 6–8% of parents did not give their consent. During the data-collection at school, students were asked to participate voluntarily, which yielded an 80% response-rate. The questionnaire was distributed and filled out in the classroom. There was no clear pattern in the non-consent and

non-response. This survey moment was monitored by a researcher who answered students' questions, and teachers who supervised students while respecting their privacy.

6.3.4.2 Variable description

Dependent variable

Students' track chauvinism. Students were presented 5 statements on how they view their track compared to other tracks. These statements were formulated based on the explorative qualitative interviews of the School, Identity and Society-survey and inspired by research on national/ethnic chauvinism. Items previously used in national/ethnic chauvinism research, like 'the world would be a better place if people were more like the X-group' and 'Generally, [country] is a better country than most other countries' (e.g., Raijman et al., 2008) were not included as these can seem rather broad, whereas the explorative qualitative interviews gave the basis to break down sense of superiority into more detailed characteristics, more explicitly linked to education but inspired by the same underlying sentiment as previously used items. Items commonly used in welfare chauvinism research did not translate very well to the educational context. Van der Waal et al. (2010) operationalized welfare chauvinism as: 'Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?'. The studied items were therefore more inspired by national/ethnic chauvinism research, rather than welfare chauvinism. The statements had 5 answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5): (1) 'students in my track are smarter than those in other tracks', (2) 'have more capabilities than those in other tracks', (3) 'are cooler than those in other tracks', (4) 'my track is harder' and (5) 'more creative'. The goal of these items was to measure students' sense of track superiority (i.e., track chauvinism). To validate its conceptual difference with students' public track regard (see further), we included the items of these two measures in an exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis included a total of 8 items for which two factors explained 51% of the variance (KMO = 0.859). The factor analysis showed that students' track chauvinism and students' track public regard are conceptually distinct. The factor loadings for track chauvinism ranged from 0.623 to 0.861, except for the item 'my track is harder' which had a factor loading of 0.450.

Main determinants

Student level; Track membership. Students are part of only one track. There were 2723 surveyed academic track students, 1034 technical and 783 vocational track students.

Students' public track regard. A self-developed three item scale, based on Sellers and colleagues' (1998) definition of public regard as the extent to which individuals feel that others view their group positively or negatively, were included in the survey. The items were: 'students from other tracks look down on my track', 'students from other tracks are respected more than my track' and 'students from other tracks see students from my track as social outcasts'. The items had 5 answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5). To establish these items as conceptually different from students' track chauvinism, they were included together in one factor analysis (cf. supra). The EFA showed a two-factor structure with the three items of students' public track regard loading on a separate factor with loadings ranging from 0.639 to 0.677. This was consistent for all three tracks and the three items have a good Cronbach's alpha of 0.738. These items were brought together in a scale by calculating their overall mean (Table 18, $M = 2.258$, $SD = 0.825$). All items were recoded, so a high score represents a high public regard. The three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < 0.05$) (see Table 18).

Perceived chauvinistic teacher communication. Students were asked to indicate for 20 items how they perceived the teachers from track specific courses were talking about tracking during lessons. These items were developed to represent different aspects of teachers' discourse. Three items related to teachers' speech highlighting differences among tracks from a superiority point of view: (1) 'my teacher makes jokes about other tracks' (2) 'my teacher says my track is better than other tracks' (3) 'my teacher says we have more capabilities than students in other tracks. The derogatory element, through making jokes about other tracks, of statement one represents the derogatory aspect of chauvinism (Raijman et al., 2008). The response scale ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). These items were referred to as teacher chauvinism. Exploratory factor analysis on the 20 item-battery in which these items were included showed that the three items of teacher chauvinism exclusively loaded on the same factor. The factor loadings ranged from 0.518 to 0.730. The Cronbach's alpha for the three items was 0.648. A scale was created taking the mean score of those three items ($M = 2.436$, $SD = 0.873$): the higher a student's score, the more the student perceives the teachers from track specific courses as using chauvinistic track speech. These items were brought

together in a scale by calculating their overall mean (Table 18, $M = 2.44$; $SD = 0.87$). The three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < 0.05$) (see Table 18).

School level; Teachers' chauvinistic culture. To create a measure for chauvinistic track culture in schools, the individual students' perceived chauvinistic teacher communication items were aggregated to the school level by calculating the average for each school. To validate whether those perceptions are (partly) shared by the students within each school, the 'mean rater reliability' (Glick, 1985; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979) was calculated. This is done by calculating the intra-class correlation (ICC) of an ANOVA (BMS-WMS/BMS), which allows us to measure the similarity between micro-units belonging to the same macro-unit and has to be higher than the threshold of 0.60 (Glick, 1985). The ICC for teacher chauvinism is 0.86 ($F = 7.159$, $p < 0.001$), which implies that the perceptions are shared by the students of the same school and that the aggregate can be considered as a school characteristic.

Control variables

Student level. Sex was almost equally distributed in our sample: 48.8% of the sample was male. The academic track had mostly female students (55.5%), in the technical and vocational track the majority was male (56.3% and 54.8% respectively). Table 19 provides bivariate correlations between all studied variables.

Table 18: Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables–comparing the academic, technical, and vocational track

Variable	Total		Academic (N= 44)		Technical (N= 37)		Vocational (N=28)		Difference
	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	F-test or Cramer's V
School Level									
Teachers Chauvinistic Culture (N= 64)	2.44	0.26	2.32	0.20	2.56	0.25	2.67	0.24	
Educational System (ref. = Dutch-Speaking) (N= 64)	56.25		51.11		53.85		51.61		
School Structure (ref. = categorical) (N= 64)	62.5		51.11		42.03		60.17		
	Total		Academic (N= 2725)		Technical (N= 1037)		Vocational (N= 786)		Difference
Individual Level									
Cognitive Chauvinism (N= 4426)	2.60	0.91	2.62	0.93	2.57	0.87	2.57	0.90	1.701
Social Chauvinism (N=4448)	2.37	0.99	$2.12^{T,V}$	0.91	$2.66^{A,V}$	0.98	$2.86^{A,T}$	0.97	244.19***
Public Track Regard (N = 4365)	11.22	2.47	$11.69^{T,V}$	2.26	$10.82^{A,V}$	2.56	$10.05^{A,T}$	2.57	153.54***
Perceived Chauvinistic Teacher Communication (N= 4377)	2.44	0.87	$2.30^{T,V}$	0.84	$2.56^{A,V}$	0.87	$2.76^{A,T}$	0.87	100.60***
Sex (ref. = male) (N= 4553)	49.1		44.55		56.8		54.7		0.112***
SES (N= 4584)	48.18	16.71	$50.16^{T,V}$	17.31	44.43^{A}	19.44	44.57^{A}	14.62	49.69***
Prior GPA (N= 3705)	67.57	12.67	$69.98^{T,V}$	10.89	$62.28^{A,V}$	12.19	$65.10^{A,T}$	16.71	130.19***
Ethnic background (N= 4275)	43.4		47.5		39.6		37.3		0.088***

X^{A} :differ from the academic track at $p < 0.05$; X^{T} differ from the technical track at $p < 0.05$; X^{V} differ from the vocational track at $p < 0.05$

Table 19: Bivariate correlations

Variables	Teachers chauvinistic culture (N= 64)	Educational system (N= 64)	School structure (N= 64)	Cognitive chauvinism (N= 4426)	Social chauvinism (N= 4448)	Public regard (N= 4365)	Chauvinistic teacher communication (N= 4377)	Sex (N= 4553	SES (N= 4584)	Prior GPA (N= 3705)	Ethnic background (N= 4275)
Teachers chauvinistic culture (N= 64)	/	-0.167***	0.006	0.112***	0.299***	-0.234***	0.300***	-0.183***	-0.133***	-0.084***	0.127***
Educational system (N= 64)	-0.167***	/	0.243***	-0.079***	0.043**	0.075***	-0.050***	-0.054***	-0.014	-0.279***	0.113***
School structure (N= 64)	0.006	0.243***	/	0.023	0.046**	0.009	0.001	0.020	-0.020	-0.115***	0.023
Cognitive chauvinism (N= 4426)	0.112***	-0.079***	0.023	/	0.585***	-0.421***	0.341***	-0.149***	-0.008	0.045**	0.088***
Social chauvinism (N= 4448)	0.299***	0.043**	0.046**	0.585***	/	-0.540***	0.367***	-0.170***	-0.081***	-0.101***	0.144***
Public regard (N= 4365)	-0.234***	0.075***	0.009	-0.421***	-0.540***	/	-0.361***	0.108***	0.061***	0.049**	-0.113***
Chauvinistic teacher communication (N= 4377)	0.300***	-0.050***	0.001	0.341***	0.367***	-0.361***	/	-0.148***	-0.020	-0.038*	0.037*
Sex (N= 4553)	-0.183***	-0.054***	0.020	-0.149***	-0.170***	0.108***	-0.148***	/	0.023	0.127***	-0.034*
SES (N= 4584)	-0.133***	-0.014	-0.020	-0.008	-0.081***	0.061***	-0.020	0.023	/	0.108***	-0.151***
Prior GPA (N= 3705)	-0.084***	-0.279***	-0.115***	0.045**	-0.101***	0.049**	-0.038*	0.127***	0.108***	/	-0.087***
Ethnic background (N= 4275)	0.127***	0.113***	0.023	0.088***	0.144***	-0.113***	0.037*	-0.034*	-0.151***	-0.087***	/

* $p < 0.05$.; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Prior Grade Point Average. (GPA) was measured by asking students to self-report which average grade they obtained in the previous school year. As there is no guarantee students are still part of the same track as the one in which they achieved the reported GPA, prior GPA is used as a general indicator of educational success. This was scored as a percentage (N = 3705; M = 67.57; SD = 12.67). Students in the academic track had the highest average GPA (69.98), technical track students the lowest (62.28) and the vocational track students scored in between (65.10), students in the three tracks differed significantly from each other (p < 0.05) (see Table 18). As there are no standardized tests in Belgian education we have to rely on self-reported GPA, which does raise questions of validity due to possible cover-up and memory issues in students (Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015a,b). Yet it is the best measure we currently have.

Students' socioeconomic status. SES is based on students' reports of the occupation of their parents, which were matched to the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom et al., 1992). Ideally, the SES measure would be based on parents' own reporting, but due to the limitations of SIS-dataset we use student reported parental occupation. Student reports do generally seem a good indicator of parental SES (e.g., Ensminger et al., 2000; Lien et al., 2001). Students were also allowed to give a brief description of parental occupation so the researchers had more information to determine parents' jobs. The highest occupational score of both parents was retained as the students' SES indicator. The higher the score on the ISEI, the higher the SES. The scale theoretically ranges from 10 to 90. For our sample the minimum score was 15, the maximum 90, with an average of 50.16 (N = 4584, SD = 16.72). Students in the academic track have the highest SES (50.16) on average, which is considerably higher than the average SES of the technical (45.72) and vocational track (44.57) students. The three tracks differed significantly from each other (p < 0.05) (see Table 18).

Ethnic background. We chose a simplified solution with only two groups. The reference category are Belgian natives and Western Europeans. All other national backgrounds are grouped in the dummy category. The ethnic background of the students was determined in the first place by the birthplace of the student's maternal grandmother. This is common practice in Belgium, as most students of immigrant descent are second or third generation and have the Belgian nationality (OECD, 2008). If this data was not available, we used the

mother's place of birth. If even this data was missing, we used the students' birth country (Maene, Thijs, & Stevens, 2021). There were 1891 students of the reference category (1608 Belgian descent and 283 Western European) and 2412 minority students.

School level; *Educational system*. To control for possible region/ policy differences on track chauvinism we include a control dummy variable with the Flemish education, which included 36 surveyed schools (counting 2659 students) as the reference category. The Walloon education has 28 included schools counting 1925 students. Schools in the Brussels Capital Region fall under one of these systems depending on the principal language of education.

School structure. Categorical schools were 63.5% of all surveyed schools (*N* = 40). Of all surveyed schools, 24 provided only the academic track, 16 schools provided technical education either alone or combined with vocational education. There were 24 multilateral schools. Ten schools offered academic, technical and vocational, 13 schools offered academic and technical, and 1 school academic and vocational education.

6.3.4.3 Design

Track differences were examined for each variable by means of an F-test or Cramer's' V (Table 18). To study the chauvinism composition hypothesis, since it is the first time, to our knowledge, that track chauvinism is employed as a statistical construct, we have to test what track chauvinism consists of before using it as a dependent variable for analysis. Whether the 5 chauvinism items are one scale that is consistent in meaning across all three tracks, if some items have to be omitted or if this breaks down into different constructs of chauvinism per track, was studied through measurement invariance (MI) testing. If our construct (s) achieve MI across tracks, it would give more credibility to track chauvinism meaning the same to all students, regardless of track, and it would allow between track comparisons. We test MI through MPlus (Geiser, 2013).

Following the guidelines on reporting MI-testing by Van de Schoot et al. (2012) and Putnick & Bornstein (2016), we will start from the full 5 item model and test for configural, metric and scalar invariance across the tracks (Table 20). For all models the model fit will be tested through the CFI, RMSEA and SRMR indices. CFI should achieve values larger than 0.90 and preferably larger than 0.95 (van de Steen et al., 2012). RMSEA should be smaller than 0.08 and preferably smaller than 0.05 (van de Steen et al., 2012). Lastly, SRMR should be smaller than

0.030 for the metric model and smaller than 0.015 for the scalar model (Chen, 2007). The chi-squared tests indicate whether there are significant differences between the models. When scalar invariance is achieved, the MI analysis is complete. If no invariance across the tracks is achieved, possibly problematic variables will be eliminated one by one based on modification indices (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). When interpreting modification indices, the higher the number, the bigger the improvement of model fit would be by modifying the model based on this variable. If there are several options that provide similar results in terms of modification indices, a theoretical motivation will be used to delete an item.

After the deletion of an item from the scale, the same measurement invariance tests will be rerun with the reduced scale. If this again does not provide any type of invariance, another item will be deleted. If no scalar invariance is achieved after eliminating two items, but at least metric invariance is achieved, partial scalar invariance testing will be performed (Van de Schoot et al., 2012). This is done by unconstraining the intercept of one item and retesting for scalar invariance afterwards. This partial scalar invariance testing would be done for all items separately, meaning we only unconstrain one intercept per tested model, as ideally more than half of all intercepts should be invariant (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Partial scalar invariance can be considered sufficient to compare the means of the different tracks in subsequent analysis. If no partial scalar invariance is achieved, it is not advised to compare means.

The rest of the design section depends on the outcome of the chauvinism composition hypothesis. If it would be allowed to test the chauvinism hypothesis, based on the results of the measurement invariance test, an ANOVA with students' track chauvinism as the outcome and a post-hoc Bonferroni test to check if student chauvinism differs between the tracks will be run. If MI testing leads to multiple outcome variables, all outcome measures will be tested for track differences with a post-hoc Bonferroni test. If no (partial) scalar invariance is achieved the results of these Bonferroni tests should be considered as indicative of possible differences that future research should look deeper into.

To test the public regard and teacher communication hypotheses, we will run multilevel regression models with students' chauvinism as the dependent variable(s), using HLM6 (Raudenbush et al., 2013). Multilevel models most accurately analyze the data, since the surveyed students (level 1) are clustered in schools (level 2). The regression analysis starts

with an unconditional model (model 0) to indicate whether there are significant school differences in the dependent variable. The addition of students' track as dummies, with the academic track as reference category, can only be done if the outcome measure achieves MI. If not, all three tracks will be analyzed separately.

The subsequent model (Tables 23 and 24) will include SES, sex, prior GPA and ethnic background as control variables at the student level, and educational system and school structure as control variables at the school level. Previous research showed sex differences in terms of chauvinism in general but no consensus on which sex is more chauvinistic (e.g., Hjorth, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Van Der Waal et al., 2013). Research on tracking in Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) has repeatedly shown that tracking and SES are closely related to each other, with tracking causing an underrepresentation of lower SES-students in the academic track and an overrepresentation in the technical and vocational tracks (e.g., Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Tan, 1998).

Chauvinism and public regard are generally studied from the viewpoint of the dominant social group (Douglass & Umana-Taylor, 2017; Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997), however, studying it in all groups can provide more insight into how chauvinism works. Prior GPA was included as a control variable since it can be considered a general indicator of educational success. Ethnic background was added since nationalism research has shown chauvinism can be based on national/ethnic background, both as minority and majority group members, adding ethnic background allows us to account for possible strengthening or weakening effects of ethnic identity on educational chauvinism. The educational system is added to control whether the differences in the first two years of secondary education affect students' track attitude. School structure, being in either a categorical or multilateral school, is added since this has been shown to affect students' study involvement, sense of futility and self-esteem (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015b; Van Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012). Additionally, the track's public regard will be added to test the public regard hypothesis; perceived chauvinistic teacher communication and teachers' chauvinistic culture were added to test the teacher communication hypothesis. Adding this teacher communication at both level 1 and 2 allows to discern between the effects of perceived chauvinistic teacher communication by a singular student and the separate effect of a schools' chauvinistic teacher culture. The metric variables, chauvinism, public regard and

perceived chauvinistic teacher communication, were grand mean centered. If MI is achieved, in order to determine the specific direction and significance of the effect of public regard per track, interactions would be run between public track regard and students' track. To do this, we would perform a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 20: Measurement Invariance Testing of Track Chauvinism

5 item model						
	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Configural	376.139	15	0.000	0.960	0.127	0.034
Metric	401.687	23	0.000	0.958	0.105	0.041
Scalar	1533.132	31	0.000	0.832	0.180	0.099
4 item model						
Configural	27.964	6	0.000	0.996	0.049	0.013
Metric	37.585	12	0.000	0.995	0.038	0.023
Scalar	738.331	18	0.000	0.872	0.163	0.087
3 item model						
Configural	0.000	0	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Metric	5.651	4	0.227	1.000	0.017	0.018
Scalar	422.126	8	0.000	0.902	0.186	0.070

6.3.5 Results

When testing the chauvinism composition hypothesis, initial analysis showed no MI when all 5 chauvinism items were included (Table 20). When comparing between the different invariance models, they all differ significantly in terms of their chi-square ($p \leq 0.001$) (see Appendix 11). Therefore, based on the modification indices (see Appendix 12), the 'students in my track are more creative' item was deleted, as its correlation modification indices (40.9 and 27.6) were considerably higher than those of the other variables, with values ranging between 20 and 14. The new scale with 4 items does not achieve MI yet (Table 20), but it does

already show a non-significant chi-square difference between the configural and metric model (p = 0.142) (see Appendix 11), which is an improvement over the 5-item model. For the modification indices there were no clear values that stood out, the correlation of the 'smarter' and 'more capable' items (27.710) and 'my track is harder' with 'cooler' (27.714) gave the highest values, but were too close to base a decision on. As the first deleted item was 'students are more creative', it seemed theoretically more coherent to try and eliminate 'student in my track are cooler' next, as these two could be considered non-cognitive, whereas my track is 'harder', students have 'more capabilities' and are 'smarter' all pertain to cognitive skills.

The new three item scale did achieve metric MI which is already stronger than configural invariance (Table 20). In terms of model fit, the CFI (1.000), RMSEA (0.017) and SRMR (0.018) are all within the desired threshold values (Chen, 2007; van de Steen et al., 2012). As the three item model did not achieve scalar invariance, partial scalar invariance was tested. Table 21 shows that all partially unconstrained models achieve a desirable CFI, the models that unconstrain 'my track is smarter and 'more capable' achieve a good RMSEA, but none of the models achieve a good SRMR. So the model fit of these unconstrained models is not unequivocally good. Table 22 compared the partially unconstrained models with the 3 item model that achieved metric invariance. The p-values of Table 22 indicate that none of the partially unconstrained models are invariant compared to the metric model (p > 0.05), therefore there is no partial scalar invariance achieved.

Table 21: Partial Scalar Invariance of Cognitive Chauvinism: 3 Item Model, Unconstrained Item Intercept

	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
'Smarter'	16.834	6	0.010	0.997	0.035	0.029
'more capable'	59.234	6	0.000	0.987	0.077	0.056
'Track is harder'	208.899	6	0.000	0.952	0.150	0.077

Table 22: Comparison of Unconstrained Cognitive Chauvinism 3 Item Models to Metric Invariance Model

	χ^2-Diff	Df-diff	p
'Smarter'	11.183	2	0.004
'more capable'	53.583	2	0.000
'Track is harder'	203.248	2	0.000

Achieving metric invariance with this three item factor means that both the factor structure and the factor loadings are invariant across the tracks. These items also seem theoretically aligned, with the common theme being that the three items are cognitively oriented. Additionally, they have a good Cronbach's alpha (0.765). We therefore elect to continue analysis with this three item solution, which we will label cognitive track chauvinism (from now on called cognitive chauvinism), rather than opting for a four or five item construct which achieved no level of MI. Yet metric MI is insufficient to allow for any meaningful comparisons between the mean scores of the tracks, as this requires (partial) scalar invariance.

The two excluded items ('students from my track are cooler' and 'more creative') will be retained and turned into a separate scale, as these seem theoretically aligned and have a good Cronbach's alpha (0.734). This item will be labeled social track chauvinism (from now on called social chauvinism). As neither scale achieved MI, we cannot compare results between groups and opt instead to study each track in a separate analysis.

Cognitive chauvinism (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = 0.91), the scale which achieved metric M.I., scored highest with academic track students (*M* = 2.62, *SD* = 0.92), followed by the technical (*M* = 2.57, *SD* = 0.87), and vocational track (*M* = 2.57, *SD* = 0.90). The chauvinism scales are rescored to a mean rather than a sum scale for further analysis. For social chauvinism (*M* = 2.37, *SD* = 0.91), based on the two remaining items, the vocational track has the highest score (*M* = 2.86, *SD* = 0.97), followed by the technical (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 0.98) and lastly the academic track (*M* = 2.12, *SD* = 0.91).

The null-model for cognitive chauvinism showed that for the academic track 10% of the total variance ($p < 0.001$) can be situated at the school-level. For the technical and vocational track this is 10.7% and 4.1% respectively. For social chauvinism, in the academic track 13.4% of the total variance can be situated at the school level, in the technical track 6.2% and in the vocational track 2.0%. This variance at the school level is relatively low throughout the vocational track and for social chauvinism in the technical track.

For the control variables at the school level (Table 23), academic track students in Dutch-speaking schools are more cognitively chauvinistic than their counterparts in French-speaking schools. Additionally, academic students in multilateral schools are also more cognitively chauvinistic than academic students in categorical schools. The educational system and school structure show no significant relationship with cognitive chauvinism for the technical and vocational students. Teacher communication culture on the other hand is only significant with technical students, showing that the more chauvinistic communication is shared among teachers, the higher students' cognitive chauvinism. At the student level however, perceived chauvinistic teacher communication is positively significant across all three tracks.

Public regard is negatively related to cognitive chauvinism in a significant manner in all three tracks. For the control variables at the individual level, boys are generally more cognitively chauvinistic than girls across all tracks. SES shows no significant effect on cognitive chauvinism in any track. Prior GPA is only in the academic track significantly correlated with the outcome. Being part of the ethnic minority is significantly positively related to cognitive chauvinism for the academic and vocational track students, but not in the technical track. In order to obtain more insight into the public regard measure and to inform the discussion on the public regard hypothesis, we ran additional F-tests with Levene's homogeneity of variance tests to see if the variance in experienced public regard was the same for all tracks. Pairwise homogeneity of variance tests showed that the variances differ significantly between the academic track and both the technical ($F(1,3601) = 99.085$, $p < 0.001$) and the vocational track ($F(1,3350) = 283.840$, $p < 0.001$) as well as between the technical and vocational track ($F(1,1705) = 37.863$, $p < 0.001$).

Students in Dutch-speaking schools are significantly less socially chauvinistic compared to those in French-speaking schools in the academic and technical track. For the vocational track, the opposite is the case. The technical track is the only one that differs in social chauvinism

based on school structure, with multilateral school students being significantly more socially chauvinistic than their counterparts in categorical schools. For chauvinistic teacher communication culture, all three tracks show differing impact on social chauvinism. Academic students' chauvinism benefits from a more chauvinistic communication culture, whereas vocational students' chauvinism lowers in these more chauvinistic cultures. Technical students experience no significant impact at the school level of chauvinistic teacher communication. At the individual level however, all three tracks show a significantly positive relationship between perceived chauvinistic teacher communication and social chauvinism.

Public regard is significantly negatively related to social chauvinism in all three tracks. For the control variables at the individual level, SES shows no significant effect on the outcome in any track. For prior GPA, only the technical track shows a significantly negative relation to social chauvinism. In the academic and vocational, but not in the technical track, boys are more socially chauvinistic than girls. Lastly, ethnic background is only significant in the academic track, with ethnic minority students being more socially chauvinistic.

Table 23: Separate Multilevel Regression for Academic, Technical and Vocational Track (HLM 6) with Cognitive Chauvinism as Outcome

Variables	Academic	Technical	Vocational
Intercept	2.333***	1.648***	2.996***
School Level			
Educational System (ref. = Dutch-Speaking)	-0.150**	-0.015	0.155
	(0.047)	(0.088)	(0.089)
School structure (ref. = categorical)	0.138*	0.102	-0.037
	(0.054)	(0.088)	(0.098)
Teacher communication culture	0.148	0.362*	-0.153
	(0.141)	(0.150)	(0.175)
Individual Level			
Public Regard	-0.140***	-0.118***	-0.135***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.017)
Perceived Chauvinistic Teacher Communication	0.205***	0.217***	0.254***
	(0.022)	(0.035)	(0.044)
Sex (ref. = male)	-0.192***	-0.151*	-0.366***
	(0.041)	(0.063)	(0.066)
SES	-0.001	0.001	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Prior GPA	0.006**	0.004	<-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Ethnic background (ref. = Belgian/Western European)	0.128**	0.089	0.168**
	(0.046)	(0.072)	(0.050)
Variance components			
Intercept	0.075***	0.081**	0.001*
Public Regard	0.005***	0.003	0.002
Perceived teacher communication	0.005	0.008	0.015*
Sex	0.018*	0.013	0.006
SES	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Prior GPA	<0.000	<0.001	<0.001
Ethnic Background	0.019	0.053	0.004

Note: All presented coefficients are unstandardized. *$p < 0.05$.; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table 24: Separate Multilevel Regression for Academic, Technical and Vocational Track (HLM 6) with Social Chauvinism as Outcome

Variables	Academic	Technical	Vocational
Intercept	0.736	1.844***	4.110***
School Level			
Educational System (ref. = Dutch-Speaking)	0.224*** (0.051)	0.181* (0.068)	-0.210* (0.098)
School structure (ref. = categorical)	0.081 (0.052)	0.163* (0.060)	-0.125 (0.106)
Teacher communication culture	0.560** (0.175)	0.266 (0.147)	-0.378* (0.177)
Individual Level			
Public Regard	-0.518*** (0.030)	-0.451*** (0.051)	-0.426*** (0.079)
Perceived Chauvinistic Teacher Communication	0.162*** (0.023)	0.199*** (0.043)	0.206*** (0.041)
Sex (ref. = male)	-0.143*** (0.032)	-0.159 (0.089)	-0.414*** (0.068)
SES	-0.002 (0.001)	<0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)
Prior GPA	0.001 (0.002)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)
Ethnic background (ref. = Belgian/Western European)	0.103** (0.037)	0.118 (0.075)	0.076 (0.077)
Variance components			
Intercept	0.014	0.064*	0.026
Public Regard	0.014*	0.034	0.097**
Perceived teacher communication	0.004	0.011	0.013
Sex	0.011	0.106*	0.009
SES	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Prior GPA	<0.001*	<0.001	<0.001
Ethnic Background	0.009	0.052	0.037

6.3.6 Discussion

This study examined how students' track chauvinism is constructed and how it is related to the perceived opinions of society and teachers on students' tracks. Firstly, track chauvinism was investigated more in depth through factor analysis and measurement invariance testing, leading to the construction of two separate types of chauvinism. Cognitive chauvinism, which achieved metric measurement invariance across the three tracks, and social chauvinism, which is an explorative construct as it did not achieve any type of measurement invariance and is only based on two items. In order to study the relationship of cognitive and social chauvinism with the public opinion, we tested three hypotheses.

Firstly, the track chauvinism hypothesis assumed that students in the academic track would be most cognitively chauvinistic, followed by students in the technical and lastly in the vocational track, based on a sense of success within an educational system that is characterized by a focus on academic achievement. The students in the vocational track were hypothesized to be most socially chauvinistic, as they might search for alternative characteristics to feel superior, rather than academic success. Any results based on descriptive statistics should be considered purely as a possible indication of between group differences that future research, which explores these constructs more in depth, should look into, as the lack of (partial) scalar invariance for these two constructs does not allow for conclusive statements on between group mean comparisons. Therefore we cannot discuss the track chauvinism hypothesis. Secondly, the public regard hypothesis expected academic track students' chauvinism to benefit from a high public regard, as it would provide opportunities for status gains through reflected appraisal (Sidanius et al., 1997; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). For the vocational, and to a lesser extent technical track, a lower public regard would lead to higher chauvinism as a protective strategy by these students to cope with their lower public perception (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). The public regard hypothesis was partly confirmed for both types of chauvinism. Lower public regard is linked to higher track chauvinism, but rather than this just being the case for vocational and technical track students, this is the case across all tracks. The academic track has a higher average public regard with significantly less variance than the other two tracks. It therefore seems that there are fewer academic track students who experience low public regard. As public regard is negatively related to track chauvinism across all three tracks and there are students who experience low public regard in

all tracks, it seems that track chauvinism is generally used as a defensive response to perceived negative public judgement (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). High public status does not necessarily lead to feelings of chauvinism, therefore chauvinism does not seem to be an expression of reflected appraisal. So, organizing secondary education in a system with explicitly public tracking and differential track status might come at the cost of some students feeling looked down upon, becoming more chauvinistic and as such developing more antagonistic feelings towards other tracks (Dekeyser, Van Houtte, Maene, & Stevens, 2022).

The results for public regard for all groups are in line with ethnic identity research, even for the high status academic track. Ethnic identity research only rarely studies public regard with the dominant, high status White category (Douglass & Umana-Taylor, 2017), as public regard and experiences of discrimination are not as salient in dominant groups as in minority groups (Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997). Academic track students seemingly experience less instances of low public regard since their track can be considered the 'norm' and their track can therefore be a hidden identity, an identity which is not salient or conscious since it is unchallenged (Doane, 1997). But when they do experience low public regard, it would unexpectedly challenge this hidden identity, a very jarring experience which could cause track membership to become more salient (Douglass & Umana-Taylor, 2017). Low public regard would then invoke the same chauvinistic defensive reaction as it does in the other tracks (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). This seems to be happening for both cognitive and social chauvinism. An additional explanation might be that lower status academic track students, students in the Humanities compared to Science education, shift reference groups. Rather than comparing themselves favorably to the technical and vocational track, they would compare themselves in a more negative light with their higher status academic track counterparts. Future (qualitative) research could provide more insights from the students' perspective into the more ambiguous status position of lower status academic track students, as members of the highest status track who have comparatively low status within this track. Stevens and Vermeersch (2010) already looked at how teachers perceive and adapt to this stratification within the academic track.

Thirdly, the teacher communication hypothesis assumed that, regardless of track, there would be a positive association between more chauvinistic teacher communication (cultures) and more chauvinistic attitudes in students. Students are hypothesized to consider the opinion of

their teachers, who can be seen as role models and authority figures who also experience being tracked (Achinstein et al., 2004; Yariv, 2009). The teacher communication hypothesis was partly confirmed by our analyses. For both types of chauvinism, all three tracks show a significantly positive association between perceived chauvinistic teacher communication and their own social chauvinism at the individual level. At the school level however, the three tracks show different outcomes. For cognitive chauvinism, only technical students experience a significantly positive impact, the other tracks show no significant association between cultures of chauvinistic teacher communication and the outcome. The academic track students have a positive association between school wide chauvinistic teacher communication and their social chauvinism, in the technical track this association is not significant and in the vocational track there is even a significantly negative association between school wide chauvinistic teacher communication and social chauvinism.

Interpreting these results for the academic track, the lack of an association between chauvinistic teacher communication cultures and cognitive chauvinism might be because, despite this communication being shared at the school level, this school culture possibly does not have an equal impact on all students within the same school. For academic students, this might be due to different status groups existing within the academic track, with for instance Science Education being attributed more cognitive status than the Humanities. For social chauvinism, the school level chauvinistic communication is significant. This is in line with the association with perceived teacher communication at the student level and seems plausible as there are, to our knowledge, no clear social status differences in academic tracks. Therefore, a chauvinistic school culture could more easily benefit all students' social chauvinism.

The technical track is the only track to experience a significant, positive, association between schoolwide teacher chauvinistic communication and students' cognitive chauvinism. This is in line with the associations with perceived chauvinistic teacher communication at the student level. For social chauvinism, the technical track is the only track to seemingly experience no impact of school-level teacher communication. The difference between the association with the individual experience of chauvinistic teacher communication and the lack of association at the school level with social chauvinism might be partially attributed to how the chauvinistic communication variable is constructed. In Belgian education, schools are generally considered

categorical if they provide either academic or a combination of technical and vocational education. Therefore, by aggregating the results from a technical-vocational school, both the communication of technical and vocational track teachers are included. Yet this does not provide an explanation for the diverging results for social and cognitive chauvinism.

The negative relation between vocational students' social chauvinism and schoolwide communication culture might also be due to how the chauvinistic communication culture variable is constructed. It might be that the chauvinistic communication by technical track teachers cause vocational students to feel less socially chauvinistic, partially representing the school-level variable, whereas their own vocational teachers' communication could lead to higher feelings of both types of chauvinism, reflected in the student level variable. Since the track opinions teachers voice associate with students' views on tracks, teachers might be considered as role models or authority figures when it comes to tracking. This is however not the case for vocational students' cognitive chauvinism, where there is no significant association. Future research should investigate these diverging results.

There are significant results of teacher communication at both the individual and the school level on students' track attitudes. Stimulating awareness in teachers and schools about their own track prejudices and the effects voicing these prejudices can have on their students could be an effective policy choice to reduce antagonistic feelings in educational tracks. School wide communication of track chauvinism can be significantly related to students' track views beyond individual student experiences with teacher communication, showing that track chauvinism cannot be reduced to an individual's response to lower status, but rather that track chauvinism is developed in interaction with others (i.e., teachers) and the broader school context.

Concerning the control variables, a few notable results might be used as inspiration for future research. Firstly, Prior GPA was positively significantly related to cognitive chauvinism in the academic track, indicating that the cognitive focus of this track seemingly affects the importance of prior GPA on students' attitudes. Secondly, academic track students' cognitive chauvinism was higher in multilateral schools, whereas technical students' social chauvinism was higher in multilateral schools. These results imply that students who are confronted with students from other tracks tend to look at their track through a more superior lens. The academic track is more cognitively oriented and coming into contact with non-academic

students seemingly strengthens cognitive superiority attitudes. For the technical track, based on the way multilateral schools are operationalized, coming into contact with academic track students leads to more social superiority, compared to coming into contact with either no other tracks or vocational track students. So, being confronted with an unfavorable status comparison stimulates technical students to protect their self-image through feelings of social ingroup superiority. The vocational track students' chauvinism showed no significant correlations with school structure. It is currently unclear, due to the operationalization of school structure, whether this is because their sense of chauvinism is not changed by coming into contact with other students or whether they do not make a distinction between technical and academic track students for this contact.

While a sense of superiority might be seen as a rather hostile attitude, as it is based on comparing the ingroup to others, this paper has shown that it might also serve a good purpose, as it might allow students to defend themselves against negative outside voices. It might even be the case that feeling connected to an ingroup could counteract the desire to drop out of education. Additionally, chauvinism can be broken down into several aspects, so schools and policy makers could look into which aspects of track identity they can stimulate to maintain the benefits of track chauvinism, while having minimal negative consequences in students' opinions towards other tracks. Dekeyser and colleagues (2022) have already given an indication that, in technical and vocational tracks, a sense of superiority does not necessarily lead to significantly more negative attitudes towards the other tracks. The teacher communication hypothesis was made regardless of track.

6.3.6.2 Limitations and future research suggestion

The first limitation of this paper lies in the fact that no (partial) scalar measurement invariance was achieved for either type of chauvinism. So there cannot be made any statements with certainty when comparing the group means for chauvinism between the tracks. We therefore cannot discuss the track chauvinism hypothesis. There is metric invariance for cognitive chauvinism, showing internal consistency in the factor structure and factor loadings. Additionally, both scales give a good Cronbach's alpha, 0.765 and 0.734 for cognitive and social chauvinism respectively. As there seems a statistical basis to consider these scales as usable constructs and chauvinism is commonly used as a concept in ethnic and national identity research, we encourage future researchers to survey a wider range of chauvinistically inspired

track attitude items, to deepen the understanding of this concept in the context of educational tracking and allow for between track comparisons when achieving scalar invariance.

The second limitation of this paper pertains to the teacher communication measure. Superiority is operationalized in the broad sense, through "my track is superior to other tracks", but a more detailed investigation could test whether chauvinistic teacher communication is limited to comparisons between the ingroup and tracks lower on the status ladder or compared to all tracks. It is adequate for the research questions posed in this paper, but there is more that could be explored in depth on this subject in future research. Additionally, comparing students' perceived teacher communication with the actual communication by teachers would provide more insight in the effectiveness of teachers' track communication. Lastly, the Belgian context makes it hard to study school wide chauvinistic communication for each track separately, as a lot of Belgian schools provide a combination of technical and vocational education.

Thirdly, the studied data are cross-sectional. So even though there are theoretical reasons to assume that chauvinism is a defensive response to a low public regard (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019), we cannot with certainty disprove that this relationship might be the other way around. In that case, students who are more chauvinistic would be more sensitive to or aware of negative messages towards their ingroup, causing them to believe that the public perception towards their track is more negative, compared to students in the same track who are less chauvinistic.

Future research might be able to include track mobility, as students' track opinion might differ depending on their previous educational experiences and how long they are in their current track. This paper did include ethnic background as a control variable since the chauvinism concept originates from the field of ethnic/nationalism studies. But future research should look deeper into the relationships between ethnic background, coping with minority status and sense of (educational) superiority. Lastly, we believe that both types of track chauvinism might be interesting to study as an influencing factor in relation to classic educational concepts such as students' academic performance and their (academic) self-esteem.

6.3.6.3 Conclusions and implications

Explicit public tracking is an educational grouping system that aims to provide the best learning environment for all students, but it also (unintentionally) leads to social divisions and hierarchical group thinking between the tracks (Dekeyser, Van Houtte, Maene, & Stevens, 2022). Lower public regard leads to higher feelings of both cognitive and social chauvinism across all three tracks. Students invoke a sense of superiority and harbor antagonistic outgroup attitudes when facing negative public opinion as a way to protect themselves. As students 'lower' on the educational status ladder experience a generally more negative public opinion, they resort to these negative feelings to a larger extent. Policy makers should be aware of the unwanted consequences of tracking, especially for technical and vocational students, and look for either less damaging alternatives to explicitly public tracking or at ways to compensate for the negative effects this system can cause.

Consequently, how tracks are portrayed societally should be rethought in ways that diminish experiencing negative public opinion. Additionally, it could be interesting to see if track membership relates to public regard and chauvinism in similar ways in educational systems where tracking is not so rigid. At the same time, this article shows that teachers' communication regarding tracks does matter in how students see their own and other tracks. Stimulating awareness in teachers about their own track prejudices and the effects voicing these prejudices can have on their students could be an effective way to reduce antagonistic feelings and social division between educational groups. Policy makers should stimulate alternative narratives which provide the same protective benefits as social chauvinism, without its possible negative consequences. This is all the more relevant as tracking might be considered a precursor of future social divisions between 'higher' and 'lower' educated groups and their attitudes towards each other.

6.4 Empirical chapter 4: Me, my track and society: how track identification affects the relationship between general self- esteem and perceived public track status.

6.4.1 Abstract

Prior research has demonstrated the adverse effects of ability grouping (here tracking) on a broad range of outcomes for secondary school students, including their self-esteem. A recent line of study focuses on the importance of track identities in understanding how ability grouping impacts students. This study builds on these findings by investigating the role of public track regard and chauvinistic track identification on the relationship between track membership and general self-esteem. Multilevel modeling of school survey data collected from 4,540 third-year high school students from 64 schools in Belgium shows that students' public track regard correlates positively with their general self-esteem. In addition, while students' chauvinistic track identification does not protect against societal judgment, it does associate with general self-esteem. The type of chauvinism, either social or cognitive, that correlates with self-esteem is track-dependent. The conclusions discuss the implications of these findings for research and social policy.

6.4.2 Introduction

Educational tracking, the practice of separating students in homogenous ability groups to prepare for disparate futures (Hallinan et al., 2003), affects students' self-esteem. Self-esteem is the positive or negative attitude persons have toward themselves as a whole (Rosenberg et al., 1995) and has been shown to impact a wide range of outcomes (e.g., Chiu, 1990; Wilburn & Smith, 2005). The general finding is that students in tracks with higher academic status, exhibit higher self-esteem (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Educational tracking leads to groups with differential group status, which can affect students' self-esteem through social comparison, leading to relative gratification and, therefore, higher self-esteem of high-status academic track students (Davis, 1959; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012), and to students in lower status tracks feeling less in control of their own educational success (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015).

Most western nations are knowledge-based societies characterized by a lower demand formanual labor due to technological changes (Nixon, 2006). Such societies attribute the

highest status to academic tracks, since they provide training specifically for more desirable knowledge-based higher education and jobs (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Vocational education is valued the least since it leads to less desirable blue collar, agricultural, or service jobs (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005). This causes students to differ in their public regard, the extent to which they feel others view their group positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998; Dekeyser et al., 2022). Vocational education carries a stigma (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015), which in different domains leads to lower self-esteem (Link & Phelan, 2001), especially when the stigmatized group is believed to perform poorly (e.g., Major & O'Brien, 2005). Vocational students are viewed as less able, and less interested, and the vocational track is seen as a destination for those who cannot reach the academic standards of the other tracks, which in turn increases the impact of stigma (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Van Praag et al., 2015).

Dealing with stigma and negative public regard of an identity can be done through either dis-identification and looking for positive identity effects elsewhere or through identifying with the (stigmatized) identity and gaining benefits from ingroup identification (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1979; Woodcock et al., 2012). Tracking research has studied the role of different dimensions of track identification regarding the relationship between public regard and stigma on the sense of futility (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015; De Pauw, Spruyt & Bradt, 2021). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, the association between track identification dimensions and general self-esteem and how these dimensions change the association between public regard and self-esteem has not been studied, despite stigma affecting people's self-esteem. Therefore, this paper will study how certain types of track identification correlate with self-esteem and interact with the relationship between public track regard and general self-esteem. This research adds to the existing field of tracking research by testing the relationship of track identification, which is an emerging line of research within this field (e.g., Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015), with students' general self-image, and as such gives a first indication of whether track identification has an impact that goes beyond educational attitudes like sense of futility or the opinion on other tracks (De Pauw, Spruyt & Bradt, 2021; Dekeyser et al., 2022). Prior sociological research has shown a relationship between track position and general self-esteem but did not look at this relationship from an identity perspective (e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Applying an identity perspective should allow for new

insights since students can possibly alter what track membership means to them and their self-image through differential identification. By relating this relationship to public regard as well, the (perceived) societal view on educational tracks is integrated into this research. Current quantitative research on tracking does not often consider students' interpretation of track membership and what the label means to them.

Identification dimensions that can be connected to this relationship include private regard, identity centrality, and chauvinism (Rowley et al., 1998). These go beyond the mere self-categorization of ingroup belonging, but refer to how people evaluate their ingroup along particular characteristics. This paper focuses on chauvinism as an identification dimension. Chauvinism is a sense of ingroup superiority that devalues, discriminates, and derogates out-groups and values what makes the in-group unique (Raijman et al., 2008). Track chauvinism can be broken down into a social and cognitive component (Dekeyser et al., 2023). The choice to study the impact of chauvinism on the relationship between educational public regard and self-esteem is twofold. At first, public track regard inversely relates to feelings of track chauvinism, regardless of track (Dekeyser et al., 2023). Vocational students show the highest average social chauvinism, whereas differences in cognitive chauvinism are non-significant (Dekeyser et al., 2023). Second, group chauvinism is also connected to higher self-esteem (e.g., Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000; Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2003), but this has not been studied in the context of educational tracking yet. Therefore, this study investigates whether educational track as an identity, through track status and both cognitive and social chauvinistic track identification, is tied to general self-esteem and whether track chauvinism can act as a coping mechanism to diminish the possible impact of negative public opinion on general self-esteem.

6.4.3 Theoretical framework

6.4.3.1 Educational Tracking and Group Status

Educational tracking exists in different ways, but they share the same goal: to provide students with education best suited to prepare for disparate futures and achieving better academic results for all, as separating students in ability groups should allow curricula and teaching methods to be adapted better to students' ability (Gamoran, 1992; Hallinan et al., 2003). Tracking can differ in the extent of differentiation between groups, on a course-by-course

basis or by providing an entirely separate curriculum (Maaz et al., 2008; Chmielewski, 2014), the age of tracking (Hanushek & Woßmann, 2006) and whether tracking occurs within or between schools (e.g., Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012; Chmielewski, 2014). When tracking is organized by providing a separate curriculum, tracking generally divides between an academic track, preparing for higher education, and vocational education, preparing for a craft (Chmielewski, 2014). Some systems also add technical education, which lies in between with a mixed finality, preparing for both an academic and a crafts future (e.g., Onderwijskiezer, 2021). The educational status hierarchy caused by tracking is considered legitimate by students across countries and grouping systems (Van Noord et al., 2019). Students' views on tracks also partially follow this societal status hierarchy (Dekeyser et al., 2022).

Group status is the extent to which groups are admired or respected by others (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017). Usually, the minority or lower status groups within a status hierarchy are attributed more stigma (Meyer, 2003). Stigma entails the devaluation or dehumanization by others, based on an attribute or social category that is societally less desirable (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Due to stigma-related stress, people can, among other things, experience lower self-esteem (Link & Phelan 2001), depression (e.g., Fischer & Holz, 2007), and discrimination (Major & O'Brien, 2005). In educational tracking, it are the vocational students which experience this stigma (Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck, & Kavadias, 2015).

6.4.3.2 Global and Domain Specific Self-Esteem

Academic track students have the highest self-esteem, and vocational students have the lowest (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Self-esteem impacts a wide array of educational and non-educational outcomes. Self-esteem is connected to mental well-being, even to suicidal thoughts (e.g., Wilburn & Smith, 2005). In education, self-esteem relates to both performance and non-performance aspects. The relation between self-esteem and academic performance is rather inconsistent (e.g., Filozof et al., 1998; Marsh & O'Mara, 2008), yet self-esteem does impact future career ambitions (Chiu, 1990; Filozof et al., 1998) and test anxiety (e.g., Hembree, 1988).

First, self-esteem research consists of the intrapersonal and the interpersonal perspective (von Soest, Wichstrøm & Kvalem, 2016). The intrapersonal perspective sees self-esteem as how persons assess their own performance in domains to which they attach importance

(James, 1890/1983). The interpersonal perspective sees self-esteem as depending on how persons perceive outsiders to evaluate them, that is reflected in appraisal (e.g., Mead, 1934; Jaret, Reitzes & Shapkina, 2005). The sociometer model adds that self-esteem is a reflection of social acceptance or rejection (Leary et al., 1995). Social acceptance is consistently shown to increase self-esteem, yet social rejection does not necessarily lead to decreased self-esteem (Blackhart et al., 2009). Additionally, people derive self-esteem from social comparison, for instance, through relative gratification (Rosenbaum, 1976; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012).

Second, self-esteem can be broken down in global self-esteem, how individuals view themselves in totality, and domain-specific self-esteem, the attitude individuals hold toward themselves within a specific domain. Domain-specific self-esteem shapes general self-esteem, yet not all domains are equally impactful. Usually, the domains which are considered most important in society, have a stronger impact on general self-esteem (von Soest, Wichstrøm & Kvalem, 2016). Especially domains with a social component impact general self-esteem, due to a desire for social inclusion (Leary et al., 1995; von Soest, Wichstrøm, & Kvalem, 2016). For example, satisfaction with physical appearance has a considerable influence on global self-esteem, whereas academic satisfaction does not (von Soest, Wichstrøm & Kvalem, 2016).

6.4.3.3 Self-Esteem, Identity and Educational Tracking

Educational tracking can entail an interpersonal self-esteem component, as tracks are attributed to differing societal status, and students experience these status differences (e.g., Jaret, Reitzes & Shapkina, 2005; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). This interpersonal component of educational tracking impacts global self-esteem through social acceptance/rejection and relative gratification (Van Houtte 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Spruyt and Kuppens (2015) argue that educational tracks can be studied as separate identities, based on (1) the centrality and authority of education as a status allocator, (2) the awareness of students of their position within the educational hierarchy, as their educational position is referenced in non-educational contexts such as the media and political discourse, and (3) certain opinions and behaviors being considered as characteristic to 'higher' – and 'lower' educated people and as such connected to educational labels (Jackman & Muha, 1984).

The relationship between self-esteem and the extent of identification with a negatively evaluated identity is twofold. First, people can disidentify with a low-social status identity in order to preserve self-esteem and diminish the impact of stigma (e.g., Steele, 1997; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Woodcock et al., 2012). In that case, students can try to bolster self-esteem by developing an anti-school culture and attaching value to non-educational domains like work, dating, and being cool (Rosenbaum, 1976; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2016). Second, students can set themselves apart from fellow track members or devalue pro-education attitudes as coping mechanisms to protect their self-image (e.g., Lacey, 1970; Van Praag et al., 2017). Third, the Rejection-Identification model argues that ingroup members of stigmatized or threatened groups can buffer the negative effects of this stigma through increased ingroup identification (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999). This is in line with Social Identity Theory (Turner, 1975; Tajfel et al., 1979), which posits that people gain positive self-worth from ingroup identification, regardless of group status. Applying an identity perspective on tracking not only allows to look at the extent of identification, but also at the association between certain types of ingroup identification on general self-esteem, which has, to the best of our knowledge, not been done yet. The question then is how evaluative identification components of track identity relate to general self-esteem.

6.4.3.4 Chauvinism

Chauvinism is a concept used mostly in ethnic and national identity research (e.g., Coenders, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2017; Latcheva, 2010), but it has also been studied recently in relation to educational tracking (Dekeyser et al., 2023) and general self-esteem (Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000). It is different from other, positive forms of ingroup identification, like ingroup favoritism or bias, since it is a more conflict-oriented identification, rooted in the idea that the ingroup is superior on certain characteristics. Ingroup bias refers to making choices that benefit the ingroup more than outgroups, based on a more positive sentiment toward the ingroup. This can be both through favoring the ingroup or derogating the outgroup (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel et al. 1979; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). Chauvinism does not look at favoring behavior, but is purely about attitudes of supremacy based on the idea that if more people were like the ingroup, the world would be a better place.

Educational track chauvinism can break down into cognitive and social chauvinism. The former attaches value to education-based characteristics like academic performance, the difficulty of

the courses, and perceived intelligence, whereas the latter focuses more on personal characteristics like being cooler and more creative than outgroup members (Dekeyser et al., 2023). Chauvinistic feelings can be caused by the societal status ladder, as the highest status group might allow their self-perception to mirror the higher status society attributes to them, increasing their feelings of superiority (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). This societal status is derived from the idea that academic students are more educationally successful (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that this reflected appraisal, people seeing themselves as how they perceive significant others to see them, would lead to higher self-esteem through higher cognitive chauvinism. The societal status would effectively act as a looking glass for the self. It might likewise lead to a more negative self-perception in lower-status tracked students through an internalization of their lower academic status (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Wallace & Tice, 2012). At the same time, chauvinism has also been observed in lower status groups, as chauvinism can be a mechanism to resist a lower place on a status ladder (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019), by dismissing the elements on which they are esteemed lower and highlighting ingroup superiority and homogeneity. Lower-status students tend to dismiss the academic aspects of their track identity and attach more importance to the social aspects of their ingroup (Willis, 1977; Dekeyser et al., 2023). Social chauvinism might, therefore, stimulate higher self-esteem, particularly in lower status tracks.

Identity conformity and typicality, feeling and behaving in line with what is considered to be typical for an identity, is positively related to self-esteem, unless someone feels pressured to conform (e.g., Good & Sanchez, 2010; Skinner et al., 2018). In the context of educational tracking, academic track students should experience more benefits from cognitive chauvinism toward their self-esteem compared to students in other tracks who hold similar levels of cognitive chauvinism, as academically oriented attitudes are typical for the academic track. At the same time, vocational track students are typically, like other lower-status students, more focused on social and non-academic parts of life (Willis, 1977; Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). Therefore vocational students' self-esteem should benefit more from feeling higher social chauvinism, compared to the other tracks.

The connection between chauvinism and self-esteem has not been studied for educational group chauvinism yet. As for educational tracking, vocational track students' high social chauvinism, is assumed to be a coping reaction from vocational track students against low-

public regard, which might allow them to preserve their self-esteem in the face of negative societal evaluation (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Dekeyser et al., 2023).

6.4.3.5 Current Study

To study the role of public track regard and chauvinistic track identification regarding general self-esteem, we break our research question down in four hypotheses. Prior research has established that the more academic a track is, the higher someone's general self-esteem is, partly based on a track's societal position relative to the other tracks (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been any quantitative research that explicitly studies how students' perception of public opinion on their track affects their general self-esteem. This leads to the public regard hypothesis: The higher students' public track regard, the higher students' general self-esteem.

The track chauvinism hypothesis states that the more track chauvinistic a student is, the higher his/her self-esteem will be (e.g., Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000; Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2003). The relationship between chauvinism and self-esteem has proven to be true in other contexts but has not been studied in the context of educational track identities yet. Based on Social Identity Theory (Turner, 1975; Tajfel et al., 1979), we expect that any type of ingroup identification is beneficial toward students' self-esteem and, therefore, do not hypothesize any difference between cognitive and social chauvinism for the track chauvinism hypothesis. The track-specific chauvinism hypothesis states that academic track students' self-esteem will benefit more from cognitive chauvinism than students from other tracks who have similar levels of cognitive chauvinism. Whereas vocational, and, to a lesser extent technical track students' self-esteem is expected to benefit more from social chauvinism relative to other students having the same levels of social chauvinism. This hypothesis is based on insights from identity conformity and typicality research (e.g., Good & Sanchez, 2010; Skinner et al., 2018).

Last, we assume that track chauvinism and public regard will interact in how they affect general self-esteem. Students who experience lower levels of public regard are more chauvinistic, regardless of which track they are in, presumably due to chauvinism acting as a protective mechanism against outsider opinions (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Dekeyser et al., 2023). We, therefore, hypothesize that students low in public track regard but high in track

chauvinism will maintain a higher general self-esteem than students low in public track regard and low in track chauvinism (protective chauvinism hypothesis), irrespective of the type of chauvinism.

6.4.3.6 Context

Belgium provides a particularly interesting context to study tracking. First, its tracking is rigid (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). Commonly, there are no shared classrooms or courses between tracks, causing clear social divisions. Second, Belgian tracks are explicit and publicly known. This allows the public to formulate opinions on students depending on students' track and school. Third, Belgian secondary education is characterized by a 'cascade' (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). In Belgium, moving 'down' from an academic to a more vocational track is easy and common, but 'upward' mobility toward more academic education is barely possible. This causes a so-called 'cascade,' whereby students 'aim high' by trying the more academic track first, and eventually 'go down' to 'lower,' more vocational tracks (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). This leads to vocational education not only being associated with societally less desirable jobs but also being the destination of students who 'failed' in more academic tracks (Van Praag et al., 2015), leading to lower societal status and more stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005). This cascade suggests a status hierarchy, wherein the academic track is considered the 'norm' and most valuable, due to restricted track mobility. The cascade system also stimulates hierarchical thinking in students, teachers, and outsiders looking at secondary education (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012; Dekeyser et al., 2023). Fourth, tracking is organized both within and between schools, allowing to test if track status is more impactful when students are confronted with students from other tracks daily. At last, Belgian education is divided in a Flemish-region and Walloon-region-governed education. These systems are similar but show some differences: in the Walloon system, when students do not succeed in their first 2 years, they are rerouted to a program which aims to tackle individual issues and reinstate students in the communal program afterward, relying more on grade retention. The Flemish system is more inclined to let students 'move down' to technical or vocational tracks rather than applying remedial programs (Danhier & Martin, 2014; Onderwijskiezer, 2021).

6.4.4 Methods

6.4.4.1 Sample

The data for this study were drawn from the School, Identity & Society survey (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021). The dataset relies on a mixed-method research design (QUAL > QUAN). The measurement instruments vis-a-vis students' track identification are based on qualitative interviews with adolescents (*N* = 32) enrolled in their third year of secondary education, as a preparatory phase for the School, Identity & Society survey. The quantitative dataset contains information on 4,540 third year secondary education students: 64 schools participated, 7 in Wallonia (French-speaking part of Belgium), 29 in Flanders (Dutch speaking), and 28 in the Brussel Capital Region (21 French and 7 Dutch speaking). The schools were selected through multistage sampling: First, cities with a history of migration were randomly selected, and second, the schools were divided in strata based on their track variety. The focus on cities with a history of migration was based on the overarching topic of the dataset, but not informed by tracking research. This led to a distinction between academic schools, technical–vocational, and multilateral schools. Schools were randomly invited from each stratum. Belgian education does provide an arts track, but since only 2.2 percent of students follow the arts track, we opted not to include them in this research (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b).

The data collection took place from September through December 2017. The school principals distributed an information letter to all students and parents, informing them on the research theme, timing, and the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study. This letter allowed parents to opt their child out of participating. Depending on the region, 6–8% of parents did not give their consent. During the data collection at school, students were asked to participate voluntarily, yielding an 80% response rate. There was no clear pattern in the non-consent and non-response. The questionnaire was filled out in the classroom. This survey moment was monitored by a researcher who answered students' questions, and teachers who supervised students while respecting their privacy.

6.4.4.2 Variables

Dependent Variable. General self-esteem was measured by a Likert-scale inspired by the Rosenberg Self-Concept Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), consisting of seven items, as selected for the RADISS 2 survey (D'hondt 2015) (1) 'In general, I am satisfied with who I am,' (2) 'Sometimes

I think I am not good for anything', (3) 'I think I have a couple of good qualities', (4) 'I do not have many qualities to be proud of,' (5) 'I am a valuable person, at least equally valuable as others,' (6) 'I take a positive stance towards myself,' (7) 'I will never do as good as most others.' The items had 5 answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5). The negatively worded items were recoded, so a high-score represented high self-esteem. A reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha of this scale (.780) would not improve if any of the items would be omitted. Therefore, all 7 items are included in the self-esteem scale for analysis (M = 3.55, SD = .691, α = .780). The Cronbach alpha's ranged from .661 for the vocational to .800 for the academic track. The means for the three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < .05$; Table 25).

Independents. *Track membership*. Students are part of only one track. In the sample were 2,723 academic track students (60.0 percent), 1,034 technical (22.8 percent), and 783 vocational track students (17.2 percent; Table 25).

Students' track chauvinism was measured with five statements on how students view their track compared with other tracks. These statements were formulated based on the qualitative interviews preceding the School, Identity & Society survey and inspired by national/ ethnic chauvinism research. The items had five answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5): (1) 'students in my track are smarter than those in other tracks', (2) 'have more capabilities', (3) 'are cooler', (4) 'my track is harder' and (5) 'more creative'. Chauvinism breaks down into two distinct concepts, cognitive, and social track chauvinism (Dekeyser et al., 2023). They employed measurement invariance testing (MI), since track chauvinism had not been widely used as a quantitative measure in tracking research yet, to verify whether the chauvinism scales have the same composition for each track, allowing between-track comparisons. Cognitive track chauvinism reached metric invariance (p = .227; *RSMEA*: .017; *CFI*: 1.000; *SRMR*: .018; a = .764), but social track chauvinism did not reach MI, demanding more caution when comparing between the tracks, this might be because the social chauvinism scale contains only two items.

Cognitive track chauvinism, or cognitive chauvinism, consists of (1) 'students in my track are smarter than those in other tracks', (2) 'have more capabilities,' (3) 'my track is harder.' Academic chauvinism (M = 2.60, SD = .91) scored highest with academic track students (M = 2.62, SD = .92), followed by the technical (M = 2.57, SD = .87), and vocational track (M = 2.57,

SD = .90). The reported values are a mean of the scale. None of the tracks differed significantly from each other (Table 25).

Social track chauvinism, or social chauvinism, consists of (1) 'students in my track are cooler than those in other tracks' and (2) 'are more creative.' For social chauvinism (*M* = 2.37, *SD* = .91, *α* = .734), the vocational track scored the highest (*M* = 2.86, *SD* = .97), followed by the technical (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = .98) and academic track (*M* = 2.12, *SD* = .91). The three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < .05$; Table 25).

Students' public track regard. A self-developed three-item scale, based on Sellers and colleagues' (1998) definition of public regard as the extent to which individuals feel that others view their group positively or negatively. The items were: (1) 'students from other tracks look down on my track', (2) 'are respected more than my track', and (3) 'see students from my track as social outcasts.' The items had five answering categories ranging from 'absolutely disagree' (1) to 'totally agree' (5). To establish these items as conceptually different. from chauvinism items, they were included together in one exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis included eight items, two factors explained 51% of the variance (KMO = .859). It showed that students' chauvinism and public regard are conceptually distinct. The EFA showed a two-factor structure with the three items of students' public regard loading on a separate factor, loadings ranged from .639 to .677. This was consistent for all tracks. All items were recoded, so a high-score represents a high-public regard. The scale is an overall mean (Table 25, *M* = 2.258, *SD* = .825, *α* = .738). The three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < .05$; Table 25).

Table 25: Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables– frequencies, means, standard deviations, F-tests or Cramer's V, comparing all tracks

Variable	Total		Academic (N=44)		Technical (N=37)		Vocational (N=28)	Difference	
	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD	F-test or Cramer's V
School Level									
Educational System (ref. = Dutch-Speaking) (N= 64)	56.25		51.11		53.85		51.61		
School Structure (ref. = categorical) (N= 64)	62.5		51.11		42.03		60.17		
	Total		Academic (N=2725)		Technical (N=1037)		Vocational (N=786)	Difference	
Individual Level									
General Self-Esteem (N= 4372)	3.56	0.69	$3.63^{T,V}$	0.68	$3.52^{A,V}$	0.71	$3.31^{A,T}$	0.62	64.917***
Cognitive Chauvinism (N= 4426)	2.60	0.91	2.62	0.93	2.57	0.87	2.57	0.90	1.701
Social Chauvinism (N=4448)	2.37	0.99	$2.12^{T,V}$	0.91	$2.66^{A,V}$	0.98	$2.86^{A,T}$	0.97	244.19***
Public Track Regard (N= 4365)	11.22	2.47	$11.69^{T,V}$	2.26	$10.82^{A,V}$	2.56	$10.05^{A,T}$	2.57	153.54***
Sex (ref.= male) (N= 4553)	49.1		44.55		56.8		54.7		0.112***
SES (N= 4584)	48.18	16.71	$50.16^{T,V}$	17.31	44.43^{A}	19.44	44.57^{A}	14.62	49.69***
Prior GPA (N= 3705)	67.57	12.67	$69.98^{T,V}$	10.89	$62.28^{A,V}$	12.19	$65.10^{A,T}$	16.71	130.19***
Ethnic background (N= 4275)	43.4		47.5		39.6		37.3		0.088***

X^{A} :differ from the academic track, $p< 0.05$; X^{T} differ from the technical track, $p< 0.05$; X^{V} differ from the vocational track, $p< 0.05$.

*Student level: Se*x was almost equally distributed in our sample: 48.8 percent was male. The academic track had mostly female students (55.5 percent), in the technical and vocational track, the majority were male (56.3 and 54.8 percent respectively; Table 25).

Prior Grade Point Average (GPA) was measured by asking students to self-report their average grade from the previous school year. As there is no guarantee students are still in the same track as in the previous year, prior GPA is used as a general indicator of educational success. This was scored as a percentage (N = 3,705; M = 67.57; SD = 12.67). Students in the academic track had the highest average GPA (M = 69.98, SD = 10.89), technical students the lowest (M = 62.28, SD = 12.19), and the vocational students scored in between (M = 65.10, SD = 16.71), the three tracks differed significantly from each other ($p < .05$; Table 25). As there are no standardized tests in Belgian education, we have to rely on self-reported GPA, which does raise questions of validity due to possible cover-up and memory issues in students (Kelly, 2008). Yet, it is the best measure we have (Table 25).

Socioeconomic status. SES is based on students' reports of parental occupation, which was matched to the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, De Graaf & Treiman, 1992; Table 25, M = 48.18, SD = 16.71). Academic track students have the highest average SES (M = 50.16, SD = 17.31), followed by the vocational (M = 44.57, SD = 14.62) and the technical track (M = 44.43, SD = 19.44). The technical and vocational track did not differ significantly, but they both differ significantly from the academic track.

School level: School structure. Categorical schools, providing either academic or both technical and vocational education, were 63.5 percent of all surveyed schools (N = 40). 24 schools provided only academic education, and 16 provided technical education alone or combined with vocational education. There were 24 multilateral schools, providing a combination of academic with either technical, vocational, or both tracks. Ten schools offered academic, technical, and vocational, 13 schools offered academic and technical, and 1 school offered academic and vocational education. School structure was coded as a dummy variable, categorical schools were the reference category, and all multilateral school types were coded as 1.

Educational system. To control for possible region/policy differences, we include a control dummy variable with the Flemish education, which included 36 surveyed schools (2,659

students) as the reference category. The Walloon education has 28 included schools (1925 students). Schools in the Brussels Capital Region fall under one of these systems depending on the principal language of education. Table 26 provides bivariate correlations between all studied variables.

Table 26: Bivariate correlations

Variables	Educational system (N= 64)	School structure (N= 64)	General self-esteem (N= 4372)	Cognitive chauvinism (N= 4426)	Social chauvinism (N= 4448)	Public regard (N= 4365)	Sex (N= 4553)	SES (N= 4584)	Prior GPA (N= 3705)	Ethnic background (N= 4275)
Educational system (N= 64)	/	0.243***	-0.43**	-0.079***	0.043**	0.075***	-0.054***	-0.014	-0.279***	0.113***
School structure (N= 64)	0.243***	/	-0.034*	0.023	0.046**	0.009	0.020	-0.020	-0.115***	0.023
General self-esteem (N= 4372)	-0.43**	-0.034*	/	0.048**	-0.043**	0.128***	-0.070***	0.015	0.132***	0.076***
Cognitive chauvinism (N= 4426)	-0.079***	0.023	0.048**	/	0.585***	-0.421***	-0.149***	-0.008	0.045**	0.088***
Social chauvinism (N= 4448)	0.043**	0.046**	-0.043**	0.585***	/	-0.540***	-0.170***	-0.081***	-0.101***	0.144***
Public regard (N= 4365)	0.075***	0.009	0.128***	-0.421***	-0.540***	/	0.108***	0.061***	0.049**	-0.113***
Sex (N= 4553)	-0.054***	0.020	-0.070***	-0.149***	-0.170***	0.108***	/	0.023	0.127***	-0.034*
SES (N= 4584)	-0.014	-0.020	0.015	-0.008	-0.081***	0.061***	0.023	/	0.108***	-0.151***
Prior GPA (N= 3705)	-0.279***	-0.115***	0.132***	0.045**	-0.101***	0.049**	0.127***	0.108***	/	-0.087***
Ethnic background (N= 4275)	0.113***	0.023	0.076***	0.088***	0.144***	-0.113***	-0.034*	-0.151***	-0.087***	/

* $p < 0.05$.; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

6.4.4.3 Design

To test all hypotheses, we ran a hierarchical multilevel regression model with students' general self-esteem as the dependent variable, using HLM6 (Table 27; Raudenbush et al., 2013). Multilevel models most accurately analyze the School, Identity & Society-data, since the surveyed students (level 1) are clustered in schools (level 2). The hierarchical regression analysis started with an unconditional model (Model 0) to indicate possible significant school differences in the dependent variable. Next, we added students' track position as dummies, with the academic track as the reference category, sex, SES, prior GPA, and ethnic background as a control variables at the student level (Table 27; Model 1). Sex is added, since women generally exhibit lower average self-esteem than men (e.g., Bachman et al., 2011). This gender difference is also present in educational tracking, wherein girls generally have lower self-esteem, but boys' self-esteem is affected more by track status (Van Houtte, 2004b). Research on tracking in Flanders has repeatedly shown that tracking and SES are closely related, with tracking causing an underrepresentation of lower SES students in the academic track and an overrepresentation in the technical and vocational tracks (e.g., Boone & Van Houtte, 2013). Prior GPA was included as there is a relationship between academic performance and self-esteem, even though results are inconsistent (e.g., Filozof et al., 1998; Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). Ethnic background was added since minority background has been shown to be (positively) related with general self-esteem (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). Additionally, we added the school-level control variables, school structure, and educational system (Model 1). School structure is added, because whether students are in a categorical school providing one track or in a multilateral school offering multiple tracks affects their self-esteem. Academic track students' self-esteem is higher in multilateral schools compared to categorical schools, as the multilateral school allows them to compare themselves more readily to students from other tracks, leading them to be more aware of their status gratification and therefore stimulating higher self-esteem (Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). At last, the educational system is considered because Flemish education focuses more on vertical movement between tracks from the first year onward, while Walloon education attempts to reinstate students more often (Danhier & Martin, 2014; Onderwijskiezer, 2021). This could cause status differences to be more pronounced in Flemish education from a younger age. At the same time, the status loss for vocational students might be larger in Wallonia, since the Walloon system makes more

effort to keep students in the academic track, meaning students would move to the vocational track 'despite' remedial programs trying to reinstate them in academic education.

Subsequently, to test the public regard hypothesis, which states that the higher students' public track regard, the higher their general self-esteem, the students' public track regard was added (Model 2); both cognitive and social chauvinism were added to test the track chauvinism hypothesis, which states that the higher students' track chauvinism is, the higher their general self-esteem (Model 3). An interaction term was run between public track regard and both types of chauvinism, to test the protective chauvinism hypothesis (Model 4a and 4b).

Lastly, as it was hypothesized that academic track students would benefit more from cognitive chauvinism and vocational students more from social chauvinism, interactions were run between students' track and either cognitive or social chauvinism (Model 5a and 5b, respectively). To determine the specific direction and significance of the effect of a type of chauvinism on general self-esteem per track, we performed a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). The table presents the analyses with the academic track as the reference category, for the other simple slope analyses, only the relevant interaction coefficients will be given and discussed in the result section. The full tables of these analyses are available upon request. The metric variables general self-esteem, cognitive and social chauvinism, and public regard were grand mean centered. Variance components were also studied and reported in the tables, but will not be further discussed.

Table 27: The Association between School- and Student-level tracking variables and General Self-Esteem: Hierarchical Multilevel Regression (HLM 6).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 5a	Model 5b
Intercept	3.666***	3.647***	3.649***	3.649***	3.645***	3.642***	3.643***
School Level							
Educational System (ref.= Dutch-Speaking)	-0.036	-0.042	-0.042	-0.042	-0.041	-0.037	-0.038
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.035)
School structure (ref.= categorical)	-0.089**	-0.076*	-0.094**	-0.094**	-0.094**	-0.087**	-0.090**
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.031)
Individual Level							
Technical track (ref.= academic track)	-0.117***	-0.080*	-0.086**	-0.086**	-0.085**	-0.088**	-0.073*
	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.033)
Vocational track (ref.= academic track)	-0.376***	-0.312***	-0.306***	-0.306***	-0.307***	-0.301***	-0.345***
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.044)
Sex (ref.= male)	-0.129***	-0.146***	-0.131***	-0.131***	-0.130***	-0.130***	-0.128***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Ethnic Background (ref.= Belgian & Western European)	0.132***	0.147***	0.138***	0.138***	0.137***	0.139***	0.141***
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Prior GPA	0.007***	0.007***	0.007***	0.007***	0.007***	0.007***	0.007***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
SES	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Public Regard		0.096***	0.125***	0.126***	0.128***	0.125***	0.124***
		(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)

Cognitive Chauvinism			0.043* (0.019)	0.043* (0.019)	0.044* (0.019)	0.056** (0.020)	0.043* (0.019)
Social Chauvinism			0.016 (0.015)	0.016 (0.015)	0.015 (0.015)	0.017 (0.015)	0.010 (0.021)
Cognitive Chauvinism*Public Regard				-0.004 (0.013)			
Social Chauvinism*Public Regard					-0.012 (0.012)		
Technical Track* Cognitive Chauvinism						-0.080 (0.042)	
Vocational Track* Cognitive Chauvinism						0.019 (0.044)	
Technical Track*Social Chauvinism							-0.036 (0.037)
Vocational Track*Social Chauvinism							0.078* (0.032)
Variance components							
Intercept	0.014**	0.012***	0.013**	0.013**	0.013**	0.013**	0.013**
Technical track	0.004	0.003	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.004	0.004
Vocational track	0.031**	0.024*	0.026*	0.027*	0.027*	0.025*	0.026*
Public Regard		0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002

Cognitive Chauvinism			0.004	0.004	0.004	0.003	0.004
Social Chauvinism			0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
Sex	0.010	0.010	0.010*	0.010*	0.010*	0.011*	0.010*
Ethnic Background	0.005	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004
Prior GPA	<0.001**	<0.001*	<0.001*	<0.001*	<0.001*	<0.001*	<0.001*
SES	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: All presented coefficients are unstandardized. *p< 0.05.; **p< 0.01; ***p< 0.001.

6.4.5 Results

The ANOVA on general self-esteem (Table 25), showed that vocational track students have the lowest average self-esteem (M = 3.31), academic track students the highest (M = 3.63), and the technical track lies in between (M = 3.52). These differences were significant (F(2,4,369) = 64.917, p < .001). A post-hoc Bonferroni-test showed that the difference between all three tracks was significant (p < .01; Table 25), confirming prior findings (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). The null model for general self-esteem showed that 4.88 percent of the total variance (p < .001) is situated at the school level.

The multilevel analysis showed that students in the academic track have significantly higher general self-esteem than those in the technical and vocational track, accounting for relevant individual and school-level control variables (Table 27; Model 1). Male students have significantly higher self-esteem than female students, students from a minority background have a higher self-esteem than those in the majority group, and the higher students' prior GPA, the higher their self-esteem. Students in school offering multiple tracks have a higher average self-esteem. There were no significant differences based on the educational system and SES. All significant results of the control variables found in model 1 remained throughout all subsequent models.

Public track regard (Model 2) is significantly positively related to general self-esteem, confirming the public regard hypothesis. The addition of public regard did not change the significance of the other effects found in Model 1. Cognitive chauvinism (Model 3) is significantly positively related to general self-esteem. Social chauvinism is not significantly related to the outcome variable (Model 3), partially confirming the track chauvinism hypothesis. In Model 4a and 4b, we added an interaction between public regard and the two types of track chauvinism to test the protective chauvinism hypothesis. These interactions were not significant. The addition of this interaction term did not alter the significance of the main effects of both types of chauvinism and public regard. Adding the interaction between track and the two types of chauvinism (Model 5a and 5b) and testing the simple slope effects (see Appendix 13 and 14) showed that vocational track students (.088; p = .002) experience a significantly larger positive effect of social chauvinism on their general self-esteem than both the academic track students (p = .016), who experience no significant effect (.010; p = .632), and the technical track students (p = .004). There is no significant difference between the

academic and technical track students, whose general self-esteem is not significantly impacted by social chauvinism either (.026; p = .363). Running these same analyses for cognitive chauvinism, there are no significant differences in terms of cognitive chauvinism's effect between academic (.056; p = .008) and technical track students (.027; p = .475), yet this is only borderline insignificant (p = .057). This is especially noteworthy as the main effect of cognitive chauvinism is significant for the academic but not for the technical track students. The vocational tracks' cognitive chauvinism (.075; p = .097) effect on self-esteem did not significantly differ from either the academic (p = .676) or technical tracks' effects (p = .074).

6.4.6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study's objective was to investigate if general self-esteem is connected to track identification, to understand the established relationship between tracking and self-esteem. In doing this, we applied insights and concepts from ethnic and national identity research to tracking. The main research question, what is the role of public track regard and chauvinistic track identification regarding the relationship between track membership and general selfesteem, was broken down into four hypotheses.

First, the public regard hypothesis which states that the higher a students' public track regard, the higher their general self-esteem will be, is confirmed. This effect remained when controlling for school- and student-level variables. These results are similar to those of reflected appraisal research in other fields (e.g., Jaret, Reitzes & Shapkina, 2005). By studying tracks' public regard in particular and not personal or schools' public regard, this research shows that the track label matters. Educational track is an identity impactful enough to affect students' general self-esteem, going beyond affecting educational outcomes. Belgium provided an ideal (i.e., extreme) case to study this, since its tracking has clear boundaries, clear public status differences and there are even personality traits attached to tracks by politicians (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). Similar studies in other countries might show weaker ties between public track regard and self-esteem, depending on track boundary rigidity and the extent to which the track label is used in public discourse.

Second, the track chauvinism hypothesis, for both social and cognitive chauvinism, assumes that the more track chauvinistic students are, the higher their self-esteem is, irrespective of track (e.g., Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000; Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2003). The

relationship between track chauvinism and general self-esteem is less straightforward than hypothesized. Students' self-esteem is positively related to their cognitive chauvinism, but not to social chauvinism. This hypothesis is therefore not confirmed.

Third, the track specific chauvinism hypothesis posits that academic track students' self-esteem will benefit more from cognitive chauvinism, compared to the other tracks, whereas vocational, and to a lesser extent technical track students' self-esteem benefits more from social chauvinism. This hypothesis is (partly) confirmed. Despite the academic track being the only track in which cognitive chauvinism significantly contributes to students' self-esteem, there is no significant difference in the correlation between cognitive chauvinism and self-esteem between tracks. Only the vocational track shows a significant correlation between social chauvinism and self-esteem and it differs significantly and positively from the other two tracks. In addition, the vocational track has the highest average social chauvinism (Table 25).

These results are partly in line with identity conformity and typicality (e.g., Good & Sanchez, 2010; Skinner et al., 2018). The academic tracks' high-societal status is derived from the value society attaches to its academic excellence (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). So feeling cognitively chauvinistic is in line with the academic tracks' status in society, and therefore, benefits academic students' self-esteem. Cognitive chauvinism does however not benefit academic students' self-esteem more than the other tracks'. It is also striking that, despite cognitive chauvinism being important to academic students' self-image and their higher place in the educational cascade, their average cognitive chauvinism is not significantly higher than the other tracks'. It is unclear why this is, and might be of interest for future research. A possible explanation is that academic students might not consider the technical or vocational track as a relevant reference group, but rather look within the academic track for markers of their academic prowess, leading to a less positive comparison for lower status academic track students. This lack of relevance of the other tracks to the academic students might be because academic track students follow the 'gold standard' trajettory toward higher education, whereas the educational aim of especially vocational students is different, focusing primarily on the labor market.

The vocational tracks' higher social chauvinism, and resulting higher self-esteem, are in line with the ingroup and societal expectations toward lower status students, who are oriented more toward social than academic interests (Willis, 1977; Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). This

confirms the track specific chauvinism hypothesis for the vocational track. What is most interesting in these results is that (social) track identification does matter for vocational students' self-esteem, especially since previous research in Belgium has shown that they are most at risk of educational disidentification (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019). Social track identity could therefore be stimulated by teachers and policy makers to maintain vocational students' connection to their education and additionally protect their self-esteem.

Last, the protective chauvinism hypothesis assumes that students higher on either type of chauvinism will experience a lesser negative impact of low-public regard on their self-esteem, regardless of track, as chauvinism protects against negative effects of lower status (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). This hypothesis is not confirmed. There is no significant interaction between either type of chauvinism and public regard on general self-esteem.

Based on these results, we can say that students search for differential sources of self-esteem based on their track. If the track identity is oriented more toward academic performance, students will attach value to their academic self-image. Yet, this does not cause them to feel more cognitively superior than other students. Vocational students do feel socially more superior and attach their self-esteem more to this perceived superiority. Social superiority could be seen as a way for vocational students to protect their self-image and distinguish themselves from the other tracks in an educational system and society that mainly values academic success. These results are in line with Social Identity Theory (Turner, 1975; Tajfel et al., 1979). Social superiority does not protect self-image by canceling out the negative effects of the public opinion, as seen in the protective chauvinism hypothesis. Students in lower status groups use social characteristics as an alternative status source, while still being affected by stigma and negative social valuation (Willis, 1977).

The lack of significant results for both types of chauvinism in the technical track might be partly attributed to the ambiguity of the track within the educational system. It has a dual finality in both the labor market and higher education. At first, this leads to a heterogeneous group in which some students are more academically oriented and others are more vocationally oriented, which might cause diverging results that cancel each other out. Second, its position in the middle of the educational hierarchy might make them less sensitive or inclined to attach value to social comparison, give them a more balanced experience of social comparison, and a lesser tendency to develop feelings of superiority. So, based on this study it is unclear

whether technical track students attach less of their general self-esteem to how they perceive their own track, or if this group is simply too diverse to draw conclusions on.

A first limitation of this article is its cross-sectional data. Public regard is considered as affecting self-esteem throughout this study, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that self-esteem can also affect the interpretation of how the public sees your ingroup. Following Baumeister's selective processing approach, people with high self-esteem pay more attention to opinions that confirm their self-image (Baumeister, 1998). Self-esteem also causes memory bias, where depending on their self-esteem people are more inclined to recall positive or negative appraisals, or even interpret experiences through a more negative/positive lens (e.g., Christensen, Wood & Barrett, 2003). These biases would make the public regard hypothesis more likely to occur. This cross-sectional design does not allow us to go beyond theoretically assuming the direction of the relationship between public regard and general self-esteem.

A second limitation is that the social chauvinism measure only contained two items and as such did not achieve measurement invariance between the tracks. Future research should look deeper into social chauvinism to give a more detailed overview of what social superiority constitutes for students and if this is track dependent. As chauvinism is usually not divided into subdimensions and there is only limited research on educational track chauvinism, there are no existing educational or social chauvinism scales that we are aware of to draw inspiration from. Looking at the findings of Willis (1977) and the exploratory qualitative phase of the School, Identity & Society survey, we suggest future research to survey items that look at attitudes like friendliness and being welcoming, supplemented with items considering values like open-mindedness and maturity. The School, Identity & Society-survey was conducted with third year secondary education students, as this is the youngest age of tracking without highly personalized remedial programs in the French-speaking region, allowing for between-region comparisons (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021). It could be interesting for future research, however, to study students in the later years of their secondary education or conduct longitudinal research, as this would provide opportunities to study the effects of students' educational history, the impact of moving between tracks or being able to establish a track identity over multiple years.

Educational track, especially in systems that allow for track mobility in both directions, could be considered an achieved status position. It would be interesting for future research to look

deeper into the interactions between these achieved status positions and ascribed status positions, such as parental SES, in order to see if either category is more impactful toward students' self-esteem or how achievement might potentially buffer against negative effects of lower ascribed status.

Considering tracking as an identity is a rather new line of research. This study adds to this growing body of work, by showing that the effects of track membership are partly attributed to public track status. Yet, students are not passive recipients of track status, they negotiate with track labels through identifying with their track in ways that allow them to capitalize on unique track characteristics. Tracking is therefore a story that goes beyond placing students in a group which should suit their academic preferences and capacities best and allow teachers to tailor their classes to track specific needs. Policy makers should be aware of the risks tracking hold for students' general self-image, and should seek to promote what makes each track unique, allowing students to gain a more positive self-image through their track identity. Vocational education requires a unique set of crafts skills which might be reframed as 'craft intelligence', different but at least as challenging and valuable as academic intelligence. When promoting tracks a narrow view should be avoided, it should be highlighted that a wide range of characteristics and skills are present and required in each track, so all students can find elements through which they can identify with their track. This would aid students to protect their self-image without resorting to educational disidentification when facing a lack of societal appreciation. This study only examined comparisons students made between their track and all other tracks. For future research it might be interesting to see whether some tracks are more relevant reference groups in shaping students' self-image than others. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if either between or within track subgroup comparisons are most impactful toward students' self-image. Present research is a new step in understanding how students' self-image is shaped by their educational experiences, but also in how students can shape the effects these experiences have on them through track identification.

Educational tracking is a stratification system that (unintentionally) creates stark divisions between students, by not only preparing them for disparate futures and separating them on a daily basis, but also by not rewarding them equally for pursuing excellence in their own field, as only success in academic subjects is rewarded with societal status. This research gives a

further indication that students internalize these societal demands, through valuing academic prowess in the academic track and by dismissing educational excellence in vocational skills and instead attaching more importance to social markers in vocational education.

Educational tracking might also be considered a system that sorts students, to a certain extent, into their future social class. Social classes can be thought of as either organized social entities or as people categorized into a group based on shared individual characteristics (Kincaid, 2016). Tracks could be considered precursors of social classes by giving students similar status and future job prospects as a shared characteristic. Additionally, tracking, especially if it is as rigid and public as in Belgium, might facilitate tracks as social entities due to the limited between-group contact and the shared valuing of either academic or social success, which stimulates searching for friends and like-minded people within track limits. Chauvinism could in this light be seen as a type of group boundary demarcation that can lead to bigger rifts between these social entities, through derogation and a sense of superiority.

7. Positionality of the researcher

Reflexivity is common practice in qualitative research. It is the act of reflecting on the personal assumptions, believes, possible prejudices and judgements the researcher has and through consciously examining these, showing their possible influence on the research process and results. A reflexive approach might even prevent certain biases to creep into the research process by formulating the risks of the personal position before entering into interviews, observations or interpreting results. An upcoming argument is to also incorporate reflexivity into quantitative research (e.g., Jamieson, Govaart & Pownall, 2023). While quantitative methods might feel more objective than qualitative methods, the mere fact that data are used does not make research entirely objective. Biases can manifest in how concepts are operationalized, in which relationships researchers wish to test and how results are interpreted. This is especially the case when studying topics that are subjective in nature, like identities (Jamieson, Govaart & Pownall, 2023).

I will perform a reflexive exercise by writing down a positionality statement on each of the possibly biased stages of research, by explicitly writing down relevant aspects of my personality, prior experiences or personal opinions. Since I am using a secondary dataset, I cannot comment on how possible biases might have informed the selection and/or formulation of survey items in the SIS-survey. For the items that had been adapted from long established existing scales I do not expect many issues. For the items informed by the explorative qualitative interviews, there might be higher risks of biases. Yet Charlotte Maene, who conducted the interviews of the SIS-survey, did perform a reflexivity exercise for her personal position towards the SIS-project in her doctoral dissertation (Maene, 2022), which can be consulted if there are any doubts about research items.

The researchers have to reflect on whether they are, to some extent, 'insiders' who have lived experience with the studied topic (Chavez, 2008). As will be the case for all educational researchers, we have lived experiences of education, since we all undergo primary and secondary education. In my case, my research population are only Belgian schools and I only attended education in Belgian schools. This gives me familiarity with the tracking system, but might also allow for my personal experiences to make me less aware of the elements that are unique to Belgian education, more so than if I were to study multiple countries. Additionally,

I obtained a teaching degree and during my final year of employment as a researcher, I taught part-time in a 'dual education' system, wherein vocational students work four days per week at an internship and only go to school one day. Within this system I taught 'general education' to the 7th graders (ages 18 and above).

Firstly I will consider how the central research questions of the individual empirical chapters could be informed by any personal biases (Jamieson, Govaart & Pownall, 2023). The central focus for the study on teachers was inspired by my career profile. I followed the professional bachelor program for secondary education teacher, for the courses of History and Physical Education. My personal interests made me opt to study teachers first and look within the SIS-dataset which data was available and could be applied to our main research topic on tracking. In particular the addition of the 'general course or track specific subject matter teacher' item was informed by my personal experiences: firstly, I experienced that as a general course teacher, you initially gain experience in multiple schools and tracks through internships, which could inform which educational type aligns with your personality and teaching style.

Secondly, teachers might avoid applying to certain tracks, causing a self-selection of educational preferences to a certain extent. Thirdly, if job satisfaction was negatively impacted by track public regard, I assumed that general course teachers have an easier time transitioning to another track while staying within the teaching profession. Track specific course teachers on the other hand would probably attach their person more to a specific track, as both the choice for their specialization subject matter and their teaching career is inherently attached to the track. I wanted to study these personal expectations to see if these had any theoretical and empirical merit. Yet despite still having a big personal interest in teachers' attitudes, we shifted away from further studying teachers as our research population. This was a practical choice due to the limitations of the SIS teacher survey. This limited our opportunities for studying school-level effects and might put us at risk of sampling biases.

The paper focusing on teachers job satisfaction (chapter 6.1) directly informed the topic of the track hierarchy paper. If teachers already were affected by the status of students' track, then students might even be more affected by this status. This study includes the track chauvinism and patriotism scales. I personally do not recollect any instances of personal track chauvinism or patriotism during my student career that might have informed the choice to include these

items. As a secondary education student, I was only part of the academic track throughout my entire trajectory. Within this I followed a Latin program for the first four years and the Exact Sciences and Mathematics program for the last two years. This was organized in a school that only provided academic track education. To my recollection we also had no events in which we made contact with students from other tracks. This gave me virtually no exposure to students from other tracks. Additionally, the programs I was in were esteemed highly even within academic education, so when discussing reference groups for academic tracks students, the idea of other academic track students being considered the main reference and students in the Humanities being seen as 'low status' is definitely recognizable. I do not remember if I personally held these believes, particularly towards the Humanities, but I remember this being the general narrative in our school environment when discussing finality and track students. Yet we only included this interpretation of the results as it has a theoretical basis (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010).

The only time we as students discussed the other tracks was when it concerned students that used to be part of our classroom or social circle that 'moved down' to the technical and subsequently the vocational track. This again shows that we had both a limited and a negative view towards the other tracks, following the societal hierarchy. We did recognize that there were definitely students that opted for these tracks out of personal interest and that these tracks required unique skills that academic track students do not possess, but I had (almost) no interaction with students from other tracks. So although I always considered myself as open-minded, this environment certainly will have had an influence on my early visions of educational tracking. The inclusion of the cross-group friendship item was theoretically informed, based on a research tradition that shows the value of cross-group friendships in diminishing prejudice through perspective-taking and empathizing (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Its inclusion shows that I go beyond my personal experiences in the selection of concepts relevant to track attitudes.

The central research questions of the studies on chauvinism composition and general self-esteem were informed by the work on the previously finished empirical chapters on teachers' job satisfaction and students' track evaluations, as we felt that the concept of chauvinism used in those earlier papers should be expanded on and studied more in depth. The general self-esteem study (chapter 6.4) had the aim to study if the concept of track identification and track

attitudes were relevant when looking beyond students' educational self-attitudes. The work on the chapters that studied teachers' job satisfaction and students' track evaluations was already completed before starting my employment as a secondary school teacher, the other two empirical chapters were still in progress. While any choices regarding the chauvinism measure were data and theory driven, I acknowledge that talking to and teaching vocational students gave me indications that seemingly confirmed our findings, vocational students display social chauvinistic attitudes from time to time and they see the academic track as a reference category. This happened for example when I posed somewhat complex theoretical and mathematical questions, to which they responded: 'we are not in the academic track, why would you ask us?' Yet the influence of these experiences should be limited as 'dual education' is only a small system within vocational education, and is therefore not fully representative of the typical vocational experience. A sizeable number of students in my 'dual education' classes felt that them being in this program represented the 'failure of their educational career', which seemingly affected their (educational) self-esteem. So this is again some anecdotal evidence that students internalize and attach legitimacy to the educational hierarchy. I did not include these observations in the discussion of these empirical chapters as these had no scientific rigor, but it felt good to see our work could be translated to the educational practice to some extent.

I was aware of my personal history before starting these empirical chapters, so while certain research choices might have been inspired by this personal history, I always searched for a theoretical basis to explain our findings. Certain (theoretical) assumptions were also not proven by our findings. When discussing 'cognitive superiority' for example, the expectation was that academic students would exhibit this superiority the most, whereas our results showed no significant differences between the tracks. Any time our results did not align with our hypotheses, I saw this as an interesting challenge to find new explanations for these findings, beyond the theoretical assumptions on which we based our hypotheses.

There might be biases in which literature or explanations for findings are opted for (Harper, 2020; Jamieson, Govaart & Pownall, 2023). After concluding the empirical work, I do not feel as if there were moments I had a conscious choice between several options in which bias could make me opt for one possible explanation over another. In terms of the chosen theories, the only risk I can identify is the fact that educational tracking has been extensively studied in

Flanders (Dutch-speaking region of Belgium), which provides insights that are already tailored to the research context. Where possible, I tried to add systemic review articles or international research articles that discussed the same topics in different national contexts to avoid a focus that is too narrowly aimed at Belgium. For this research we explicitly set out to incorporate ethnic identity concepts into tracking research. Determining which concepts might be relevant to the field of educational tracking forced me to look critically at these concepts, possibly more so than if I were to only implement established educational tracking concepts.

For the discussion of the results, in order to limit the influence of my 'insider perspective', I tried to take on the perspective of an international reviewer who would be both less familiar with the Belgian context and would want to know how and to what extent our findings could be applicable to their context of interest, but without focusing on one context in particular. There was in fact one reviewer, who explicitly wanted me to discuss the direct translation of our findings to the US-context. I refrained from doing that, as I felt that this would be focused too much on one singular context rather than on general transferability and, as I replied to this reviewer, I feel that every reader should be able to make that translation for his/herself based on his/her knowledge of the research context of his/her interest.

Strategies to limit personal biases: While I tried to avoid searching for papers that confirmed personal expectations, this might involuntarily happen at times. Yet, the feedback process in which I discussed all my findings and data-interpretations with both my promotor and co-promotor should put a filter in place in which all too obvious personal biases are counteracted. The same goes for the review process of the studies by journal reviewers and editors. To my recollection we did not get any comments on clear biases. In fact, I often got the feedback that initial versions did not go far enough in unpacking research results and proposing policy advice. So this makes me think I am a rather conservative researcher, who does not wish to risk proposing theoretical or personal argumentations that stray too far from the data-findings or that have no clear connection to these findings. At times reviewers suggested adding certain papers to our papers. I tried to accommodate these requests to a certain extent, but only for the parts I found that could be properly related to the contents of the paper. This at times meant only including limited aspects of these suggested publications.

Methodologically the same conservative attitude crept in from time to time. I started from a rather limited statistical background, I was not comfortable with multilevel analysis or using

other statistical programs than SPSS. I followed courses to bring my statistical understanding of multilevel analysis in particular to a higher level, yet there might be certain statistical methods which are more complex that might provide a better answer to our research questions, that I am unaware of. I do however apply methods which are common practice in educational tracking research, but not the more risky, experimental or newest analysis types (e.g., latent profile analysis). A reviewer stimulated me to incorporate measurement invariance analysis, which fundamentally changed the understanding of the educational chauvinism concept and subsequently the way this analysis was constructed. I am grateful for this suggestion. I discussed the merit and discussion surrounding measurement invariance in the methodology section of this dissertation. This also had an impact on another study, as this also incorporated the updated version of track chauvinism. This conservative approach concerning analysis also has some benefits, as the use of long established methods gives more certainty and broader recognizability of the analysis and the interpretation of the results. Newer, more experimental methods might still be subject to discussion among scholars, risking that the whole paper could be rejected solely based on these methodological choices. Additionally, if it turns out that these methods might have considerable flaws, this might even put us at risk of having to retroactively retract findings. By using lesser known research methods, the reviewers and readers might be distracted from the theoretical findings, which were my primary objectives, in favor of the methodology. I therefore hope that future researchers, in the same or different contexts, try to replicate this research with alternative methods. My confidence in the research choices that were made is strengthened by both the fact that all papers have successfully gone through the review process and got published and that all methodological choices were discussed with supervisors with decades of methodological expertise.

8. Discussion

There is a long standing research tradition on educational tracking, with findings showing that tracking is impactful on a myriad of outcomes, both educational and non-educational. Recently, a new line of research within this tradition started, which considers educational tracks as social identities (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015; De Pauw, Spruyt & Bradt, 2021). This dissertation builds onto this new line of research by providing insights into students' view of their own track, the kinds of identification types that might inform their identification with the ingroup, what social and contextual elements are of relevance for this identification and how these identification types might inform students' evaluation of other tracks. Additionally, we focused on teachers' experience of being tracked and how this might inform their track communication towards their students. Within this research, the research objectives were connected to theories on social identities, which originate from ethnic and national identity research. By formulating an answer to the research questions, we hope to provide more insight into whether tracks can actually be considered as social identities, whether track identities behave similarly to or differently from ethnic/national identities when it comes to the evaluative component of identification and the lessons for research, social policy and practice.

8.1 Research objectives and findings

8.1.1 Teachers' role in students' track identification

The first research objective was based on previous research that shows teachers to be an influential voice in how students see themselves and society, and research that describes teachers' feeling of being tracked themselves. Yet, no research has currently looked at the relationship between the teacher and students' development of (chauvinistic) track identification. We hypothesized a relationship between these two, assuming that teachers' own experiences of being tracked would voluntarily or involuntarily stimulate them to communicate on the place a students' track holds within the educational status hierarchy. This led to the following research question: can teachers' experience of being tracked be related to the development of students' positive track identification? The first aspect of this research objective was to look again at how teachers are tracked themselves, the second about

investigating whether teachers communicate chauvinistically about track status and if students' own track attitudes can be related to this communication.

In order to see whether teachers are tracked like their students, we first established that teachers are aware of the public status of their students, as teachers in higher status tracks report higher social praise compared to teachers in lower status tracks. Based on our results we can state that teachers are indeed tracked to some extent, but not in the ways that were theoretically assumed. We hypothesized that academic track teachers would be the beneficiaries of tracking, as the academic identity provides possibilities for self-enhancement through reflected appraisal, since people have been shown to attach high importance to social identities that provide them with positive self-esteem (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Hogg, 2006). Yet, academic track teachers' job satisfaction was unaffected by the public status of their students, the tracks they do or do not interact with on a daily basis or how closely their subject matter is related to the track. These results are in contrast with findings in tracking systems wherein the track position of the teacher is a validation of their own efforts (Finley, 1984; Talbert & Ennis, 1990; Kelly, 2004a). The lack of importance of track status could be because these teachers simply consider the academic track as the 'norm' (Doane, 1997). As a result, they do not draw much satisfaction from how they think others look at them. Alternatively, as the academic track prepares strictly for higher education, academic track teachers might not consider tracks that prepare for a labor market future as a relevant reference category. Their reference groups might be situated within the academic track, this is supported by research from Stevens and Vermeersch (2010), that has already shown is the presence of a status hierarchy within the academic track.

Only vocational track teachers in multilateral schools seem to be tracked, as they are the only ones affected by public track status. This goes against our expectations based on reflected appraisal, that all vocational track teachers would be affected by their tracks' lowest position on the status ladder (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Looking at identity and coping theories, the positive distinctiveness hypothesis could help explain why not all vocational teachers are affected, as the unaffected teachers might resort to alternative status markers for which their ingroup does score higher to base their job satisfaction on, cognitively restructuring the track status hierarchy in the process (Tajfel et al., 1979; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). So, vocational track teachers seemingly find ways to cope with their students' lower

position on the status ladder, indicating that they are not passive recipients of this lower status positions.

Interestingly, the results for multilateral school teachers suggest that daily contact with teachers from other tracks makes the track identity more visible, turns it into a more salient identity for vocational track teachers and, due to higher visibility of the track identity, they attach increased importance to the public evaluation of their track (Kelley, 1952, as cited by Richer, 1976; Van Dick et al., 2004a, 2004b). In these multilateral schools, the coping mechanisms of positive distinction and cognitive restructuring do not seem strong enough to counteract the negative effects of public track status. These results seem to be in line with previous research, which has shown that vocational teachers feel that their own job is considered less valuable (e.g., Gore & Morrison, 2001), they feel looked down upon by colleagues (Finley, 1984) and the specific challenges their track presents them with are not sufficiently recognized by society (Boldrini, Sappa & Aprea, 2019; Amitai, 2021). The impact of colleagues seems particularly relevant to vocational teachers' self-esteem. It is however noteworthy that despite experiencing the most negative public regard, the vocational track teachers in our sample hold the highest job satisfaction, which contradicts previous research (e.g., Van Houtte, 2006b; Borman & Dowling, 2008). These diverging findings, combined with the rather small sample (*n*= 243) compared to other studies (*n*= over one million, across 34 included studies: Borman & Dowling, 2008) suggest that these results should be interpreted with some caution.

Technical track teachers seem to be tracked the most, as this tracks' public regard is positively impactful towards job satisfaction, regardless of school structure. The relevance of the public opinion could be explained by the technical tracks' intermediary position on the societal status ladder, as both the academic and vocational track teachers only experience limited impact of public track status. The one thing these two tracks have in common that sets them apart from the technical track is their clearly defined positions at the opposite ends of the track status hierarchy. These positions are based on these tracks solely preparing their students for higher education and the labor market respectively, while the technical track includes both programs that prepare students for higher education and the labor market. We think that the 'uncertainty reduction hypothesis' is particularly relevant to technical track teachers. This theory predicts that people reduce social uncertainty through group membership, but if their

collective identity category is characterized by a lack of clarity in terms of its internal structure and external boundaries, this is less effective (Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Due to the intermediary position of the technical track, it seems that they cannot rely on their track identity to reduce social uncertainty and instead rely more on how society evaluates them. This is in line with Social Identity Theory which states that an unclear identity limits the benefits of ingroup identification (Tajfel et al., 1979).

Technical track teachers are not often studied, as not all educational systems provide a track that lies between the academic and the vocational track. So the fact that the technical track teachers are most affected by the public status aspect of their track is particularly interesting, since an ingroup that lacks clarity, even despite a higher status, seemingly causes people to attach more importance to outsider opinions than a clearly defined lower status group.

Based on these results we would assume that teachers are more likely to communicate on track related topics due to their lived experiences with being tracked. In that case, technical track teachers would communicate most about track identity, followed by the vocational track. We would expect less or even no track communication by academic track teachers. They are however at least aware of the public status of their students, so despite not attach their personal job satisfaction to track status, they might still communicate on the academic track status towards their students, to stimulate feelings of pride or accomplishment.

The second aspect of this first research objective is whether teachers communicate chauvinistically about track status and if students' own track attitudes can be related to this teacher communication. As we assumed, academic track teachers are perceived to communicate less chauvinistically than their technical and vocational track colleagues. Vocational track teachers are perceived to communicate most chauvinistically, which goes against our assumption that technical track teachers would communicate more about their track identity. Chauvinism is known to be provoked by a feeling of threat (e.g., Woods, 1976; Coenders, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2017; Van der Waal et al., 2010), so it might be that vocational teachers are motivated to counteract the threat of societal stigma by trying to provide an alternative narrative to their students, stimulating a sense of superiority and a 'my group first' mentality based on what makes the vocational track unique, as has been observed with other low status identities (Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019).

Previous research had already shown that teachers' voices are influential towards a myriad of outcomes (e.g., McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Thornberg et al., 2022). Our results indicate that teachers seem to stimulate a general sense of superiority in their students, as their communication significantly increases both social and cognitive chauvinism across all three tracks. So the assumption that (vocational) teachers would try to stimulate a sense of chauvinism based on what makes the ingroup unique does not seem to be confirmed. Communicating about the track identity on the surface does not seem to go beyond the 'authority' of teachers in the eyes of students (Yariv, 2009). It has to be noted that the relationship between teachers' communication and students' chauvinism might work in the other direction, and that students selectively attach attention and importance to communication of their teachers that is in line with their own chauvinistic beliefs (e.g., Nickerson, 1998).

The effects of school-level chauvinistic teacher communication are less straightforward. The results differ between all three tracks and even within the same track for the different types of chauvinism, both in terms of whether or not there is a significant association and whether this association is positive or negative. These results might be partly attributed to school structure, as school-level aggregated communication in a multilateral school might be positive towards students from some tracks but negative towards other tracks.

8.1.2 Track identification, self- and group-evaluations

The second research objective is to examine whether positive track identification is relevant towards students' general self-image and their evaluation of other tracks. Firstly, we will focus on the relationship between track identification and general self-image. Previous research has already established a relationship between tracking and general self-esteem (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). The evaluation by students of their own track can give an indication of how good students feel about their own track, but it has to be noted that the way in which people evaluate their ingroup does not necessarily determine the importance of this ingroup (Sellers et al., 1998). Firstly, all students rate their own track the highest, regardless of societal status, confirming the ingroup preference assumption of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). There are however clear differences between the tracks in how they rate themselves. The academic and technical track show fairly similar results, yet the vocational track students rate their own track significantly lower. This

could indicate that vocational students feel the impact of its societal status. The difference in ingroup evaluation cannot entirely be attributed to societal status, as not all students choose to be a part of the vocational track voluntarily and a considerable number end up in the vocational track after 'failing' in the other tracks (e.g., Van Praag et al., 2017). The trajectory of these students could turn the vocational track into a symbol of their academic 'failure'. Track patriotism and chauvinism both positively relate to ingroup evaluation for all tracks. This is in line with findings in ethnic identity research (Raijman et al., 2008; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019).

Secondly, we looked more closely at the relationship between both types of chauvinistic track identification and general self-esteem. We opted to focus on general self-esteem rather than academic self-esteem. As the track label is used by people in non-school contexts (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015), it seems reasonable to assume that the consequences of feeling tracked would also go beyond educational self-attitudes. We can confirm previous research on general self-esteem and tracking, as the academic track has the highest self-esteem, followed by the technical and lastly the vocational track, which is in line with the societal status hierarchy (e.g., Kelly, 1975; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Looking at the relationship between chauvinistic identification and general self-esteem, the academic track is the only track in which students' self-esteem significantly benefits from their cognitive chauvinism. The vocational track is the only one in which the students' self-esteem is positively related to their social chauvinism.

These results are partly in line with identity conformity and typicality research, which states that feeling and behaving in line with what is typical for an identity will be beneficial to someone's self-esteem (e.g., Good & Sanchez, 2010; Skinner et al., 2018). A cognitive focus is in line with the societal expectations towards the academic track, as this derives its societal status from its academic excellence (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). The vocational students' higher social chauvinism, is in line with previous findings that show lower status students are oriented more towards social than academic interests (e.g., Willis, 1977; Högberg, 2011). The technical track students' general self-esteem seemingly does not benefit from any chauvinistic track identification. This might be partially attributed to the ambiguous position of this track within the educational system. Its dual orientation creates a heterogeneous group in terms of its students' future, possibly causing diverging results that

cancel each other out. Alternatively, the technical tracks' position in the middle of the educational hierarchy might make its students less inclined to attach value to social comparison, less sensitive to this comparison, give them a more balanced experience of social comparison and a lesser tendency to develop feelings of superiority. So, based on these results it is unclear whether technical track students attach less of their general self-esteem to how they perceive their own track, or if this group is simply too diverse to draw conclusions on.

The rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999) expects that the negative effects of societal devaluation would be buffered through increased (chauvinistic) ingroup identification. While increased chauvinistic identification provides benefits to students' self-esteem, it does not do so by decreasing the influence of negative public regard, so the rejection-identification model is only partly confirmed. Another important takeaway from these results is that chauvinism in education is not a unified concept, as students base their sense of superiority more on the elements that lead to beneficial between group comparisons, in line with cognitive restructuring (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998).

The second aspect of the second research objective looks at the relationship between students' track identification and their opinion of the other tracks. Firstly, ingroup preference (Tajfel et al., 1979) is stronger than the societal evaluation of the ingroup, across all tracks, as every track rates its own ingroup the highest. The track hierarchy is not as imposing as certain other status hierarchies (such as the racial hierarchy in some national contexts), which are so strong that they can lead to minority groups favoring the majority over their ingroup (Newheiser et al., 2014). Secondly, when comparing the division of scores students give to all tracks, it is clear that vocational track students think significantly less hierarchically than both other tracks. Theoretically, we assume that vocational students think less hierarchically due to them being 'the victim' of this hierarchy, and devaluing hierarchical thinking could protect their self-image (Crocker & Major, 1989). Thirdly, students in the academic and technical track seemingly internalize the societal status hierarchy, as their own evaluations of the other tracks reflect the status differences in society.

Patriotism in academic track students is associated with a more positive judgement of the technical track. Chauvinism in academic track students, however, is associated with a lower evaluation of both the technical and vocational track (e.g., Stevens et al., 2014; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). For the technical and vocational track students, their ingroup

patriotism and chauvinism had no significant association with their evaluation of the other tracks. For patriotism, these results confirm the theoretically expected neutral or positive effect on outgroup attitudes (Carter & Pérez, 2016). For chauvinistic attitudes, the lack of results for the technical and vocational track go against the hypothesis that track chauvinism would negatively impact outgroup attitudes (Raijman et al., 2008; Carter & Pérez, 2016). It seems that chauvinistic attitudes have different effects depending on the track.

It has to be noted that here chauvinism was still considered a unified concept, whereas later we found that this concept breaks down into cognitive and social chauvinism. So these conclusions on the effects of chauvinism could alter if chauvinism was broken down into these two separate concepts. Since social chauvinism is more present in the vocational track, it might be the case that heightened social chauvinism leads to more negative outgroup evaluations for vocational students, but that these results are suppressed by the inclusion of cognitive chauvinism.

8.1.3 Social and contextual (f)actors

The third research objective investigates which social and contextual (f)actors affect positive track identification and the relationships between positive track identification, general track attitudes and self-image. Firstly, students' self-esteem does not differ significantly between regions. Yet there are differences in chauvinistic track attitudes between the regions. Students in the Francophone educational system are less cognitively chauvinistic than those in the Flemish region. For social chauvinism, both the academic and technical track students are more socially chauvinistic in the French-speaking region, but the vocational track is significantly less socially chauvinistic compared to the Flemish region. These preliminary results seem to indicate that the Flemish system in particular stimulates the development of chauvinistic attitudes in line with the societal image of these tracks. More in depth study into these regional differences would be interesting. Secondly, school structure, with schools being either categorical or multilateral, had no significant relationship with track evaluation. These results therefore do not provide evidence for the original intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). This might be explained by the fact that between track contact is not based on equal status, which was later added as a condition to the intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew et al., 2011). School structure affects both cognitive and social chauvinism in certain tracks. Cognitive chauvinism is significantly higher for academic track students in multilateral schools.

Social chauvinism is significantly higher for technical track students in multilateral schools. These results imply that students who are confronted with students from other tracks tend to look at their track through a more superior lens, based on characteristics that allow students to make favorable between-group comparisons.

For the technical track, coming into contact with academic track students in multilateral schools and subsequently. being confronted with an unfavorable cognitive status comparison seemingly stimulates them to protect their self-image through feelings of social ingroup superiority. The vocational track students' chauvinism showed no significant correlations with school structure. It is currently unclear, due to the operationalization of school structure, whether this is because their sense of chauvinism is not changed by coming into contact with students from other tracks or if they do not make a distinction between technical and academic track students for this contact. These results follow the idea of cognitive restructuring, with students attaching most importance to ingroup characteristics that provide beneficial between-group comparisons as a coping mechanism (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Generally speaking, students in our sample in categorical schools have a higher self-esteem than those in multilateral schools. We did however not examine whether the elevated self-esteem in categorical school students was the case for each track separately, so we cannot make overarching conclusions on the relationship between school structure and general self-esteem. Previous work in Flanders by Van Houtte and colleagues (2012) showed that academic track students in multilateral schools have a slightly higher self-esteem that their counterparts in categorical schools, likely due to favorable between group comparisons.

Thirdly, cross-group friendships were included alongside school structure, to investigate whether the effects of between-track contact depend on the type of contact. Previous research had already shown that cross-group friendships lower prejudice through mutual perspective-taking and empathizing (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The analysis only showed a beneficial influence of having a significant number of cross-group friendships when students were asked to evaluate the academic track and it was almost significant when evaluating the technical track. Yet, these results are limited due to the operationalization of cross-group friendships. These were surveyed in a general sense, but the respondents could not specify with which tracks they have these friendships. Friendships do however show some significant results in the evaluation of other tracks, while the school structure does not. This could be

seen as an indication that the influence of between group-interaction is more present if the interacting members hold equal status (Pettigrew et al., 2011). These contrasting findings on school structure and cross-group friendships show that researchers should aim to include a range of theoretically relevant social contacts, if they wish to fully investigate the influence of the social context on tracking experiences.

Fourthly we discuss public regard, being the extent to which individuals feel that others view their group positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998). 'The others' in this case are the societal narrative towards education, with academic education being valued the most and vocational education the least, based on the prestige of the future job prospects they prepare for (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). The cascade system strengthens this narrative, as the choice for vocational education is not only informed by personal interests and skills, but vocational education is also associated with students who fail in academic and technical education who have to 'go down' to the vocational track (Van Praag et al., 2015; Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). The relationship between public regard and chauvinistic attitudes is negative for both cognitive and social chauvinism, across all three tracks. It seems that chauvinism is a defensive attitude that is activated when students are confronted with negative societal appraisal, as a way to protect their self-image through dismissing those who devalue them and finding elements on which they can feel superior to them (e.g., Crocker et al., 1998; Coenders, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2017; Raijman et al., 2008).

A higher public regard is linked to higher self-esteem, confirming earlier research in other fields (e.g., Jaret, Reitzes & Shapkina, 2005). There are no significant interactions between either type of chauvinism and public regard on general self-esteem. Social superiority therefore does not protect self-image by cancelling out the negative effects of the public opinion. This might have been suspected based on the fact that these attitudes are activated when experiencing a negative public opinion. Willis (1977), however, had already shown that students in lower status groups use social characteristics as an alternative status source, while still being affected by stigma and negative social valuation.

In response to the third research question, we can see that there are a multitude of (f)actors that influence both students' chauvinistic track identification and their in- and outgroup attitudes. Our research shows that studies on educational tracking are to some extent context-specific, as even within the same nation there are differences based on region. These regional

differences might be organizational or cultural, and they affect the extent to which chauvinistic feelings develop. Belgium provided an interesting context to study track attitudes as it is a rather extreme case of rigid, public tracking with a 'cascade' structure. While the results of this dissertation are to some extent context-specific, we believe that nations with less rigid or less publicly outspoken ability grouping systems will probably find similar results, but less outspoken. We do believe in the transferability of the results of this dissertation, as our findings are rooted in elements that are not nation-specific. For instance, there are multiple nations, like the Czech Republic and Switzerland, with an educational status hierarchy in which the academic track is the largest beneficiary of educational tracking (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). As long as there is the threat of negative (societal) evaluation towards a clear identity, we believe chauvinistic identity attitudes can develop as a response, to protect the self-image. If ingroup preference (Tajfel et al., 1979) causes students from all tracks to evaluate their own track most positively, even in a system and nation that clearly promote a hierarchical view towards tracks, we expect this to also occur in other tracked systems.

8.2 Main takeaways for research

8.2.1 Main takeaways for tracking research

In order to establish whether tracks can be considered as a social identity, we considered the components presented in the identity framework by Ashmore and colleagues (2004). Taking such a wide range of components into account is necessary, as there is not one set definition of what a social or collective identity is (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Ashmore et al., 2004). These components were: (a) self-categorization, (b) an affective dimension, (c) an evaluative dimension, (d) relative importance, (e) attachment, (f) social embeddedness, (g) behavioral involvement, (h) the contents and meanings of a social identity, and (i) the context. Previous tracking research has already shown that students self-categorize (De Pauw, Bradt & Spruyt, 2021), are aware of the external evaluative component of their tracks (Spruyt et al., 2015) and students' sense of futility is a clear indication of a sense of group interdependence (e.g., Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008, 2015). Demanet and colleagues (2012) showed through the study of friendships that the social embeddedness of vocational students is weaker than of students in other tracks. Behavioral track involvement is expressed through different levels of study involvement, displays of social solidarity and even the way in which students dress (Mizrachi, Goodman & Feniger, 2009; Van Houtte, 2017). There are also examples of vocational

programs shaping their group story and providing an alternative to the societal narrative on tracks (e.g., Korp, 2011). The context in which tracking occurs has been extensively studied (Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). These studies show that a lot of components related to tracks as identities have been studied in the past, but explicitly considering tracks as identities is a very recent line of research (e.g., Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015; De Pauw, Bradt & Spruyt, 2021).

In this research we have made the investigation of track identification our explicit goal. Our focus within this field was on both the internal and external evaluative component of track identities. The choice to look at the internal evaluative component in particular was motivated by the fact that while the impact of external track evaluation on students' self-image and well-being has already been studied (e.g., Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015), there is, to our knowledge, no quantitative research that has looked at internal track evaluation. Internal track evaluation is relevant, however, as ethnic/national identity research has shown that differential identification can be used to cope with low public group status (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Compas et al., 2001; Woodcock et al., 2012).

We showed that the internal and external evaluative component of track identities are relevant to students' outgroup track attitudes and even their general self-esteem. Additionally, we provided an insight into the relative importance of stereotypical track characteristics towards students' general self-esteem. As these results show considerable similarities with the expectations set out in national/ethnic identity research, this research lends further strength to the claim that tracks could be considered social identities, which is the first important takeaway from this research for educational tracking researchers.

The second takeaway for educational tracking researchers is that students show agency in how they interpret their own position within the educational status hierarchy, how they shape their outlook on other tracks and the extent to which they let educational tracking affect their self-image, through differential track identification. We therefore encourage future researchers to not only consider students as passive recipients of the (dis)advantages of their track position, but to include measures that investigate the ways in which students try to capitalize on the benefits or try to limit the disadvantages associated with their track position. In order to study this, researchers might have to think outside of the box and look at valuable insights from other fields of research, as we did by adapting relevant ethnic identity theories

and concepts. Educational dis-identification research (e.g., Hope et al., 2013; Nouwen & Clyq, 2019b) already focused on students' agency concerning their educational identification, but we have added to this by showing that students, even in the low status vocational track, can display agency by employing pro-track attitudes to their benefit.

8.2.2 Main takeaways for ethnic identity research.

One of the findings that might be of added value to (national) identity researchers is the way in which chauvinism manifests itself in the student population. Our results delineated two types of chauvinism, cognitive and social, which are both uniquely relevant towards students' self-esteem. These types might be considered as meaningful fault lines by students on which they distinguish their ingroup from all outgroups, as the cognitive and social chauvinism types align with stereotypical characteristics of the academic and vocational track respectively. Modern national chauvinism research often surveys chauvinism through rather broad statements like 'the world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like our citizens' and 'I would rather be a citizen from our country than from any other country' (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019; Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). This research tradition is primarily interested in cross-national comparisons based on general chauvinistic attitudes that can easily be studied across nations. There are, however, some studies that focus on one particular aspect within chauvinistic attitudes, like the relationships between international organization and the power of individual countries (Ariely, 2016). Considering the diverging results of our two chauvinism types, we see added value in the framework of Wirth (1936), who suggests studying the unique characteristics citizens of each country identify with and might consider as a fault line between their country and (all) other countries. This approach could provide insights into what motivates people to develop chauvinistic attitudes, which would be a valuable addition to the current chauvinism research tradition..

8.2.3 Main takeaways for sociology

The sociological contributions of this research lie in the role of education as perpetuating and shaping social classes. Education has three primary functions according to sociology: a qualification, socialization and a selection function (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2004; Hallinan, 2006; Dworkin et al., 2013; Autin, Batruch & Butera, 2015; Brint, 2017). The stratification function is

known to reproduce social inequalities (e.g., Batruch et al., 2019). We propose that tracking not only reproduces these inequalities through the primary and secondary effects of inequality of attainment (Boudon, 1974), being differences in achievement based on social background (e.g., Schwippert, Bos & Lankes, 2004; Baumert, Stanat & Watermann, 2006) and social background based differences in (parental) track choice (e.g., Seghers, Boone & Van Avermaet, 2019). We believe that tracking also perpetuates social inequality through the possibility that tracks themselves are social entities that represent future social classes. Kincaid (2016) defines social classes as either organized social entities or as people categorized into a group based on shared individual characteristics. Our results make it clear that not only do students in one track share characteristics in terms of their future job prospects, but they (chauvinistically) identify with the characteristics that make their ingroup unique, which contributes to a higher self-esteem. Chauvinistic track identification influences academic track students' outlook on other tracks as well. Our results therefore show that these shared track characteristics are relevant to students' self- and world-view.

We cannot make any statements on whether tracks are socially organized in terms of overarching group rules, behaviors and values. Notably, teachers do engage in boundary-making through chauvinistic track communication, stimulating ingroup identification at the cost of superior ingroup attitudes and derogatory outgroup behavior. This implies that track identities go beyond merely sharing characteristics. Importantly, tracks are not simply temporary social categories, but have a link to future social classes, as social classes from a sociological perspective are based in a large part on occupational status positions and tracks derive their status from the occupational prestige of the jobs they prepare for (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010; Goldthorpe, 2010). Yet there is also a social and cultural component to social classes (e.g., Savage et al., 2013). While there are no cultural measures included in this dissertation, our empirical chapters show that academic track students have considerably less cross-track friendships than both the technical and the vocational track, indicating a more closed off social network. This would imply that the social capital that students could extract in the future from social ties with people in societally valuable occupational positions would be less available to those that are not part of the same academic social category, if these social relationships were to remain stable going from secondary education to adult life. We do have to note that there are also meaningful social

ties outside of friendships, but friendships are close social ties that are easily accessible in time of need (Lin & Dumin, 1986; Lin, Fu & Hsung, 2001).

8.3 Limitations

The first limitation concerns the teacher data. The teacher survey received quite a lot of critique, mainly in Francophone schools, aimed at the formulation of certain ethnic identity questionnaire items that went against their own color-blind approach to diversity. This resulted in a rather low response rate of 20,25 percent, or 324 teachers. After consulting the lead researcher of the School, Identity and Society-survey, we can say that the resistance does not relate to the tracking items used from the teacher survey. So content-wise we do not expect biases based on this resistance for any of the analyses for this dissertation. Yet there are some divergences between the sample and the teacher population: an overrepresentation of the youngest teachers and an underrepresentation of teachers 50 to 59 years old (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). The sex distribution of the sample is in line with the teaching population: 38.3 percent of the teachers were male (n= 92), 61.7 percent were female in the survey (n = 148), in 2017–2018 63 percent of Flemish teachers were women (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019b). We cannot make any statements on the representativity of this sample in terms of gender division per track, per subject matter, and the number of years a teacher is in the profession, due to the government not providing accurate information regarding these parameters.

Due to the limited response and the uncertainty regarding its representativeness, any results based on the teacher survey were considered as exploratory and approached with caution. For instance, we did not make any definitive statements on the fact that vocational track teachers had the highest job satisfaction in the SIS-survey, compared to other research which consistently finds that academic track teachers have the highest job satisfaction. When considering teacher communication, we opted to analyze students' perception of chauvinistic teacher communication rather than teachers' own perceptions of their chauvinistic communication. We opted to use the teacher data of the SIS-survey despite the reservations we have towards it for a few reasons. Firstly, it is a rather unique survey as it includes both the Flemish and Francophone educational system, allowing us to control for possible regional differences within the same nation. Secondly, it is a survey that is very well suited to our research objectives, as it not only includes items on teachers' track communication, but also on their perception of the public image of their students, allowing us to study the experience

of being tracked for teachers and how this experience is expressed to students. So while the results have to be approached with some caution, we hope they do stimulate future researchers to look deeper into the role of the teacher in students' track identification through a quantitative lens, as we have some results that indicate that teachers' own experiences of being tracked are translated in their approach towards their students and can provide additional proof that tracking impacts teachers' own job satisfaction.

The second limitation is the use of only cross-sectional data. This does not allow to make any conclusive statements about causality. Although we provide explanations that are theoretically plausible for the correlations found in each empirical chapter, it might be the case that the direction of effect has to be reversed. Mainly, for any findings related to public regard, Baumeister's (1998) selective processing approach might occur, wherein people with high self-esteem would pay more attention to opinions that confirm their self-image. Self-esteem also causes memory bias, where depending on their self-esteem people are more inclined to recall positive or negative appraisals, or even interpret experiences through a more negative/positive lens (e.g., Christensen, Wood & Barrett, 2003). Additionally, Abdulmojeed and Olusegun (2020) show that a more positive self-image is highly correlated to higher stigma consciousness, where they reason that self-image informs stigma consciousness, rather than stigma informing self-image. Even if longitudinal research would show that the direction of effect is inverse to those that we discussed throughout this dissertation, we still believe our results are relevant. In that case our results would show that students with low self-image are more aware of societal status differences and therefore develop more chauvinistic attitudes. These chauvinistic attitudes can then stimulate a higher self-esteem. This would also imply that students who feel secure with themselves, by having a high self-esteem, do not feel the need to look down onto students from other tracks by developing chauvinistic attitudes as much.

Longitudinal data could also inform us on several key elements of the process of track identity development. These include but are not limited to (1) how the relationship between student and track could change over time. The influence of the public opinion might decrease and the importance of within track relationships and lived experiences might increase over time. Alternatively, the societal evaluation might be a constant influence on students' track identity.

(2) how students' track history, being part of one track or migrating from one track to another, might inform their track identification.

The last major limitation of this dissertation is that any item that asked about other tracks only included these in a general sense, being 'I have X friends from other tracks' or 'my teachers says we are smarter than students from other tracks'. This does not allow us to distinguish if the results pertaining to these items are applicable to all outgroups or only to one. This was for example the case in the discussion on cross-group friendships' relationship to the opinion on vocational track students, where it was unclear whether a lack of cross-group friendship benefits was due to a lack of friendships with students from the vocational track or if there was another underlying mechanism that made these friendships less impactful than those with other tracks. Future research should dive deeper into the dyadic dynamics of tracks, looking at the pairings of two tracks rather than broad statements on 'all other tracks'.

8.4 Future research

Firstly, one of the main avenues for future research on track identification, is studying identity centrality. "Racial centrality refers to the extent to which a person normatively defines herself or himself with respect to race. It is a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 717). We believe centrality could be one of the most valuable concepts to move the research on track identification forward. Firstly because it could provide more insights in the extent to which both track chauvinism and track patriotism are relevant to the persons' self-concept, especially since centrality has already been shown to moderate the relationship between private regard and self-esteem in ethnic identity research (Sellers et al., 1998). Secondly, identity centrality can be used to gauge the relative importance of track identities towards students' self-image and compare these with other identities, that is educational or even non-educational identities. We opted not to include identity centrality as we first wished to more clearly delineate whether there actually was any patriotic and chauvinistic track identification and how these on their own might relate to in- and outgroup attitudes, before adding the moderating effects of centrality to the equation.

Secondly, the interaction of the track identity with other identities could be very relevant. In education, particularly in Belgium, there is a clear connection between the vocational track and both lower average SES and the vocational track has more students from an ethnic

minority background (e.g., Tan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2005). All of these identities can feel threatened by the majority identity. It would therefore be interesting to investigate whether chauvinistic attitudes develop for each of these identities to the same extent, whether these vulnerable identities are mutually exclusive in their effects on self-esteem or if they strengthen each other. On the one hand, students from lower status backgrounds might have already developed coping mechanisms earlier in their life, which makes them more adept at tackling the disadvantages of lower track status and might make their track identity less impactful. On the other hand, students might feel an increased sense of threat from and resentment towards society if they feel that there are multiple aspects on which they are considered by society as 'less valuable', which could lead to stronger chauvinistic attitudes in students with multiple disadvantaged identities. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if the track identity is more or less impactful depending on students' SES background specifically. We would expect that students with higher parental SES would be impacted more negatively by moving to the vocational track, as this could be experienced as 'status loss' compared to the status their parents have. This might urge students to identify less patriotically and more chauvinistically with their track, as a reaction to the relatively high status loss. Lastly, students might be able to employ avoidant coping by hiding their track identity outside of the educational context more easily than an identity that is visibly discernable, like their ethnic identity, which might make the track identity a less impactful identity outside of the school-context (Compas et al., 2001; Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

Thirdly, we have shown that track chauvinism breaks down into at least cognitive and social chauvinism, but we invite future research to look deeper into the types of track chauvinism that can be relevant towards students' self- and outgroup view. The ways in which social chauvinism is expressed should be investigated more closely, as measurement invariance testing has shown that this concept should be fleshed out more. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if the elements on which students develop attitudes of track superiority go beyond the two identified in this research.

Fourthly, in this dissertation we made the decision to mainly approach track identification from a Social Identity Theory perspective (Tajfel et al., 1979), while incorporating some elements of Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987). For future research, we believe that both the nigrescence model (Cross, 1971; 1991) and Identity Theory (Stryker, 1980;

Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999) could provide interesting avenues to study the (vocational) track identity. The nigrescence model has a multistage approach to studying minority identities, describing the process through which students internalize this identity, its customs and expected behaviors, while negotiating with the negative societal outlook on the identity they adopt. This approach, most likely through observational or ethnographic research, would be particularly relevant to study the vocational track, and could map out whether or not the societal track label permeates into group behavior, boundary making, group expectations and if there is a process that students go through to become 'truly vocational'. Identity Theory, with its roots in symbolic interactionism, would be a relevant framework to study tracked behavior and to outline which identities might compete with the tracked identity in different contexts. This is particularly interesting for interactions outside the school environment, as the track labels are also used by for instance politicians (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015).

Lastly, future research should look deeper into teacher communication. This should investigate the efficiency of teachers' track communication and what factors might influence the perception of this communication by the students. Future research should also look at the motives for teachers to convey feelings of superiority towards students more closely. In this dissertation we already showed that teachers are tracked to some extent, yet there is room for future research to study how teachers' own track attitudes translate into communication towards their students. A qualitative approach seems most appropriate for this topic. It might be interesting for observational research to look deeper into the formal and informal communication strategies teachers adopt regarding track identity, particularly in multilateral schools. Additionally, future research could investigate how school leadership influences teachers' communication about tracks. More specifically it could look into whether there are any schoolwide guidelines that inform or direct teachers' communication concerning tracking, whether there are notable differences based on school structure in these guidelines and to what extent teachers adhere to these guidelines.

8.5 Policy advice

8.5.1 Limiting status threat

This dissertation has demonstrated the impact of tracking on students' self-image and their outlook on other tracks and how these are affected by differential track identification. Chauvinistic track attitudes are stimulated by a sense of threat (e.g., Woods, 1976; Coenders, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2017; Van der Waal et al., 2010). Within a tracked system, the perceived negative societal outlook on their track stimulates students' chauvinism. Limiting the development of chauvinistic attitudes is important as the more positive outlook on students' own track through more chauvinistic attitudes comes at the cost of looking down on students from other groups and derogatory behavior. There are a few ways in which we believe the core issue of perceived threat could be tackled.

Firstly, the societal evaluation of vocational education should be increased. Importantly, vocational education actually holds lower status than the vocational jobs it prepares for (Eurobarometer, 2011; Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Kavadias, 2015). This suggests that the low status of vocational students cannot be solely attributed to future job status, but might be influenced by the narrative surrounding vocational education in particular. One of the main reasons for this low societal status is the way in which track mobility is organized. While 'downward' mobility from more academic to more vocational education is fairly common, the extent to which 'upward' mobility is possible and the restrictions placed on upward mobility differ between countries (Jacob & Tieben, 2009; Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018). Any country that applies more restrictions to upward mobility than to downward mobility implies that the skills required to succeed in vocational education are easier to obtain than those in academic education. This mobility also causes the vocational track to become the destination for students who fail in other tracks, rather than solely being populated by students with an inherent interest in vocational education (Van Praag et al., 2015a).

So our first suggestion to increase the societal status of vocational education is to make the entry into vocational education more restrictive. These restrictions should be formulated based on the inherent skills and competences required to succeed in vocational education. Korp (2011) showed that certain vocational schools already identified these skills and competences, as they created a narrative in which 'book smarts' were not considered as the

only relevant type of intelligence. Vocational education presents independence, responsibility and the creativity to find solutions for any type of situation as alternative forms of intelligence that are at least equally important. These restrictions and the accompanying narrative on vocational education should highlight the fact that vocational training requires its own unique skillset that not every students naturally possesses. As a consequence, it should take away the perception that vocational education 'is easier' and that students who fail in another track will eventually succeed in vocational education, which is the current perception in any 'cascade system'. Imposing these restrictions also has the added benefit that vocational education can be taught at a high level, as it can focus entirely on vocational achievement and does no longer have to accommodate (to the same extent) for students that enter into the vocational program with a lack of preparation in the later years of their secondary education due to failure in other tracks. In doing so, vocational education could reach the same status as the vocational jobs it prepares for. As our work has shown, students are drawn to what makes their track unique in order to increase their self-image, so more restrictive entry into vocational education and highlighting 'vocational intelligence' more could create more positive traits through which students can connect with their own track. Connecting their self-image with vocational intelligence might also stimulate more pro-educational attitudes in vocational students.

If the entry into vocational education is made more restrictive, an alternative way to remedy failure within the academic or technical track has to be formulated. We propose that failure within a track should be remedied within that same track, and track mobility should only be encouraged if there is a motivated reason why track migration could either be more in line with the students' personal interests and skillset or if this mobility would increase their chances of succeeding in education. The consequences of this different approach to treating failure on chauvinistic track attitudes can be witnessed when comparing the Flemish with the Francophone educational system, as the former focuses more on downward track mobility and the latter relies more on grade retention. In 2014, 46 percent of 15-year old students in the Francophone system had repeated at least one grade, whereas in the same age-group of Flemish students 'only' 26 percent repeated at least one grade (Hindriks & Lamy, 2014). In contrast, the Flemish system applies vertical downward mobility from academic to technical and vocational education more readily. So while the Francophone system seems to

communicate that if a student experiences issues within a track, they should try to overcome these issues within the same track, the Flemish 'cascade system' strengthens the idea that the vocational track is associated with failure in other tracks.

The main difference in results between these two systems is that in the Francophone system, students identify in less stereotypically chauvinistic ways with their track, as academic track students in the Francophone educational system are less cognitively chauvinistic than those in the Flemish region. For social chauvinism, both the academic and technical track students are more socially chauvinistic in the French-speaking region, but the vocational track is significantly less socially chauvinistic compared to the Flemish region. We do not plea for an increase in applying grade retention, as this policy is accompanied by its own range of issues for students and education (e.g., Van Canegem, 2022). Instead, we believe that the main takeaway from these regional differences is that treating each track in its own right, with its own skills and challenges, and that experiencing issues within one track should not necessarily be remedied by mobility to another track, could limit the development of cognitive chauvinistic attitudes. This lower cognitive chauvinism could be an indication that Francophone students experience less cognitive threat. Making the entry into vocational education more restrictive does not change the fact that any system that prepares its student population for either higher education or the labor market will still have to tackle the underlying assumption that higher education is a more valuable career trajectory, which reflects on the status of the tracks.

Secondly, a more radical approach to the threat educational tracking poses to the members of the vocational track would be to abolish the classic academic-vocational division and to install a new educational differentiation that is less vertically oriented, rather than improving the status of the historically low status vocational track. Inspiration on how to do this can be found in the Flemish educational reform. Within this reform, programs label themselves as 'higher education oriented', having a 'dual orientation' and a 'labor market orientation'. Students who graduate in a 'labor market' program but wish to start a bachelor degree have to complete an additional seventh year that explicitly prepares them for higher education. The other programs provide a diploma that allows entry into higher education. All programs are catalogued in one of eight 'domains': (1) Language and culture, (2) STEM, (3) Arts and creation, (4) Agri- and horticulture, (5) Economy and organization, (6) Society and wellbeing, (7) Sports,

(8) Food and Catering industry. This division into program orientations and domains gives schools the framework to organize themselves either through horizontal differentiation by only providing one orientation, or through vertical orientation, by providing programs from multiple orientations, but focusing on one domain (Beerens, 2023). In the coming years it will become clear how many Flemish schools actually re-organize themselves in accordance with this framework.

While the Flemish reform retains track labels as an addition to the orientations and domains, we propose to abolish the tracks and instead focus on the domains as the societal focus around which students could build their identity. In my proposal, every domain should provide programs from each orientation where possible. Within each domain, vertical mobility should be properly facilitated in both directions, so student get the opportunity to discover the type of education that best suits both their skills and interests. Inspiration on how to properly facilitate upward vertical mobility and on how to determine students' chances to succeed in their new orientation can be found in the Dutch educational system (Dekker et al., 2008). This system allows for upward vertical mobility to give students from disadvantaged backgrounds more time to adapt to the educational system (Herweijer, 2008). As schools can organize themselves around one domain, vertical mobility could be more easily organized within one school, streamlining the process. The main advantage of this new system would be that choosing to follow personal interests at the start of secondary education, especially if they are more vocationally or technically oriented, would not limit the opportunities students have in the future. In current tracking systems, students might sometimes forego their personal interests, informed by their parents, to increase their chances to succeed in higher education by 'aiming high' and starting in the academic track, rather than opting for a track that limits their chances to succeed in higher education (Boone, Seghers & Van Houtte, 2018; Bittmann, 2022). Despite students' personal aspirations commonly aligning with parental aspirations, in the instances that students' personal interests conflict with the aspirations their parents hold for them, the parental preference is often the deciding factor in track choice (Gölz & Wohlkinger, 2019; Smyth, 2020; Bittmann, 2022; Röhlke, 2022). Giving students the chance to pursue their personal interests would likely increase their intrinsic motivation, which is an important contributor to educational achievement (Lemos & Veríssimo, 2014). If all domains could provide programs across the different orientations and facilitate vertical mobility in both

directions, choosing for the domains in which students have a personal interest would not necessarily mean choosing for orientations that might conflict with parental aspirations.

One critique to this proposal could be that it would not remove low status positions, but would simply alter who is attributed the lowest status, moving from a between track to a within domain status comparison. While this is true, a radical reform would remove the historical stigma that is attached to vocational education and has permeated in daily life beyond the school context (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). Any system that differentiates its students will have status differences between groups of students. But in this proposed system, it would be more difficult to identify a singular group that is associated with lower future job status. While this might still be done by those with intimate knowledge of the educational system like students and teachers, it would be less easy for the general population to discern which programs hold higher or lower status within each domain. In the current system, the overarching labels of the tracks are easily identifiable and easy to attach stereotypes to. While Stevens and Vermeersch (2010) have shown that within track status hierarchies do exist and our results show that even (certain) students within the academic track have to cope with feelings of lower public regard, the overarching benefit of being part of the more highly esteemed academic track remains, as academic track students display both a higher self-esteem and a more positive assessment of their own track. So if a narrative can be created in which these domains hold similar status, this could limit the extent to which students feel low public regard based on group stereotypes, even if they opt for lower status programs within their domain.

8.5.2 Flemish educational reform

In the following section we will take a look at the Flemish educational reform, the elements that will make it unlikely for this reform to achieve more status equality between tracks and the impact this reform will likely have on the main findings of our dissertation. This dissertation is based on data collected for the School, Identity & Society-survey (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021) in the schoolyear 2017-2018. But after this data-collection was concluded, an educational reform of secondary education in Flanders started (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). This reform was implemented for the first and second grade in the year 2019-2020, for the third and fourth grade in 2021-2022 and for the fifth and sixth grade in 2023-2024. As outlined above, this reform constructs a new framework for secondary education, built around a combination of tracks, program orientations and study domains.

If this reform would aim to reduce chauvinistic identification and to limit the detrimental effects of being a vocational track student, we see two major issues that are directly related to each other. The first major issue is the retention of the track labels, in addition to the program orientations and domains. This was motivated by policy makers as they feared that parents and students would otherwise not be able to navigate themselves within the reformed system (Dockx, 2022). This choice will limit the extent to which this reform can alter the impact of track identities. While it could be argued that the introduction of domains could shift the societal narrative away from tracks to domains, we do not expect this to happen, for several reasons. The first reason is the second major issue of this reform: academic track programs are characterized as more abstract and cross-domain, whereas the technical and arts programs are labelled domain-specific (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2023). This characterization sets the academic track apart from the technical and arts track in this reform and situates the academic track above the domains, actually highlighting track differences instead of diminishing them. Secondly, the tracks are well established in the minds of people and in societal discourse, so I do not expect these to be replaced by domains, especially since the domains do signify different interests, but do not help people that wish to categorize and judge students based on their academic achievements. This desire to categorize based on achievement is clearly present in knowledge-based societies that attribute the highest status to higher education (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010). The retaining of track labels feels like a missed opportunity to provide a framework that could move the societal narrative away from a hierarchical system which impacts students' general self-esteem, their personal track evaluation and the way they view other tracks. So in terms of chauvinistic track identification, teachers' track communication and the influence of tracking on self-esteem, it seems unlikely that this reform will have major consequences.

Following the same argument as given by politicians for maintaining the track labels, schools with a good reputation are likely to stick with their current organization based on track labels, to avoid any confusion and not give the impression that they would implement reforms that could impact their good reputation. For schools with a worse reputation, this reform could provide them the opportunity to rebrand as focusing on a domain, implement structural reforms and launch a new school identity to attract parents and students.

As the Flemish educational reform is accompanied by the implementation of centrally administered standardized testing, we will look briefly at the possible impact of these central tests on chauvinistic track identification. Certain nations opt to employ centralized testing throughout the several years of secondary education (e.g., France, the US, the UK), others only have centralized standardized tests at the end of secondary education (e.g., Sweden and Finland) and some countries have no centralized tests at all (e.g., Belgium at the time of the SIS-survey) (Rotberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2015). Both what these tests measure and the way in which the results of centralized standardized testing are used are key to how they might affect track identification. Firstly, the specific domains there tested – like mathematics and reading - emphasize the value policy makers and society attach to competences which are relevant to all students, but that are typically associated with the academic track. Nations that only attach importance to these domains (unintentionally) devalue technical and vocational skills, which are seemingly not worthy of being assessed to the same extent. Attempts to improve results on these tests also cause policy makers to devote more attention to training academic skills in non-academic tracks, which might evoke frustration with these students, as their skills and ambitions are not (necessarily) academical. This academic orientation might increase the feeling of threat and societal devaluation in non-academic track students and increase their social track chauvinism in response.

Secondly, If schools feel that their reputation or funding is dependent on their collective performance, this motivates schools to attach a huge importance to tests results and to mostly invest in students whom they feel are 'worthy' investments, in contrast to nations that use centralized tests to identify where there are more students in need of extra support and actually provide that support (Katz, 1999; Berwick, 2015; Sahlberg, 2015). Publicizing test scores could have as a consequence that students who do not achieve to the desired school standards will be stimulated to migrate, be it to another school or even to another track, strengthening downward vertical track mobility. All of these elements would put an additional emphasis on the cognitive aspects of education and could provide a sense of legitimacy to students' feelings of cognitive chauvinism, if they are part of a school that has a good academic reputation. Due to the increased importance of academic performance, students in vocational education would experience an increased feeling of stigma (Kearns, 2011) and would subsequently develop more socially chauvinistic attitudes as a response. In conclusion, if

(Flemish) policy makers decide to solely assess typically academic track competences, publicize the results of standardized testing and use them as a tool to stimulate competition between schools, they would increase the divide between the different tracks, in terms of track status, track identification and in the ways students from different tracks view each other.

8.5.3 Policy advice: social actors

Aside from the broad reforms suggested above, there are a few ways in which policy makers could diminish the sense of threat within the existing tracking framework. Firstly, the results on teachers' chauvinistic track communication showed once again that teachers are an impactful voice towards students' attitudes and self-image. Vocational education teachers feel that the challenges associated with the diverse educational and personal backgrounds of their students, motivating their students, and trying to bridge the gap between curriculum and future workplace does not receive the social recognition it deserves, causing increased job frustration (Boldrini, Sappa & Aprea, 2019; Amitai, 2021). Vocational teachers do seem to communicate more chauvinistically than their technical and academic counterparts. But it is currently unclear whether this communication is motivated by their own experience of being tracked or by a desire to protect their students from the more negative societal status surrounding the vocational track. Policy makers should try to limit teachers' own negative experiences with 'being tracked', regardless of whether this is the only source of teachers' chauvinistic communication, to limit spontaneous chauvinistic remarks that might originate from teachers' own personal frustrations. This could be done by publicly acknowledging the unique challenges of the vocational track, providing (additional) support and training aimed at lessening the burden of teaching in these challenging environments, and by devoting more attention and time in the curriculum to skills that are in demand by the labor market, while focusing less on linguistic and mathematical training in the vocational curriculum.

Regardless of what motivates chauvinistic track communication, teachers should be made aware that the way they (negatively) communicate about other tracks can increase the divide between students from different tracks, by stimulating a sense of chauvinism within their own students. Teacher training programs should teach student-teachers how students view their own tracks. This should allow teachers to adapt their communication and behavior to (1) strengthen the bond between students and their track, by attaching importance to the track

characteristics students are proud of (e.g., vocational intelligence), (2) be aware of the harmful stereotypes attached to each track, so teachers do not (unintentionally) reaffirm these stereotypes, (3) be vigilant of chauvinistic communication by students and to reframe students' narratives, so the elements on which students distinguish themselves are internalized in a patriotic way, rather than a chauvinistic way. It would be interesting if future research looked at patriotic or positive outgroup track communication by teachers, to see if teachers' tracked communication could also improve between track relationships.

Our second advice concerning social actors is to create more cross-track interactions based on equal status, following the ideas of the updated intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew et al., 2011). We advise this as our findings show that cross-track friendships can be beneficial towards outgroup evaluation, while school structure showed no such benefit on outgroup evaluation. Additionally, academic and technical track students in multilateral schools develop more cognitively and socially chauvinistic attitudes respectively than their counterparts in categorical schools, showing that mere intergroup contact without equal status might actually increase the divide between tracks. Equal status between track contact could possibly be facilitated by cross-track projects which either share an aim that has nothing to do with the educational skills involved, to facilitate more status-free interactions, or through cross-track projects that require the skills from each track to successfully complete, as such highlighting the unique value of each track. The possibilities for these cross-track projects are endless. An example of the first type of project could be mixing students from different tracks in small groups to talk with and discuss the experiences of (former) drug addicts, car crash survivors,… These stories could provide students with an impactful shared experience that they could bond over. For the second type of project, an example could be a 'remote car racing contest' in which the vocational track provides the actual skill to build a miniature racing car, the technical and academic track students learn the essentials of coding to create the remote steering and the arts track students are in charge of promotion through video, posters and to organize the event in which these efforts culminate. These contests could be open to friends and family, to provide an added incentive to win. The main goal of these competitions, concerning cross-track interactions, is that students share a common goal, that requires the unique skills of all tracks to achieve.

8.6 Conclusion

This dissertation adds to the existing knowledge on the impact of tracking by showing that students are not passive recipients of the societal status attached to their track, but they actively negotiate what their track position means to them. As such, students can alter the impact tracking has on them through identifying in ways that allow them to capitalize on what makes their track unique. Yet despite this agency, students are not able to fully negate the negative effects of being tracked in a lower status track on their self-esteem.

9. English summary

For decades, education around the world has tried to find an answer to the question of how to provide the best education to each student, under the assumption that there is a large diversity in interests, abilities and skillsets. This causes every nation at some point to differentiate their students to prepare them for their specific future. How nations do this can differ on a number of factors, yet a considerable number of nations organize this division based to some extent on academic achievement. This can be organized for example through 'tracking', which separates students for their entire curriculum, or 'banding' that differentiates on a subject matter basis, (Gamoran, 1992). In this dissertation, we focus on tracking.

Tracking has caught the interests of social scientists and educational researchers across the globe. They have already shown the impact of tracking on a wide range of outcomes, both educational and non-educational. The initial focus of this research was on educational achievement. The general consensus is that tracking is not unequivocally beneficial to students, increases inequality of achievement and the importance of students' backgrounds (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Terrin & Triventi, 2023).

While educational achievement was the initial focus of tracking research, that focus did over time broaden to include (non-)educational attitudes and outcomes as well. The influence of tracking extends beyond educational attitudes, in part due to track placement being connected to societal status. Most western nations are knowledge-based societies characterized by a lower demand for manual labor (Nixon, 2006). Such societies attribute the highest status to academic tracks and values vocational education the least, reflecting the status of the jobs these tracks prepare for (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

In some nations, the track labels are even applied to students outside the educational context, to attribute (not necessarily positive) personality traits and behaviors to track membership (Jackman & Muha, 1984; Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). These track status differences have a wide range of consequences, where generally speaking the academic track students benefit from tracking, whereas vocational and to a lesser extent technical track students experience negative effects (e.g., Filozof et al., 1998; Trautwein et al., 2009; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). Track position can even go so far as to affect students' general self-esteem, feelings of

depression and the development of friendship relations (e.g., Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2005; Pinquart, Silbereisen & Grümer, 2014).

In current tracking research, track membership is usually considered as a given label, operationalized by students being a member of one track or another track. When research looks at the relationship between students and their identification with their track, it is often a question of whether students identify or disidentify with the track (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019), but less about the ways in which they do this. This dissertation expands the views of existing tracking research on track identification by investigating how positive types of identification with the track, in both high and low status tracks, might influence students' self-image and views on other tracks. This work advances a new line of research that considers students' tracks as an identity and investigates if these behave similarly to other identities.

Theoretically, we drew inspiration from coping, national and ethnic identity research, as these are well-established research traditions that study how people identify with both low- and high status groups, and how people cope with the disadvantages of low status group membership (Tajfel et al., 1979; Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). We studied ingroup identification through the concepts of patriotism and chauvinism. Patriotism is a positive ingroup evaluation based on ingroup pride (Sellers et al., 1998). Chauvinism stimulates positive ingroup feelings by distinguishing the ingroup from meaningful outgroups through feelings of ingroup superiority, leading to exclusionary and hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Raijman et al., 2008).

In addition to students' own relationship with their track, we wanted to study the impact teachers have on students' track identification. We studied this by looking at both the way teachers themselves feel tracked, and the impact their chauvinistic track communication might have on their students. We performance hierarchical multilevel regression analyses based on the School, Identity and Society-survey (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021), which surveyed 4540 students and 324 teachers across 64 schools in Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital region.

Firstly, our findings confirm previous research, as the academic track, which is rated the highest by society, has the highest self-esteem (e.g., Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). We added to this existing knowledge by showing that only the academic

track students' general self-esteem seemingly significantly benefits from their cognitive chauvinism, while only vocational students' self-esteem is positively related to their social chauvinism. These results seem to show that students gain self-esteem by identifying with the track components that characteristic to their tracks.

Secondly, our findings show that all students rate their own track the highest, regardless of societal status, which is similar to other identities (Tajfel et al., 1979). Vocational track students rate their own track significantly lower than others students rate their own. Therefore, vocational students seemingly feel the impact of its lower societal status. Vocational students also think less hierarchically about tracks, likely in an effort to limit the impact of their status position, because they are the 'victim' of educations' status hierarchy.

Thirdly, both track patriotism and chauvinism positively relate to students' ingroup evaluation, across all tracks, as would be expected based on other identity research (Raijman et al., 2008; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). When it comes to how students view the other tracks, patriotism has either a neutral or positive impact. Track chauvinism is associated with academic track students looking more negatively at the other tracks. These results are in line with findings of research on other identities. We saw no significant relationship between chauvinistic track identification and how technical and vocational students view the other tracks, but it is currently unclear whether this relationship does not exist or if it is obscured by certain limitations with the chauvinism measure in the paper that studied this relationship.

Fourthly, teachers are relevant actors when discussing students' chauvinistic attitudes. Our results indicate that teachers seem to stimulate a general sense of superiority in their students in all tracks, rather than being solely focused on the unique characteristics of each track. Academic track teachers seemingly communicate less chauvinistically than their technical track colleagues, while vocational track teachers are perceived to communicate most chauvinistically by their students. This might be due to vocational teachers being aware of the societal stigma towards their students, which might motivate them to provide an alternative narrative to their students, to counteract the threat of this societal stigma.

Not all teachers are 'tracked' to the same extent. In this dissertation, we measured 'being tracked' by looking at how teachers' job satisfaction might be affected by the public status of their students. Academic track teachers' job satisfaction is unaffected by the public opinion.

The lack of importance of track status could be because these teachers simply consider the academic track as the 'norm' (Doane, 1997), or that academic track teachers do not consider the other tracks as relevant reference categories. Vocational track teachers only experience the impact of public opinion when they teach in schools that provide multiple tracks. This suggest that daily contact with teachers from other tracks makes the track identity more visible and causes vocational teachers to attach increased importance to the public evaluation of their track (Kelley, 1952; Van Dick et al., 2004a/b). Technical track teachers' job satisfaction is attached the most to their public track status. Due to the intermediary position of the technical track, it seems that they cannot rely on their track identity to reduce social uncertainty and instead rely more on how society evaluates them.

When studying students' track identification, the context has to be taken into account. This dissertation found significantly different results across our research questions based on region (Flanders or the Francophone community), whether schools provide one or multiple tracks and students' cross-track friendships. While this dissertation is to some extent context-specific, we believe that nations with ability grouping systems that are less rigid or less public will find similar results, but less outspoken, since Belgium is not the only nation that awards academic education with the highest status and vocational education with considerably lower status (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Our research added to the upcoming line of research that investigates whether educational tracks can be considered as social identities. Both our findings and existing tracking research show considerable similarities between how tracks and other well-established identities behave, on a wide variety of components (Ashmore et al., 2004). Based on these results, we propose that track should be considered as social identities. This should open a wide array of research opportunities by drawing inspiration from ethnic- and national identity research for future tracking research.

The main takeaway of our research for sociology should be that tracks might seemingly perpetuate social inequality by being social entities that represent future social classes, in addition to perpetuating it through other well-known mechanisms. If this is the case, than the development of chauvinistic track attitudes is accompanied by considerable risks. While chauvinistic attitudes help students to increase their self-esteem and to buffer the impact of negative societal status, it comes at the cost of increased between-group divides through

exclusionary, discriminatory and derogatory behavior. So teachers and policy makers should be aware of these risks and should try to find ways in which the benefits of track identification for students' self-esteem can be retained, while reducing the existence of chauvinistic track attitudes.

The most important notion for policy reforms is that the feeling of threat that evokes chauvinistic attitudes has to be limited. Below, I suggest a few policy changes that could limit this threat. The societal status of vocational education should be increased. In Belgian education, students who fail in the academic track are allowed to move to the technical or vocational track, but track mobility in the other direction is barely possible. This causes the vocational track to become a destination for 'failing' students, devaluing this track as a place for students with genuine vocational interests. We propose that failure within one track should be remedied within this track, and track mobility should only be allowed with a motivated reasoning, based on students' motivation and capabilities. This limited mobility should allow vocational tracks to teach at a higher level and as such reflect the status of vocational jobs.

A more radical approach would to abolish the track division altogether. I propose a system that takes inspiration from the early versions of the Flemish educational reform, formulated by the Monard-report (2009), in which education is organized around 'domains of interest'. Each domain would provide education that prepares students for either higher education, the labor market, or has a mixed orientation. This system should remove the stigma of vocational education, as an interest in technical or practical domains of interest is no longer connected to a track label that is associated to some extent with academic 'failure'. Currently, some technically interested students choose academic programs, in order to 'keep all of their options open' and not limit their opportunities to succeed in higher education. This should no longer be needed in a system based on domains of interest, as these should be taught at all levels and should allow students to alter the orientation of their program throughout their secondary education. We advise to facilitate movement between these domains so students feel more encouraged to discover where their interests lie, which in turn should increase their motivation.

Regardless of whether policy makers are open to systematic changes, we encourage the facilitation of cross-track interactions based on equal status to improve cross-track

relationships, based on our results concerning cross-track friendships. Policy makers should try to limit teachers' negative experiences of 'being tracked' by acknowledging the unique challenges of each track and supporting teachers to tackle these challenges, to limit spontaneous chauvinistic remarks that might originate from teachers' own personal frustrations. Additionally, teachers should be made aware of how their communication might (involuntarily) increase the divide between students from different tracks.

This dissertation has a few limitations. Firstly, a rather small number of teachers were surveyed, so any results based on the SIS-teacher data should be considered as exploratory. Secondly, we only used cross-sectional data, so we cannot make any conclusive statements on causality. Thirdly, we could not study the dyadic relationships between tracks, particularly the impact of dyadic cross-track friendships and the impact of which tracks teachers' chauvinistic communication is aimed at.

In conclusion, students show agency in how they interpret their own position within the educational status hierarchy, how they shape their outlook on other tracks and the extent to which they let educational tracking affect their self-image, through differential track identification. As such, students can alter the impact tracking has on them through identifying in ways that allow them to capitalize on what makes their track unique. Yet despite this agency, students are not able to fully negate the negative effects of being tracked in a lower status track on their self-esteem.

10. Nederlandstalige samenvatting

De afgelopen decennia heeft het onderwijs wereldwijd geprobeerd om een antwoord te vinden op de vraag hoe die het beste onderwijs kan geven aan elke leerling, rekening houdend met de grote diversiteit aan interesses, capaciteiten en vaardigheden onder leerlingen. Dit vraagstuk zorgt ervoor dat elk land op een gegeven punt hun leerlingen differentieert, om hen voor te bereiken op hun specifieke toekomsten. Hoe landen dit doen kan variëren op verschillende vlakken, maar een aanzienlijk aantal landen organiseert deze differentiatie op basis van de academische prestaties van leerlingen. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld gedaan worden via onderwijsvormen zijn die hun leerlingen opsplitsen voor hun volledig curriculum, of 'banden' waarbij leerlingen per vak opgesplitst worden (Gamoran, 1992). In dit proefschrift ligt de focus op onderwijsvormen.

Het opsplitsen van leerlingen in onderwijsvormen (bv. ASO, TSO, KSO, BSO) heeft de aandacht gevangen van onderwijskundige onderzoekers over de hele wereld. Deze hebben de impact van opdelen in onderwijsvormen reeds aangetoond op een scala van uitkomsten, zowel binnen als buiten het onderwijs. De initiële focus van dit onderzoeksgebied lag bij de onderwijsprestaties van leerlingen. De algemene consensus is dat onderwijsvormen niet over de hele lijn zorgen voor positieve leereffecten bij leerlingen, dat het de ongelijkheid in prestaties tussen leerlingen vergroot en dat de thuisachtergrond van leerlingen zwaarder doorweegt (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Terrin & Triventi, 2023).

De focus van dit onderzoek is op termijn uitgebreid om niet enkel meer te kijken naar prestaties, maar ook naar (niet-) onderwijs gerelateerde attitudes en uitkomsten. De invloed van onderwijsvormen reikt verder dan het schoolse, deels doordat de sociale status van leerlingen verbonden is met hun onderwijsvorm. De meeste westerse landen zijn kennis-economieën, gekenmerkt door een lage vraag naar handenarbeid (Nixon, 2006). Deze samenlevingen hechten de meeste waarde aan academische onderwijsvormen en het minst aan beroepsonderwijs, als afspiegeling van de jobs waarop deze onderwijsvormen voorbereiden (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

In sommige landen wordt het 'label' van de onderwijsvorm zelfs op leerlingen gekleefd buiten de onderwijscontext, waarbij er (niet noodzakelijk positieve) persoonlijkheidskenmerken en gedragingen toegeschreven worden aan deze onderwijsvormen (Jackman & Muha, 1984;

Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). De verschillen in status tussen de onderwijsvormen hebben vele gevolgen, waarbij over het algemeen de leerlingen in de academische onderwijsvorm (ASO) het meest te winnen hebben bij het opdelen in onderwijsvormen en leerlingen in het beroepsonderwijs (BSO) en in mindere mate het technisch onderwijs (TSO) eerder nadelen ondervinden van deze opdeling (bv. Filozof et al., 1998; Trautwein et al., 2009; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). De onderwijsvorm kan zelfs een invloed hebben op leerlingen hun zelfvertrouwen, gevoelens van depressie en welke vriendschappen ze ontwikkelen (bv. Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Van Houtte, 2005; Pinquart, Silbereisen & Grümer, 2014).

In het huidige onderzoek naar onderwijsvormen wordt lidmaatschap van de onderwijsvorm vaak gezien als een gegeven, waarbij leerlingen deel zijn van een onderwijsvorm. Wanneer onderzoek dan kijkt naar de relatie van leerlingen met hun onderwijsvorm, dan is het vooral een kwestie of de leerling zich identificeert of desidentificeert met deze onderwijsvorm (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019), maar veel minder aandacht gaat naar de manieren waarop leerlingen zich kunnen identificeren met hun onderwijsvorm. Dit proefschrift breidt de visie van het bestaande onderzoek naar identificatie met onderzoeksvormen uit door te gaan onderzoeken hoe positieve vormen van ingroep-identificatie, zowel in hoge als lage status onderwijsvormen, een invloed zou kunnen hebben op zowel het zelfbeeld van leerlingen als op hun opinie over de andere onderwijsvormen. Dit werk zet hiermee een nieuwe onderzoekslijn verder die onderwijsvormen als identiteiten beschouwt en onderzoekt of deze zich op een vergelijkbare manier gedragen als andere identiteiten.

Theoretisch haalden we inspiratie bij onderzoek naar ‘coping’, nationale en etnische identiteiten, aangezien dit goed ingeburgerde onderzoekstradities zijn die bestuderen hoe mensen zich identificeren met zowel hoge- als lage-statusgroepen, en hoe mensen omgaan met de nadelen die verbonden zijn aan het lid zijn van een lage-statusgroep (Tajfel et al., 1979; Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). We bestudeerden positieve identificatie via de concepten van patriotisme en chauvinisme. Patriotisme is positieve evaluatie van de ingroep via een gevoel van trots (Sellers et al., 1998). Chauvinisme stimuleert positieve ingroep gevoelens door zich te onderscheiden van andere groepen via gevoelens van superioriteit, die leiden tot uitsluitend en vijandig gedrag naar andere groepen toe (Raijman et al., 2008).

Als aanvulling op de relatie van leerlingen met hun eigen onderwijsvorm, wilden we ook de impact van leerlingen op deze relatie bestuderen. Dit deden we door te kijken naar zowel de

hoe leerkrachten zelf het gevoel hebben beïnvloed te zijn door hun onderwijsvorm als naar de impact die leerlingen hebben op hun leerlingen door chauvinistisch te communiceren. We hebben in dit proefschrift hiërarchische multilevel regressie-analyses toegepast op de School, Identiteit en Samenleving-vragenlijst (Maene, Thijs & Stevens, 2021), die 4540 leerlingen en 324 leerkrachten uit 64 scholen in Vlaanderen, Wallonië en het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest bevraagd heeft.

Onze resultaten bevestigden ten eerste eerder onderzoek, aangezien het ASO-leerlingen, die de hoogste status hebben, ook het hoogste zelfvertrouwen hebben (bv. Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte, Demanet & Stevens, 2012). Wij hebben aan deze reeds bestaande kennis toegevoegd door aan te tonen dat enkel het zelfvertrouwen van ASO-leerlingen lijkt te verbeteren door een hoger cognitief chauvinisme te hebben, terwijl beroepsleerlingen de enige zijn die een positieve relatie tonen tussen hun sociaal chauvinisme en hun zelfvertrouwen. Deze resultaten lijken aan te tonen dat leerlingen meer zelfvertrouwen krijgen door zich te identificeren met de elementen die karakteristiek zijn voor hun onderwijsvorm.

Onze resultaten toonden ten tweede dat alle leerlingen hun eigen onderwijsvorm het meest positief inschatten, ongeacht diens maatschappelijke status, wat overeenkomt met andere identiteiten (Tajfel et al., 1979). Beroepsleerlingen schatten hun eigen onderwijsvorm wel aanzienlijk lager in dan hoe leerlingen in andere onderwijsvormen zichzelf inschatten. Dit lijkt erop te wijzen dat beroepsleerlingen de impact van hun lagere status voelen. Daarnaast denken beroepsleerlingen minder hiërarchisch over onderwijsvormen, waarschijnlijk in een poging om de impact van hun status positie te verminderen, aangezien zij het ‘slachtoffer’ zijn van de onderwijshiërarchie.

Ten derde zijn zowel patriotisme als chauvinisme positief gerelateerd aan hoe leerlingen hun eigen onderwijsvorm beoordelen, en dit voor leerlingen uit elke onderwijsvorm, zoals verwacht op basis van eerder identiteitsonderzoek (Raijman et al., 2008; Carter & Pérez, 2016; Huddy & Del Ponte, 2019). Als we kijken naar hoe deze identificatietypes een invloed hebben op hoe leerlingen naar andere onderwijsvormen kijken, dan heeft patriotisme een positieve of neutrale invloed. Chauvinisme voor ASO-leerlingen gelinkt aan een meer negatieve opinie over alle andere onderwijsvormen, wat overeenkomt met eerder identiteitsonderzoek. We zagen daarentegen geen relatie tussen chauvinisme en de opinie van TSO en BSO-leerlingen

over de andere onderwijsvormen. Op dit moment is het onduidelijk of hier geen sprake is van een relatie, of dat deze relatie verborgen is onder bepaalde limitaties van de chauvinisme-maat in de paper die op deze relatie ingaat.

Ten vierde zijn leerkrachten relevante actoren als we chauvinistische onderwijsvorm-attitudes bij leerlingen willen bestuderen. Onze resultaten geven aan dat leerkrachten een algemeen gevoel van superioriteit stimuleren in hun leerlingen, en niet enkel de aandacht vestigen op de unieke elementen van elke onderwijsvorm. ASO-leerkrachten lijken minder chauvinistisch te communiceren dan de TSO-leerkrachten, terwijl BSO-leerkrachten het meest chauvinistisch lijken te communiceren. Dit kan komen door het feit dat BSO-leerkrachten zich bewust zijn van het maatschappelijk stigma dat hun leerlingen ervaren, die hen ertoe aan kan zetten om hun leerlingen een nieuw narratief aan te bieden die ingaat tegen dit maatschappelijk stigma.

Niet alle leerkrachten ervaren in dezelfde mate een maatschappelijke invloed van de onderwijsvorm waarin ze lesgeven. In dit proefschrift hebben we deze invloed onderzocht door te kijken naar hoe de jobtevredenheid van leerkrachten samenhangt met de maatschappelijke status van hun leerlingen. ASO-leerkrachten ondervinden hier geen invloed van. Deze status is niet relevant voor ASO-leerkrachten omdat ze mogelijk hun onderwijsvorm simpelweg als ‘de norm’ beschouwen (Doane, 1997), of dat ze de andere onderwijsvormen niet als een relevant referentiekader voor hun eigen status zien. BSO-leerkrachten ervaren enkel een invloed van de publieke opinie als ze lesgeven in scholen waar meerdere onderwijsvormen aangeboden worden. Dit lijkt erop te wijzen dat het dagelijkse contact met leerkrachten uit andere onderwijsvormen ervoor zorgt dat de onderwijsvorm als een identiteit meer op de voorgrond treedt en dat BSO-leerkrachten bijgevolg meer waarde hechten aan de publieke opinie over hun onderwijsvorm (Kelley, 1952; Van Dick et al., 2004a/b). D jobtevredenheid van TSO-leerkrachten hangt het meest samen met de publieke status van het TSO. Door hun positie in het midden van de onderwijskundige statusladder lijkt het dat deze leerkrachten niet kunnen terugvallen op de TSO-identiteit om een antwoord te bieden sociale onzekerheid en in de plaats daarvan meer belang hechten aan hun maatschappelijke status.

Als we de identificatie van leerlingen met hun onderwijsvorm willen bestuderen moeten we rekening houden met de context waarin dit gebeurt. In dit proefschrift waren er significante verschillen in de antwoorden op onze onderzoeksvragen tussen leerlingen uit verschillende regio’s (Vlaanderen en de Franstalige gemeenschap), tussen scholen met één onderwijsvorm

en scholen met meerdere onderwijsvormen, en hoeveel vriendschappen leerlingen hadden met mensen buiten hun eigen onderwijsvorm. Ondanks dat dit proefschrift context-gebonden is geloven we erin dat deze resultaten zich ook tot op zekere hoogte kunnen vertalen naar andere landen/systemen, aangezien België niet het enige land is waar het academisch onderwijs de hoogste maatschappelijke status heeft en het beroepsonderwijs een aanzienlijk lagere status (Andersen & Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Ons onderzoek was een voortzetting van de startende onderzoekslijn die onderwijsvormen als sociale identiteiten beschouwt. Zowel eerder onderzoek als onze resultaten tonen aanzienlijke gelijkenissen in hoe onderwijsvormen en andere identiteiten zich gedragen, over een scala van thema's (Ashmore et al., 2004). Op basis hiervan stellen wij voor om onderwijsvormen in toekomstig onderzoek (nog vaker) als sociale identiteiten te beschouwen. Dit zou de deur moeten openen voor interessante onderwijssociologische onderzoekspistes door inspiratie te halen bij etnisch- en nationaal identiteitsonderzoek.

De belangrijkste sociologische les van dit proefschrift is dat het systeem van leerlingen in onderwijsvormen de onderwijsongelijkheid lijkt voort te zetten doordat deze onderwijsvormen een voorloper lijken van sociale klassen, wat een aanvulling is op eerder gekende mechanismen van sociale ongelijkheid in onderwijs. Indien dit het geval is dan is de ontwikkeling van chauvinistische attitudes bij leerlingen vergezeld door serieuze risico's. Chauvinistische attitudes helpen leerlingen om hun zelfvertrouwen te beschermen en om tegengewicht te bieden aan de negatieve impact van hun publieke status, maar dit gaat gepaard met diepere kloven tussen de verschillende onderwijsvormen door uitsluitend, discriminerend en denigrerend gedrag. Leerkrachten en beleidsmakers moeten zich bewust zijn van deze risico's en manieren zoeken om de voordelen die leerlingen ondervinden van zich identificeren met hun onderwijsvormen te behouden, terwijl ze de nadelen van verbonden aan chauvinisme verminderen.

Het belangrijkste uitgangspunt voor beleidshervormingen is dat het gevoel van statusbedreiging die de oorzaak is van chauvinistische attitudes moet ingeperkt worden. Hieronder geef ik enkele voorstellen om deze dreiging in te perken. Hierbij moet de maatschappelijke status van het beroepsonderwijs omhoog. In het Belgische onderwijs worden leerlingen die 'falen' in het academisch onderwijs doorverwezen naar het technisch en/of beroepsonderwijs, maar mobiliteit in de andere richting is nauwelijks mogelijk. Dit zorgt

ervoor dat, hoofdzakelijk, het beroepsonderwijs de bestemming wordt voor 'gefaalde leerlingen', wat een devaluatie van het beroepsonderwijs als een plaats voor leerlingen met 'vakman/vrouw-' interesses met zich meebrengt. Daarom stellen we voor dat het 'falen' in een onderwijsvorm moet aangepakt worden binnen deze onderwijsvorm, en dat verplaatsingen tussen onderwijsvormen enkel toegestaan mogen worden op basis van de persoonlijke motivatie en capaciteiten van leerlingen. Deze beperkte mobiliteit zou het beroepsonderwijs de ruimte moeten bieden om op een hoger niveau les te geven en hun status zo meer een weerspiegeling te laten worden van de beroepen waarop het voorbereidt.

Een meer radicale aanpak zou zijn om alle onderwijsvormen af te schaffen. Als alternatief stellen we een systeem voor die geïnspireerd is door de eerste versie van de Vlaamse onderwijshervorming, zoals deze voorgesteld werd in het rapport Monard (2009), waarbij onderwijs georganiseerd is rond interessegebieden. In ons voorstel zou elk interessegebied programma's aanbieden die leerlingen voorbereiden op het hoger onderwijs, programma's gericht op de arbeidsmarkt of een combinatie van beiden. Dit systeem zou het stigma die verbonden is aan beroepsonderwijs, aangezien een technische of 'vakman/vrouw' interesse niet meer verbonden is aan een label dat het stigma meedraagt van 'academisch falen'. In het huidige systeem zijn er leerlingen die hun interesses negeren en in de plaats kiezen voor academische programma's om 'hun opties open te houden' en om hun kans op slagen in het hoger onderwijs niet te fnuiken. In ons voorstel zou dit niet meer nodig zijn, aangezien alle inhouden op alle niveaus aangeboden worden, wat leerlingen in staat zou moeten stellen om de oriëntatie van hun programma beter af te stemmen op hun capaciteiten en interesses, wat voor verhoogde motivatie zou moeten zorgen.

Ongeacht of beleidsmakers openstaan voor grootschalige hervormingen moedigen we het faciliteren van contact tussen de verschillende onderwijsvormen in een setting die voor evenwaardigheid tussen de groepen zorgt aan, op basis van onze resultaten rond cross-groep vriendschappen. Beleidsmakers zouden ook de negatieve ervaringen van leerkrachten met de status van hun onderwijsvorm moeten inperken, door erkenning te geven aan de unieke uitdagingen van elke onderwijsvorm en ondersteuning te bieden om deze uitdagingen aan te pakken, om zo mogelijks spontane chauvinistische uitspattingen van leerkrachten geïnspireerd door hun persoonlijke frustraties in te perken. Daarenboven zouden leerkrachten

bewust moeten gemaakt worden van hoe hun communicatie mogelijks (onbewust) de kloven tussen leerlingen uit verschillende onderwijsvormen vergroot.

Dit proefschrift heeft enkele beperkingen. Ten eerste was er een eerder klein aantal leerkrachten bevraagd, dus alle resultaten op basis van de lerarendata uit het SIS-onderzoek moeten eerder als verkennend beschouwd worden. Ten tweede gebruiken we enkel cross-sectionele data, dus kunnen we causaliteit nooit met zekerheid aantonen. Ten derde konden we niet kijken naar de dyadische relaties tussen onderwijsvormen, meer bepaald naar de invloed van dyadische vriendschappen en of de chauvinistische lerarencommunicatie gericht is naar één uitgroep of naar alle onderwijsvormen.

Leerlingen tonen 'agency' in hoe ze ze hun positie op de maatschappelijke statusladder van het secundair onderwijs interpreteren, hoe ze hun opinie over de onderwijsvormen vorm geven en de mate waarin ze de status van hun onderwijsvorm hun zelfbeeld laten beïnvloeden, door de manier waarop ze zich met hun onderwijsvorm identificeren. Leerlingen doen dit voornamelijk door te kapitaliseren op de zaken die hun onderwijsvorm uniek maken. Maar ondanks deze 'agency' zijn leerlingen niet in staat om de negatieve invloeden van lid zijn van een onderwijsvorm met lage status op hun zelfvertrouwen van zich af te schudden.

11. Appendices

11.1 Overview of author contributions

I was the lead author on all four papers that are included in this dissertation. This means I took the lead in conceiving of paper ideas, I wrote the theoretical frameworks, performed the quantitative analyses, interpreted and discussed the results of these analyses. All four papers were written with the same co-authors. Prof. dr. Peter Stevens was my supervisor and the main brainstorming partner in conceiving paper ideas and relating these to the overarching topic we wished to study. Prof. dr. Mieke Van Houtte was co-supervisor of this project. Both professors provided extensive feedback on all steps of the writing process, wherein Mieke Van Houtte took the lead in providing methodological feedback. The last co-author was dr. Charlotte Maene. This research was based on the data of the School, Identity and Society-survey (Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) project: G024516N), which was designed by Charlotte Maene, who also collected the data. She provided extensive feedback and valuable insights in the dataset, analyses methods and was available on demand if I wanted an extra perspective on the papers in general.

11.2 Full Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

11.3 Job Descriptive Index (Smith et al., 1969)

My job…

1. Is fascinating
2. Is routinous
3. Gives me satisfaction
4. Is annoying
5. Is good
6. Is creative
7. Is respected
8. Is nervewrecking
9. Is pleasant
10. Is usefull
11. Is exhausting
12. Is healthy
13. Is challenging
14. Is irritating
15. Is frustrating
16. Is too easy
17. Is neverending
18. Makes me feel competent

11.4 Table 28: Chauvinism exploratory factor analysis full sample and per track.

Variables	Full sample	Academic track	Technical track	Vocational track
Students from my track are smarter than those from other tracks.	0.838	0.839	0.852	0.817
Students from my track have more capabilities than those from other tracks.	0.871	0.862	0.881	0.859
Students from my track are more creative than those from other tracks.	0.813	0.829	0.823	0.783
My track is harder than the other tracks.	0.568	0.623	0.620	0.674
Students from my track are cooler than those from other tracks.	0.723	0.719	0.724	0.688

11.5 Table 29: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on academic track: technical track reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	66.125***	66.875***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	-0.256 (1.795)	-0.802 (1.865)
Student level		
Academic track (ref.= technical track)	14.868*** (1.503)	14.965*** (1.625)
Vocational track (ref.= technical track)	-9.197*** (2.175)	-7.224*** (2.037)
Patriotism	-0.255 (0.448)	1.128*** (0.248)
Chauvinism	0.357* (0.164)	0.079 (0.322)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	1.770* (0.829)	1.872* (0.806)
Sex (ref. = Male)	2.122** (0.164)	2.218** (0.694)
SES	-0.016 (0.022)	-0.017 (0.020)
Academic Track*Patriotism	2.559*** (0.513)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism	-0.323 (0.730)	
Academic Track* Chauvinism		0.505 (0.334)
Vocational Track* Chauvinism		-0.402 (0.841)
Variance component		
Intercept	36.138**	52.052**
Academic track	18.061*	27.948*
Vocational track	74.604*	74.920*
Patriotism	0.787*	1.954*
Chauvinism	0.450**	0.249**
Cross-track Friendships	9.227	8.479
Sex	1.824	2.826
SES	0.005	0.005

11.6 Table 30: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on academic track: vocational track as reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	56.985***	59.656***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	-0.374 (1.795)	-0.878 (1.863)
Student level		
Academic track (ref.= vocational track)	24.133*** (2.263)	22.277*** (2.123)
Technical track (ref.= vocational track)	9.221*** (2.166)	7.277*** (2.028)
Patriotism	-0.573 (0.526)	1.127*** (0.248)
Chauvinism	0.356* (0.164)	-0.321 (0.721)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	1.779* (0.830)	1.874* (0.808)
Sex (ref. = Male)	2.124** (0.655)	2.216** (0.693)
SES	-0.016 (0.023)	-0.017 (0.022)
Academic Track*Patriotism	2.876*** (0.555)	
Technical Track*Patriotism	0.320 (0.729)	
Academic Track* Chauvinism		0.904 (0.722)
Technical Track* Chauvinism		0.400 (0.841)
Variance component		
Intercept	38.122*	45.634*
Academic track	30.538	26.811*
Technical track	73.946*	73.522*
Patriotism	0.779*	1.956*
Chauvinism	0.448**	0.250**
Cross-track Friendships	9.627	8.739
Sex	1.829	2.816
SES	0.005	0.004

11.7 Table 31: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on technical track: academic track as reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	67.519***	67.457***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	1.358 (1.643)	1.491 (1.678)
Student level		
Technical track (ref.= academic track)	9.236*** (1.557)	8.441*** (1.587)
Vocational track (ref.= academic track)	-6.457*** (1.824)	-5.785** (1.785)
Patriotism	0.790*** (0.224)	1.004*** (0.160)
Chauvinism	-0.441* (0.166)	-1.051*** (0.190)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	1.408 (0.814)	1.707* (0.812)
Sex (ref. = Male)	1.172 (0.792)	1.146 (0.776)
SES	-0.028 (0.022)	-0.025 (0.022)
Technical Track*Patriotism	1.476*** (0.337)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism	-0.828 (0.486)	
Technical Track* Chauvinism		1.584*** (0.338)
Vocatinal Track* Chauvinism		1.123* (0.485)
Variance component		
Intercept	32.139***	28.963***
Technical track	29.740**	32.403**
Vocational track	47.639***	47.743***
Patriotism	0.384	0.442
Chauvinism	0.617	0.200
Cross-track Friendships	8.850*	8.675*
Sex	11.871	10.153
SES	0.006	0.006

11.8 Table 32: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on technical track: vocational track as reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	61.054***	61.648***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	1.357 (1.643)	1.495 (1.679)
Student level		
Academic track (ref.= vocational track)	6.467*** (1.820)	5.809** (1.786)
Technical track (ref.= vocatinal track)	15.708*** (1.490)	14.225*** (1.466)
Patriotism	-0.035 (0.440)	1.003*** (0.160)
Chauvinism	-0.441* (0.166)	0.077 (0.435)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	1.407 (0.813)	1.711* (0.812)
Sex (ref. = Male)	1.176 (0.794)	1.152 (0.776)
SES	-0.028 (0.022)	-0.025 (0.022)
Academic Track*Patriotism	0.822 (0.485)	
Technical Track*Patriotism	2.302*** (0.515)	
Academic Track* Chauvinism		-1.130* (0.484)
Technical Track* Chauvinism		0.460 (0.431)
Variance component		
Intercept	38.494	38.345
Academic track	46.728***	47.808***
Technical track	21.417	24.453
Patriotism	0.376	0.462
Chauvinism	0.618	0.192
Cross-track Friendships	8.610*	8.660*
Sex	12.312	10.176
SES	0.006	0.006

11.9 Table 33: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on vocational track: academic track as reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	55.548***	54.394***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	-0.781 (1.882)	0.468 (1.844)
Student level		
Technical track (ref.= academic track)	-4.945** (1.745)	-4.637* (1.739)
Vocational track (ref.= academic track)	18.248*** (2.116)	15.643*** (2.212)
Patriotism	0.134 (0.256)	0.692** (0.245)
Chauvinism	-0.944*** (0.227)	-1.649*** (0.261)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	-1.544 (1.092)	-1.453 (1.109)
Sex (ref. = Male)	1.589 (1.098)	1.765 (1.088)
SES	-0.037 (0.031)	-0.038 (0.031)
Technical Track*Patriotism	0.689 (0.524)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism	1.967*** (0.544)	
Technical Track* Chauvinism		0.941 (0.527)
Vocatinal Track* Chauvinism		2.904*** (0.616)
Variance component		
Intercept	53.554***	49.674***
Technical track	28.245	30.645
Vocational track	62.706**	67.879**
Patriotism	1.369*	1.383
Chauvinism	1.265**	0.876
Cross-track Friendships	18.517*	18.554*
Sex	23.345**	19.625**
SES	0.014	0.015

11.10 Table 34: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 2, opinion on vocational track: technical track as reference group

Variables	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	50.577***	50.0378***
School level		
School structure (ref.= separate school)	-0.781 (1.882)	0.320 (1.796)
Student level		
Academic track (ref.= technical track)	4.966** (1.748)	4.812** (1.731)
Vocational track (ref.= technical track)	23.147*** (2.131)	20.155*** (1.909)
Patriotism	0.817 (0.510)	0.721** (0.244)
Chauvinism	-0.944*** (0.227)	-0.104 (0.366)
Cross-track friendships (ref.= less than half)	-1.540 (1.092)	-1.416 (1.073)
Sex (ref. = Male)	1.584 (1.098)	1.718 (1.100)
SES	-0.037 (0.031)	-0.037 (0.029)
Academic Track*Patriotism	-0.682 (0.524)	
Vocational Track*Patriotism	1.285 (0.676)	
Academic Track* Chauvinism		-1.120*** (0.287)
Vocational Track* Chauvinism		1.220** (0.437)
Variance component		
Intercept	54.019	62.112*
Academic track	28.811	24.332
Vocational track	94.376**	63.746
Patriotism	1.358*	1.355
Chauvinism	1.262**	2.199
Cross-track Friendships	18.684*	18.108*
Sex	23.374**	20.831***
SES	0.014	0.013

11.11 Table 35: Measurement invariance: 5 and 4 item model comparison

5 item model				4 item model		
	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p
Metric against configural	25.548	8	0.001	9.621	6	0.142
Scalar against configural	1156.993	16	0.000	710.368	12	0.000
Scalar against metric	1131.445	8	0.000	700.746	6	0.000

11.12 Table 36: Modification indices 5-item model

5 item model		
		Mod indices
Creative	&	27.682
smarter		
Creative	&	40.961
capabilities		
Harder	&	20.081
smarter		
Harder	&	20.084
capabilities		
Harder	&	14.661
creative		
Cooler	&	17.064
capabilities		
Cooler	&	14.664
harder		

11.13 Table 37: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 4, technical track as reference group

Variables	Model 5a	Model 5b
Intercept	3.554***	3.569***
School Level		
Educational System (ref.= Dutch-Speaking)	-0.036 (0.035)	-0.038 (0.035)
School structure (ref.= categorical)	-0.086** (0.032)	-0.089** (0.031)
Individual Level		
Academic track (ref.= technical track)	-0.121 (0.113)	-0.012 (0.098)
Vocational track (ref.= technical track)	-0.470** (0.144)	-0.542*** (0.122)
Sex (ref.= male)	-0.130*** (0.027)	-0.128*** (0.267)
Ethnic Background (ref.= Belgian & Western European)	0.139*** (0.021)	0.141*** (0.217)
Prior GPA	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)
SES	<0.000 (0.001)	<0.001 (0.001)
Public Regard	0.125*** (0.016)	0.124*** (0.016)
Cognitive Chauvinism	-0.024 (0.038)	0.043* (0.019)
Social Chauvinism	0.017 (0.015)	-0.026 (0.029)
Academic Track* Cognitive Chauvinism	0.080 (0.042)	
Vocational Track* Cognitive Chauvinism	0.099 (0.056)	
Academic Track*Social Chauvinism		0.036 (0.037)
Vocational Track*Social Chauvinism		0.114** (0.040)
Variance component		
Intercept	0.005	0.005
Academic track	0.004	0.004
Vocational track	0.019	0.020
Sex	0.011*	0.010*

Public regard	0.002	0.002
Ethnic background	0.004	0.004
Cognitive chauvinism	0.003	0.004
Social Chauvinism	0.002	0.002
Prior GPA	<0.001*	<0.001*
SES	<0.001	<0.001

11.14 Table 38: Simple slope analysis empirical chapter 4, vocational track as reference group

Variables	Model 5a	Model 5b
Intercept	3.341***	3.297***
School Level		
Educational System (ref.= Dutch-Speaking)	-0.036 (0.035)	-0.038 (0.035)
School structure (ref.= categorical)	-0.086** (0.032)	-0.089** (0.031)
Individual Level		
Academic track (ref.= vocational track)	0.349** (0.122)	0.529*** (0.099)
Technical track (ref.= vocational track)	0.470** (0.144)	0.542*** (0.122)
Sex (ref.= male)	-0.130*** (0.027)	-0.127*** (0.267)
Ethnic Background (ref.= Belgian & Western European)	0.139*** (0.021)	0.141*** (0.217)
Prior GPA	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)
SES	<0.001 (0.001)	<0.001 (0.001)
Public Regard	0.125*** (0.016)	0.124*** (0.016)
Cognitive Chauvinism	0.075 (0.044)	0.043* (0.019)
Social Chauvinism	0.017 (0.015)	0.088** (0.027)
Academic Track* Cognitive Chauvinism	-0.019 (0.044)	
Technical Track* Cognitive Chauvinism	-0.099 (0.056)	
Academic Track*Social Chauvinism		-0.078* (0.032)
Technical Track*Social Chauvinism		-0.114** (0.040)
Variance component		
Intercept	0.008	0.008
Academic track	0.024*	0.025*
Technical track	0.018	0.018
Sex	0.011*	0.011*

Public regard	0.002	0.002
Ethnic background	0.004	0.004
Cognitive chauvinism	0.003	0.004
Social Chauvinism	0.002	0.002
Prior GPA	<0.001*	<0.001*
SES	<0.001	<0.001

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