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Friendship Assimilation and Ethnic Homophily of Young Immigrants in the U.S. and Germany

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How do religion and ethnicity impact children's social networks?

How do the German and American debates on integration differ?

Introduction

Although Germany's share of immigrants ranks third in the EU behind Luxembourg and Switzerland,[1] Germany still seems to quarrel with being a country of immigration.[2] Regarding the increasing relative size of the first, second, and third generation immigrant population, however, it is a crucial question for Germany's future development whether their integration will be successful. Current research from disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology[3] highlights the gap in educational outcomes and labor market performance of immigrants, particularly of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. and Turkish immigrants in Germany.

Yet, Germany and the U.S. are two very different settings for immigrant incorporation. It was not before the law-of-citizenship amendment in 2000 that Germany added an *ius soli* legislation to the existing *ius sanguinis* principle. In the U.S., in contrast, *ius soli* was legally stipulated as early as the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution from 1866 to guarantee equal civil and legal rights to all "… persons born or naturalized in the United States". Being a country of immigration from the beginning, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity are essential characteristics of U.S. society. However, the process of abolishing *de jure* segregation in the U.S. only began in the 1950s after a series of Supreme Court decisions, and was finally completed in the 1970s. It is an open empirical question whether this flip-side of the U.S. diversity coin still has an impact on segregation in social networks.

Considering these differences in tradition and self-conception between both countries' histories one might expect that patterns of interethnic friendship choice and children's and adolescents' peer networks significantly differ between both countries. From an immigrant children's point of view, having social ties to natives facilitates acquisition of language and acculturation, especially in those cases where their parents either do not have access to host country social networks or content themselves with strong ties to their ethnic community. As Quillian and Campbell (2003: 540) put it for the U.S., the "…ability to manage social relationships across racial lines may be especially important for the future socioeconomic status of many minority students because their entrance into many high-status occupations will require regular interactions with white teachers, coworkers, and bosses." Surely, this holds also for social networks of young immigrants who originate from different cultural contexts in the U.S. as well in Germany. This essay will present a short overview on theories of immigrant incorporation in social networks and empirical results on segregation in social networks in the U.S. and Germany.

Theories of Immigrant Incorporation and the Social Network Perspective

In his famous model of the race relations cycle Park (1950) assumed assimilation of immigrants in social status, culture, and residential locations to be a natural endpoint of a stepwise process of contact, competition, conflict, and accommodation between minority and majority groups.[4] A well-elaborated critique of the classic assimilation models was expressed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) based on studies on children of post-1965 "new" immigrants in the U.S., who originated from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. In addition to straight-line assimilation to the host country mainstream, they found a considerable amount of downward mobility to host country delinquent sub-cultures,

but also upward mobility inside of the ethnic community—neither of which are in line with traditional assimilation models.[5]

Recent research has been focused on social capital as a *resource* in the incorporation process.[6] Social capital has been investigated using methods of social network analysis and data on social ties of children and adolescents. One of the benefits of a social network approach is that it allows quantifying the degree of segregation or integration between two ethnic or immigrant groups compared to other groups. Many immigrant families have comparatively low educational backgrounds and their children perform much worse in school than their native classmates. Ethnic homophily would thus restrict the access to peers with higher grade point averages (GPAs) and higher parental socioeconomic status. This could lead to a downward bias of their standards and frames of reference with regard to school performance. Accordingly, friendship assimilation and ties to native peers in young ages play an important role in the process of immigrant integration and status attainment.

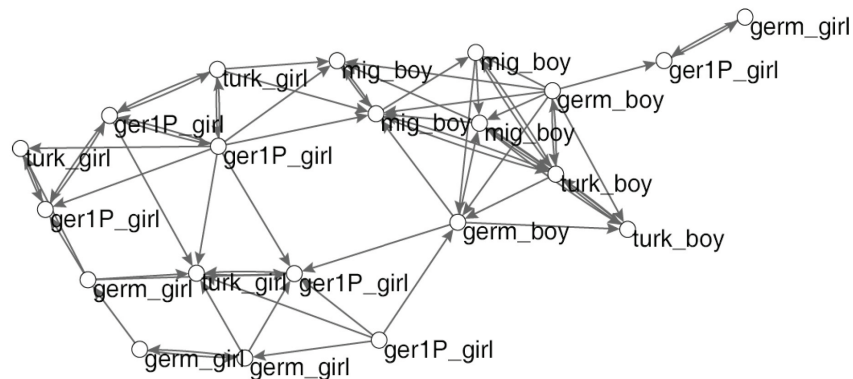*Figure 1: Friendship Network in a School Class of 4th Graders, Bremen 2009*

Figure 1 shows the network of friendships in one school class of ten-year-old children.[7] Using such kinds of network data one can predict which characteristics at the children's or at the dyadic level (such as similarity of two actors) have an effect on the probability of a tie between them. According to the homophily argument, segregation or integration in networks are outcomes of similarity in salient characteristics.

Religion, for instance, is one of the most important dimensions of homophily, which has also been emphasized by McPherson et al. (2001: 415).[8] In Germany, the largest immigrant group is of Turkish origin. Their religious affiliation is mostly Islamic, while the native majority is mainly Christian. One might expect that boundaries resulting from different religious affiliations have an additional effect on the formation of friendship ties.[9]
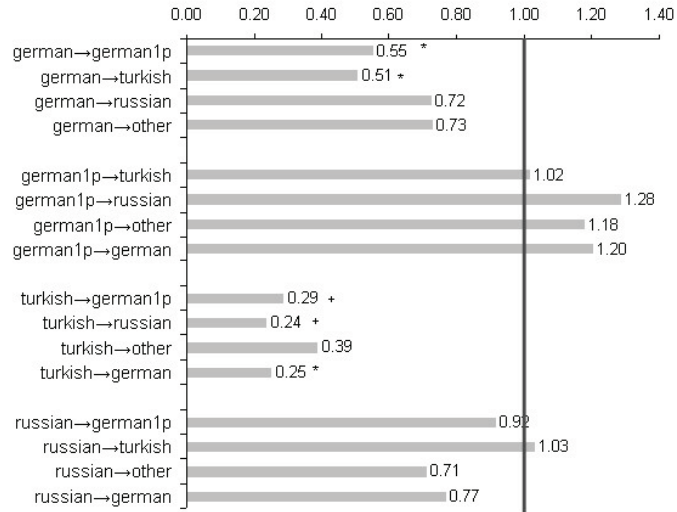
Results

The results of the empirical analysis are based on data of 4th grade pupils in Bremen, Germany, collected in the DFG project "Dynamics of social assimilation in multiplex peer networks," as well as on results of the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The result for Bremen is based on models specifically adapted to the analyses of Quillian and Campbell (2003).

Figures 2 and 3 summarize the analysis of friendship ties in terms of odds ratios: the vertical lines represent odds ratios of 1, which is the propensity to nominate a friend from the own ethnic group.[10] The first bar in Figure 2 shows that for native Germans the odds of nominating a classmate with only one parent who is first or second generation immigrant (german1P) as a friend is reduced by a factor of 0.55, compared with the odds of nominating a classmate who is from the same ethnic origin. Thus, the greater the distance from the vertical line (in nearly all cases to the left side), the higher the degree of friendship segregation. Figure 2 reveals a considerable degree of segregation between native German and Turkish children. Native Germans' odds of nominating a Turkish classmate as being a friend are reduced by a factor of 0.51, compared with the odds of nominating a classmate of the same ethnic origin. While there is significant segregation of immigrant children

from the former Soviet Union (most of them are children of German repatriates), Turkish children have strongly decreased odds of nominating a classmate who is *not* of Turkish origin. In other words, they have a strong preference for friends from their own ethnic group. Their odds of nominating a native German or a Russian classmate as a friend are reduced by factors of 0.25 and 0.24, respectively.

Even though both settings are not fully comparable we do not find lower degrees of segregation in the U.S.[11] As a striking result of Figure 3, there is a pattern of strong segregation according to race; that is, skin color seems to play an important role.

F*igure 2: Friendship Segregation in Schools, Bremen, Germany, 2009 (odds ratios)*

significance: * p<0.05   + p<0.10

Figure 3: Friendship Segregation in Schools, U.S. (add health data 1994, odds ratios, results of Quillian & Campbell (2003))
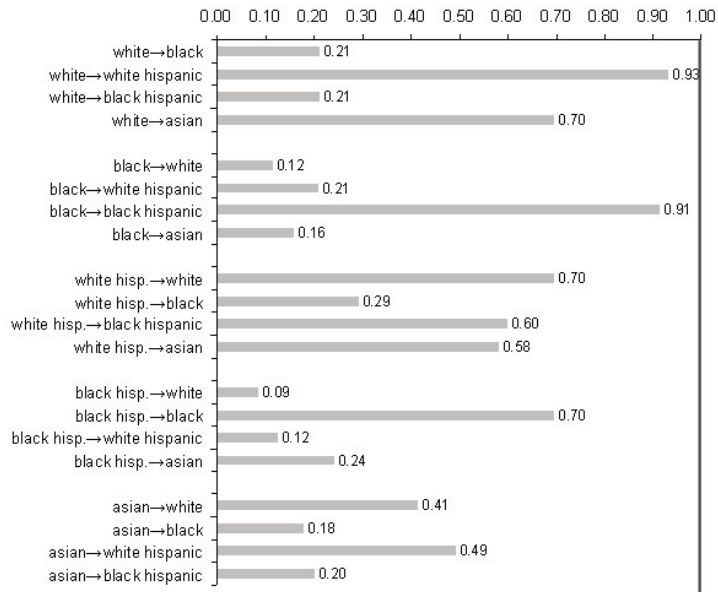
Nearly all effects are significant.

The odds ratio of a white student to nominate a white-Hispanic schoolmate as a friend is only reduced by a factor of 0.93, which is very close to 1 (recall that an odds ratio of 1 would indicate no difference from own-group choice). Hence, with regard to friendship choice, whites do not seem to care whether their schoolmates are of Hispanic origin or not—provided that they are *white* as well! In contrast, the odds of nominating black-Hispanics are reduced by factor 0.21 compared with own-group choice. The tendency toward racial homophily becomes even more surprising when we focus on black-Hispanics: their odds of nominating Afro-Americans (black hisp.→black) are reduced only by a factor of 0.70 compared with own-group choice. Although there is some degree of segregation between both groups, they are still rather close to each other. In contrast, the odds of nominating white-Hispanics are reduced by a factor of 0.12, indicating an enormous degree of segregation, although both groups share the same mother tongue and a considerable part of common culture! Complementary, from the Afro-Americans' perspective, the odds of nominating black-Hispanics are decreased only by a factor of 0.91, which is not significant.

According to these results, ethnic segregation of friendship ties in the U.S. strongly depends on skin color. In Germany, in contrast, there seems to be an ethnic boundary between Turkish children, who constitute the largest immigrant group, and native Germans, as well as between Turkish and other immigrants. In the U.S., there is indeed a long tradition of diversity and immigration, but racial discrimination, which has been overcome at the institutional level since the 1970s, seems to still be important in the process of friendship choice. But one might argue that the strong effect of skin color is also a result of residential segregation. Mouw & Entwisle (2006) have shown by effect-decomposition that there is indeed a third of the level of inter-ethnic friendship segregation (!) attributable to residential segregation. Nevertheless, according to their analysis we find the strongest segregation of friendships along racial lines.[12]

Controlling for a couple of background variables such as homophily in gender, living conditions such as housing type, mother's monitoring, cultural capital, ethnic homophily, and structural features of the network, further analyses of the German data show that religion indeed matters for friendship choice. Compared with a dyad of two children who are not affiliated with any religious community, the propensity of Christian children to nominate Muslim children as friends are significantly reduced (*factor 0.667, p<=.01*), although this effect does explain only a small proportion of *ethnic* segregation.

Moreover, compared with dyads of two native Germans, the propensity of doing homework together is increased by a factor of 3 in dyads of two Turkish children (*factor 3.088, p<=0.000*). Accordingly, supporting each other in doing homework is much more important for Turkish children than for native Germans. Although this result could indicate problems in performance which makes group work necessary in the first place, it definitely points to a high significance of school performance, rather than to a disinterest of Turkish parents in academic issues. However, restricting the network to classmates whose parents have a high level of cultural capital[13] strongly reduces the propensity of a tie (*factor 0.485, p<=0.000*) in Turkish compared with native German dyads. Turkish children try to support each other in doing homework, but getting help from highly qualified parents is rather unlikely in the Turkish community. Moreover, Turkish children have a much *lower* propensity than two native Germans of making an own-group friend whose grade point average[14] is at least at a mean level *(factor 0.678, p<=0.05)*. These differences in peer-network integration are supposed to have a negative impact on school performance. Thus, there could also be an unintended negative effect of tracking, but also of English Language Learner (ELL) classes, as ADMIN, who is a former official of the DC public school administration, stated in an interview:

> "Ethnicity and culture definitely form the basis of childhood and adult bonds, and where language proficiency is a challenge it can be easier for students to form bonds when there is more ease in communication. Also as a matter of time spent together, they may be in similar classes if they are learning English in ELL programs."

According to deeper analyses of the German data, as the degree of ethnic segregation of networks

increases, the more demanding and "costly" a tie is: it is stronger in networks of spending leisure time outside of school, and even stronger regarding visits at other children's homes. It should be noted that there is much higher segregation in the *parents'* network—and this, in turn, has an impact on the likelihood of "strong" ties in the children's network, such as birthday party invitations.

Regarding the mechanisms of segregation in networks, these results lead to the model of integration of immigrants in networks summarized in Figure 4.[15]

Figure 4: Integration of Immigrants in Social Networks (bivariate probit model based on German data)
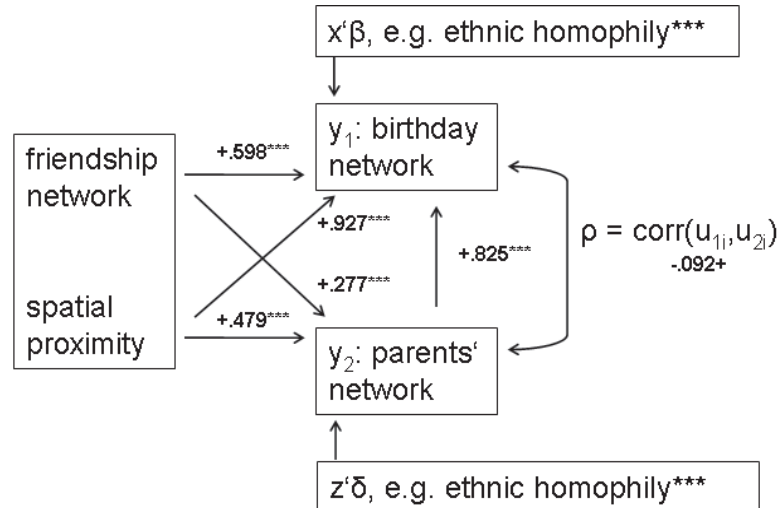
Stronger ties are measured here by invitations to birthday parties, which are highly relevant for prestige and reputation among the peer group in the class (Sirota 2001). Arrows in Figure 4 represent the assumed causal relations: Obviously, whether parents are acquainted with each other strongly depends on ethnic homophily (e.g., german→turkish: *–0.527, p<=0.000*), which is part of the set of determinants indicated by z'δ. Parents' acquaintanceship depends on children's friendship as well as on spatial proximity of residential locations. Controlling for this, ties in the parental network have a strong and significant impact on the likelihood of birthday party invitations. Hence, if there is a considerable degree of segregation in the parental generation, this negatively affects the likelihood of integration of immigrant children into birthday party networks.

Yet, it is an open question whether segregation at the parental level will decline in the future. As recent results have shown for immigrants from former Yugoslavia and Turkey,[16] there was a huge increase in transnational marriages of women in recent years. The "natural" process of assimilation, as supposed by Park (1950), might be decelerated due to such kind of immigrant replenishment, because children's parents continue to be composed of at least one first-generation mother or father. The general relevance of social integration of students' for their future life-course has been highlighted by ADMIN, who advised against artificially separating students according to ability by tracking systems:

> "We don't do students any favors by creating classrooms that look nothing like the world we'll send them into after graduation, where they will be expected to work with people of all abilities and backgrounds. In my view, separation by achievement levels in school is part of the reason we have separation by income gaps later in life."

In the end, the question of why there is such a high degree of racial segregation in networks in the U.S. cannot be easily answered. As EXPERT, a behavioral scientist at a university, stated, one should indeed account for the difference between the "old" and the "new" immigration into the U.S., which is in line with the segmented assimilation model. Actually, the U.S. has a long tradition of eth-

nic diversity, but also of racial segregation, which is reflected in an unequal distribution of power:

> "The fact is that the vast majority of the power-elite in the U.S. has always been White and European in origin. This is still true. It is thus not surprising that this asymmetry in actual power and prestige is reflected in the generally segregated nature of adolescents' friendship ties—that is, that White European-American adolescents, for the most part, tend to socialize in homogenous cliques and groups, as do their various minority peers."

Children and adolescents are thus aware of an unequal distribution of power and prestige in the U.S. and seem to reproduce the *de facto* segregation in social networks.

Conclusion
Despite the official view on diversity and integration, the U.S. has a long tradition of social inequality based on ethnic and racial origin. As a matter of course, the U.S. is not a racist country. However, subtle forms of racism may operate as rather unconscious elements in many daily interactions, which could explain the astonishing result of high salience of skin color for friendship segregation between white and black Hispanics, even if they share the same language and thus also a considerable part of common culture.[17]

There is no denying that subtle forms of racism might also exist in Germany. Here, in contrast, the heated debate is mainly on Muslim immigrants and thus not focused on a specific ethnic group, but on religion as a basic element of *culture*. It is thus highly important for future processes of assimilation that the way in which the German public debates on integration is held, does not reinforce ethnic boundaries, as Alba & Nee (2003) put it—which would be actually *religious* boundaries in the German case. Religious persons regard their religion as sacred and sensibilities are easily offended. Therefore, automatically linking undesired behavior, which is considered as not being in favor of integration, hastily with the Islam, without knowing any details about Muslim citizens and residents, should be avoided in the public discourse.[18]

On the other hand, a debate on the reasons why especially Turkish immigrants have these striking deficits in educational success and labor market performance is urgently needed. In an open debate no topic should be off-limit, neither discriminating practices from the German side, nor effects of strong social bonds to the home country and the ethnic community at the immigrants' side. For instance, the high degree of intra-ethnic[19] and transnational marriages[20] in the Turkish group is not in line with assimilation theory. Yet, it cannot be ruled out that this indicates an orientation toward home country cultural and social capital and impedes assimilation with regard to educational success and labor market performance in the long run. Hence, it is thus a really fine art to bring the inevitable debate forward, without generating and reinforcing boundaries between the native population and immigrants from Muslim countries.

NOTES

[1] Herda (2010).

[2] The overall share of "persons with migration background," which is the official term of the German Federal Statistical Office, was 18.6 percent in 2005 and is even around 30 percent in the age group below 16 today. Moreover, the spatial distribution of immigrants is highly segregated over the country so that the vast majority lives in larger cities of western Germany (Windzio & Huinink 2010). In these cities it is obvious that Germany is an immigration country. The relative growth of the non-native population in birth cohorts 1970 and later, however, is a result of natives' declining fertility rates rather than of high inflows and positive balance of migration. In the years 2006 and 2007 Germany's net gain in population due to immigration was just some thousand persons (22,791 and 43,912). In 2008 there was even a net *loss* of 55,743 persons (www.destatis.de). With regard to the balance of migration Germany is currently not an immigration country.

[3] Entorf & Minoiu (2005), Stanat (2006), Portes & Hao (2004); Levels & Dronkers (2008); Kalter (2007).

[4] This model has been further elaborated, amongst others, by Milton Gordon (1964) and Richard Alba (2008) in the U.S. and Hartmut Esser (1980) in Germany. Assimilation models have been widely criticized for being conservative by proponents of multiculturalism who accept or even promote a multiplicity of different cultures. While multiculturalism and assimilation are normative concepts in political debates, in academic research multiculturalism is often supported by anthropologists whose research methods made them well aware of ethnocentric biases in the perception and evaluation of foreign cultures. Most sociological studies, in contrast, focus on social inequality in different dimensions when investigating assimilation processes.

[5] At the same time, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003; Alba 2008) adjusted their assimilation theory to the notion that the new immigrant groups show uneven assimilation processes by further elaborating the concept of "blurring" and "shifting" ethnic boundaries, which can have very specific effects for different immigrant groups. Hereby, they have taken into account the willingness of the receiving society to accept their new members. Nevertheless, Alba and Nee adhered to the idea of assimilation taking place in the long run, even if there are significant differences between immigrant groups.

[6] Nee & Sanders (2001).

[7] Since there are $k=n \cdot (n–1)$ possible directed ties as such in Figure 1, the empirical analysis will be based on k cases for each school class network. In the following analysis, units of analysis are *dyads*. A dyad consists of two actors, who are in this case embedded in the surrounding network.

[8] This is in line with the classic sociological view of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel, who argued that religion governs the relationship between the individual and society by providing moral values (see Luckmann 1967: chp. VI). It is an open question, however, whether religious affiliation still has an impact on the formation of social ties today. In his famous book on *The Invisible Religion*, Thomas Luckmann (1967) claimed that regardless of declining figures in church attendance, there might be no decline in the significance of religion if one refers to a broader definition, which includes also individual reasoning on the basic meaning of society and biography (ibd.: chp. VII).

[9] Most international comparative studies on immigrant incorporation aim at investigating the effects of national institutional settings, which is called a "destination effect." Since the beginning of migration research when Ernst Ravenstein published his laws of migration in 1885, migration turned out to be a highly selective process not only with regard to individual traits and social background but also with regard to characteristics of the sending and destination contexts, such as population size and distance. In other words, there is a statistical self-selection of immigrants into specific destination countries which is also governed by unobserved individual characteristics. Researchers cannot be sure if e.g., Turkish immigrants in Germany and France actually are the same population with regard to the statistical parameters of interest, or whether they are a specific community. One reason for this self-selection is chain migration, when immigrants reduce transaction costs by settling in countries and cities where they already have ties to co-ethnics who help them cope with everyday issues. As a result of chain migration, immigrant communities in the host country often are of the same regional origin in their home country. In order to disentangle origin, destination, and community effects, van Tubergen et al. (2004) suggested a "double comparative design" based on a multitude of origin and destination countries encompassing also a multitude of immigrant groups. Thereby the authors were able to control the community effects. This design led to many new insights into incorporation processes of immigrants. Strictly speaking, comparative studies not using such a design cannot determine whether they actually investigate destination country effects or just outcomes of special communities. The current study is definitely far from applying such a double comparative design. It investigates two different settings composed of different ethnic groups. Moreover, historical time and respondents' age are not the same, so it can be just a starting point in the comparative analysis. It will be shown, however, that the comparative perspective leads to important insights nevertheless.

[10] These odds ratios are estimated from logistic regression models for ties in networks in which indicators of socioeconomic background, opportunity structure, and embeddedness in substructures of the network have been controlled.

[11] Again, the following results for the U.S. are based on models controlling for socioeconomic background, opportunity structure, and the embeddedness in substructures of the network (Quillian & Campbell 2003).

[12] Mouw & Entwisle (2006: 416p). Again, I caution that it is very difficult to compare both settings—the U.S. and Germany—in research on immigrant incorporation. Ethnic categories differ between both countries and the age group is not the same because the Add Health data includes also older respondents in middle and high school. On the other hand, Figure 3 shows effects for the third generation in the U.S.—which leads to a slight underestimation of segregation, although Quillian and Campbell (2003: 555) found that there is no considerable decline over generations. Finally, as Wimmer and Lewis (2010) could show by using Facebook data of U.S. college students, broad categories such as Asian or Hispanic actually combine different ethnic groups and thus lead to a further underestimation of ethnic segregation. Hence, the result that the overall degree of segregation is rather high and probably even higher in the U.S. than in Germany might hold regardless of these methodological problems.

[13] This means in this case that they possess 150 or more books. See Mullis et al. (2004) for another application of this indi-

cator.

[14] Class-mean centered grade point average for Mathematics, German, and English.

[15] Since a clear causal statement is always problematic in non-experimental and cross-sectional designs, the model is based on a bivariate probit specification (Greene 2000: 849), which is a simultaneous system of two equations in which the effect of ties in the parents' network on children's birthday-party invitation is estimated controlling for observed and unobserved correlated factors of tie formation.

[16] Kalter & Schroedter (2010).

[17] Agreeing that ethnic boundaries according to skin color actually exist in the U.S., Mouw & Entwisle (2006) have put the racism argument into perspective in a recent paper by highlighting that about one-third of friendship segregation in schools can be explained by residential segregation over (not within!) school districts. Since the authors (ibid.: 429) observed a trend in increasing segregation of public schools they do not expect that segregation in social networks will considerably decline in the near future, but rather predict an increase. As we know from urban research (Crowder 2000; Schelling 1978), ethnic residential segregation can be a self-energizing process in that the outflow of minority group members from a neighborhood triggers the outflow of other minority group members, and encourages majority group members at the same time to move in. Even though detailed inter-city and inter-country comparison of residential segregation is a real challenge due to different administrative definitions of spatial units, the degree of residential segregation in Germany is still much lower than in the U.S. (Häußermann & Siebel 2006, chp. 10-11)—which is good news for Germany, up to now.

[18] As argued by Esser (2008), among other things, ethnic boundaries discourage immigrants from producing resources that facilitate upward mobility within the receiving society, such as language acquisition and educational success. If assimilation with regard to educational degrees and status-attainment fails to appear, the German society will be ethnically stratified in the long-run, which means that social inequality is strongly correlated with ethnic inequality (Esser 2004). As a result, social conflicts, which are easily and rather smoothly negotiated in Germany e.g., by trade unions and employers associations, would be perceived as being ethnic conflicts. This could have happened if most locomotive drivers who participated in the strike in 2007/08 were mostly of Turkish origin—which would be an ideal type of ethnic stratification.

[19] Windzio (2011).

[20] Kalter & Schroedter (2010).

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