

This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

How children and adults challenge each other's performances of everyday cosmopolitanism

Reference:

Kostet Imane, Verschraegen Gert, Clycq Noël.- How children and adults challenge each other's performances of everyday cosmopolitanism
Ethnic and racial studies - ISSN 1466-4356 - 45:11(2022), p. 2117-2137
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1991968>
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1822300151162165141>

How children and adults challenge each other's performances of everyday cosmopolitanism

Imane Kostet¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-2061-5673

Gert Verschraegen¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-8638-1566

Noel Clycq²

ORCID: 0000-0003-2123-5098

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

² Department of Training and Education sciences, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract

Based on in-depth interviews with children aged 11 to 14, and their parents and teachers, this article discusses the various ways in which children and adults claim to value ethnic diversity, and how they challenge each other's understandings of racism and performances of everyday cosmopolitanism. We illustrate how certain speech norms emerge during the interviews, and how especially adults seem to perform their cultural openness in such a way as to be perceived favourably. We distinguish between three different types of cosmopolitanism. While parents mainly perform 'cultural cosmopolitanism' - that is representing themselves as open towards those with other cultural backgrounds - their children display 'social cosmopolitanism', which is grounded in their everyday social interactions. Teachers, in turn, seem to be especially concerned with performing 'moral cosmopolitanism', demonstrating social engagement and non-racism.

Keywords: children's agency, everyday cosmopolitanism, racism, reverse socialization, super diversity, norm contestation

Introduction

There is ample research into the ways in which ‘*differences are negotiated on the smallest of scales*’ (Wilson, 2011: 635) and how people construct cosmopolitanism – or openness towards others – from ‘below’ (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002; Pichler, 2008). The translation of cultural openness into everyday practices has been analysed at length, especially in urban cities where cosmopolitanism is expected to flourish (Müller, 2011). An interesting and more recent thread in this literature is the focus on young people and how they navigate contexts with a lot of ethnic diversity (Keating, 2015). Research in different locations indicates that children and young people often practice cosmopolitanism differently from adults, and that they are more likely to experience diversity as a commonplace or ordinary aspect of their daily lives (Harris, 2009; Iqbal et al., 2017; Kostet et al., 2021; Visser and Tersteeg, 2019; Wessendorf, 2013). Children are generally more rooted in their local environments and have more opportunities to build friendships across differences, yet they do not necessarily seem to be intentionally ‘cosmopolitan’. Compared to adults, they hardly emphasize their ability to interact across differences, as this is not particularly exceptional or noteworthy for them (Harris, 2009; Kostet et al., 2021; Visser and Tersteeg, 2019). Overall, there is a growing consensus that children display a great deal of agency when navigating super diverse environments and that they do not simply adopt ‘what they hear from adults’ (Visser, 2020; Visser and Tersteeg, 2019; Weller and Bruegel, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Less research is available, however, on how children’s cosmopolitan orientations interact with those of their own parents and teachers, nor do previous studies strongly tackle the ways in which these different orientations can be seen as a ‘performance’ rather than as inherent beliefs (see e.g. Müller, 2011; Plage et al., 2017; Woodward and Skrbis, 2012 for exceptions). Cosmopolitanism is indeed often deliberately performed within specific encounters rather than appearing to be an attitude or a form of identity (Plage et al., 2017).

In this paper, based on in-depth interviews with children aged 11 to 14 and some of their parents and teachers in the super diverse city of Antwerp, we show how children and adults narrate their evaluations of ethnic diversity and mixed friendship groups in different ways, and how they question and challenge each other’s understandings of racism. In doing so, this study unpacks the ways in which cosmopolitanism is enacted among the different generations. More specifically, we describe how adults and children challenge each other’s performances, which results in major discussions about diversity and racism at home and in the classroom. Focusing on both children and adults also allows us to foreground children’s agency and their ability to articulate their own views on diversity and stand up for their own opinion. To better understand the differential orientations of adults and children towards ethnic and cultural difference, we draw upon different theoretical concepts. Firstly, we draw on the literature on everyday cosmopolitanism, arguing that it constitutes a multifaceted ‘cultural repertoire’ (Kendall et al., 2009; Lamont and Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986) on which children as well as adults can

draw to navigate the diverse social environments in which they find themselves. Secondly, to make sense of how parents, teachers and children talk differently about cultural diversity, we examine the various ‘speech norms’ that are activated in discussions about diversity and racism. We elaborate on these theoretical approaches in the first section of the paper. Subsequently, we present our methods and data. Thereafter, we will discuss in detail how adults and children contest each other’s performances of cosmopolitanism, after which we end with some brief conclusions.

Theoretical Framework

Repertoires of everyday cosmopolitanism among children and adults

In the past decade, research has demonstrated how those living in super diverse neighbourhoods increasingly succeed in interacting across differences in ‘unpanicked’ ways (Neal et al., 2013). The notion of conviviality is used to capture how diversity has become an ordinary aspect in many urban citizen’s everyday lives as they negotiate ethnic differences quite unproblematically (Gilroy, 2004; Wessendorf, 2013). Others, however, have evidenced that people engage rather superficially with diversity. Blokland and van Eijk (2010), for example, show how ‘diversity-seekers’ claim to have settled in a neighbourhood for the ethnic diversity, yet hardly interact across ethnic differences in their local environment. Valentine (2008), in turn, illustrates how openness towards diversity is often more a form of civility and ‘urban etiquette’, rather than the articulation of a profound respect for and engagement with the ‘other’ (see also Bell and Hartmann, 2007; Plage et al., 2017). Scholars further point out that conviviality should not be romanticised as convivial behaviour can coincide with structural inequality and everyday racism (Noble, 2011, 2013).

From a complementary perspective, these dynamics in super diverse cities are also studied through the lens of ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, defined as the repertoires and strategies used by ordinary people to bridge boundaries between different groups (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002; Pichler, 2008). This literature is conceptually close to recent research on conviviality (see e.g., Noble, 2013; Radice, 2016) and distinguishes between cosmopolitan attitudes, practices and competences (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). While cosmopolitan attitudes refer to a recognition of the other and an open and tolerant world view, they do not necessarily or always translate into everyday practices or the ability to interact across ethnic and cultural boundaries in skilful ways. Cosmopolitan practices indeed require more than cultural openness; they entail ‘*coordinated sets of learned cultural competencies which must be applied in particular social situations, akin to a cultural repertoire or mode of behaviour*’ (Kendall et al., 2009: 104–105). Rather than as inherent beliefs, values or ideas, we perceive cosmopolitanism as a cultural repertoire or ‘toolkit’ (Lamont and Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986) which can be selectively called upon in particular social contexts to express or enact one’s position towards others (Kendall et al., 2009; Woodward and Skrbis, 2012).

Following earlier work (e.g., Kendall et al., 2009; Müller, 2011; Woodward and Skrbis, 2012), we will therefore primarily pay attention to how ideals of cultural openness are expressed or ‘performed’, focusing on the differences between children and adults. We build on a growing body of literature in super diverse cities suggesting that there are generational differences in urban citizens’ cosmopolitan practices. As children are more likely to encounter different ethnic groups in their everyday lives (e.g. at school or in public places), they generally perceive diversity as an ordinary aspect of their lives, compared to adults, who more often construct symbolic boundaries when talking about ethnic groups (Harris, 2009; Visser and Tersteeg, 2019). Adults also appear to perceive children’s interactions more strongly through an ‘ethnic lens’; this is reflected, for example, in teachers and parents reporting that some children only hang out with ‘those of the same ethnic background’, while children themselves see this differently (Crozier and Davies, 2008; Sedano, 2012). In their Australian study, however, Noble and Watkins (2014) have showed that generally there is little difference between the views of pupils, teachers and parents, but they also showed how pupils are more focused on social justice and that they were less likely to draw on cultural explanations when talking about certain phenomena. Children and adults also seem to view racism differently and differ in opinion about the legitimacy of using racial labels when talking about diversity. There is some evidence, for instance, that while children report that some teachers treat them differently due to their racial or ethnic background, teachers themselves believe it is unlikely that those who are racist would teach in a school with a majority of racial minorities (Vaught and Castagno, 2008). Teachers seemingly ignore children’s comments on racism or silence them, and report that they find it more important to talk about cultural differences than about racism. Similarly, many white parents do not talk much about racism unless it is brought up by the children themselves or the media, and they, too, prefer to focus on cultural differences rather than racial exclusion when discussing diversity (Priest et al., 2016).

Norm contestation in discussions on diversity and racism

To grasp the varied ways in which children and adults perform cultural openness, we will pay close analytical attention to how our respondents normatively challenge the way in which others speak about ethnic and racial difference, and how they justify their own register of speaking about such differences. This focus is rather common in research on ‘everyday racism’ (Essed, 1991), which makes frequent use of interviewing as ‘*a way of generating in-depth talk*’ about ethnic or racial diversity and racism (Romm, 2010: 215) to gauge which presuppositions and rules are applied in it. As Nina Eliasoph aptly puts it: ‘*part of a society's way of understanding race – or any issue – is people's shared understanding of how and where it is appropriate to speak about it. Interviewees' attitudes toward communication itself is part of what should count as interviewees' "attitudes"*’ (Eliasoph, 1999: 482).

Our approach to the way our respondents normatively speak about diversity is partly inspired by the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot (2011; 2006). They have advanced an

understanding of norms as enacted practices which take shape in various sorts of everyday disputes and controversies about the rules and valuations that should underpin our common life. Boltanski and Thévenot argue that norm contestation is rather common in our rapidly changing and diversifying societies as ordinary actors are often uncertain or disagree about which norms and judgments should prevail in certain situations. As indicated by recent controversies about ‘political correctness’ and ‘wokeness’ in both the anglophone world (Pollock, 2004; Titley, 2020) and continental Europe (Bonnet, 2014), such disputes also arise concerning the implicit norms that govern how people speak about racial and ethnic difference. Actors continually implement critique and invoke justice demands concerning how people address ethnic groups and speak about racial difference. According to Boltanski, they do so on the basis of their innate ‘critical capacities’ and ‘ordinary sense of justice’ (Boltanski, 2011: 27–29).

To capture the normative grammar that is implicit when people speak about ethnicity and race, we use the concept of ‘speech norms’, which are the (implicit) norms activated in discussions about cultural openness, diversity and racism. Speech norms concerning diversity and race are about what supposedly can be said (and what cannot be said) about (racial and ethnic) diversity, but especially also in which context and to whom something can be said (or not) (e.g. Bonnet, 2014; Pollock, 2004). This alludes to Goffman’s work (1981), arguing that everyday talk can be seen as staged performance, a form of acting before an audience, which often occurs in highly ‘scripted’ ways; what is deemed relevant to some audiences is not deemed relevant to others; what can be said to some people (and how it should be said to them) cannot necessarily be said to others. Research, for instance, has shown how white people are more cautious when talking about race in public, as this ‘frontstage is multiracial’ and think they can afford to ‘speak their mind’ in the backstage when talking to an ‘all white audience’ (Nelson, 2021: 3). In this article, we will analyse how speech norms on diversity are enacted within the frontstage interaction between the respondents and the researcher (cf. Romm, 2010: 215–267). Building on the work of Bonnet and Caillaut (2015), we see speech norms which are enacted in interview situations as expressions of assumed social desirability, suggesting that respondents are inclined ‘to distort their answers to be perceived favourably’ (Bonnet and Caillaut, 2015: 1187).

The Research

The data presented in this paper are part of a larger study in which we examine children’s boundary making and repertoires on ethnic and social diversity. While we have discussed children’s repertoires on ethnic differences in more detail elsewhere (see Kostet et al., 2021), this paper mainly focusses on how children’s enactments differ from those of their own parents and teachers. The study is conducted in Antwerp (Flanders, Belgium), a rich site for studying cosmopolitan attitudes and practices because of its super diverse character. In recent years, Antwerp has become a ‘majority-minority city’ (Crul, 2018), in which the more than 170 minority groups form the majority of the population (Stad Antwerpen, 2020).

Respondents

To recruit as diverse a group as possible, the children were initially selected within the sixth grade (11-12y) of six primary schools, chosen because of their location in more or less diverse neighbourhoods and the degree of ethnic and social mix among pupils. The 21 interviews with the children took place in three rounds over a period of two school years: (1) the sixth grade of primary school, (2) the first grade of secondary school, and (3) the second grade of secondary. During the second research round, parents and teachers were asked whether they too were willing to participate in the study: 12 parents and 13 first-grade teachers agreed to do so. There was one couple among the parents, so parents of 11 children were interviewed. The teachers teach one or several of the children. There are, hence, several pupils of which only a parent or a teacher have been interviewed. While there is a great deal of diversity within the group of children, this diversity is less pronounced among the parents interviewed. Of the 10 mothers and two fathers who agreed to participate, seven are of Belgian descent, three are of European descent and two have a Moroccan migration background. Of the teachers, 10 are of Belgian descent, two have a non-Belgian, European background and one teacher is of Northern African descent. The low diversity among teachers is, however, less remarkable, as only a very small minority of teachers have a migration background in Flanders.

Research approach and analysis

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all parties. Everyone was interviewed individually. Although the narratives are at times similar (see results), the researcher did not share any information about what was said in a previous interview with a parent, teacher or child. All those involved have been informed that each other's interviews are private and that they cannot access this information. The interviews with the children, however, did influence the interviews with the parents and the teachers, as they determined the topics to be further explored. Concretely, all actors were asked to explain their perceptions on diversity, to tell something about their social network and encounters with different ethnic groups, how they view topics such as racism and discrimination, and so on. Teachers were asked to elaborate both on their personal perceptions and the school policy or ideology, but this paper draws only on the first. It is important to consider, however, that the ways in which they performed cosmopolitanism is related to their professional position (see results). The audio-recordings were transcribed and coded inductively with the qualitative software programme NVivo. The interviews with the children were coded and analysed first. The codes that arose inductively from the first research round with the children were applied to those of the adults, as well as the subsequent interviews with the children themselves. Thereafter, codes which arose inductively from the interviews with adults were

applied deductively to those with children. This repeated coding process allowed us to analyse similar and conflicting patterns in children's and adults' repertoires on diversity and racism.

As we discussed above, talking about diversity entails many speech norms and people generally express themselves carefully. The interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper, a female researcher with a minority ethnic background. This most likely had an effect on the respondents' answers. It may be that some of the respondents were utterly positive about diversity, perhaps more positive than they would be otherwise, because the researcher was seen as 'diverse' herself. Rather than perceiving social desirability as a methodological obstacle to our research, we employ it to examine what the interviewees believe they are supposed to answer when being interviewed on diversity and racism.

Results

In this section, we discuss how children and adults share or challenge each other's repertoires on diversity and racism, and construct a typology of how cosmopolitanism is enacted among children, parents and teachers. We discuss how parents enact 'cultural cosmopolitanism', that is an openness towards those with other cultural backgrounds, while their children draw less on these repertoires on diversity but display cosmopolitanism in their everyday practices, which we will call 'social cosmopolitanism'. We further describe how the teachers, through their formal role as educators, are especially concerned with performing social engagement and non-racism, although their performances of what we will call 'moral cosmopolitanism' are contested by their pupils, who show an awareness of current debates on ethnic and racial diversity. Strikingly, both parents and teachers dismiss children's anti-racist performances as a form of pubertal behaviour, and children's opinions are repeatedly described as rather simplistic, poorly reasoned and blind. It is important to mention that we do not consider these different performances of cosmopolitanism as demarcated categories into which the various respondents fit completely. Our typology is not all-encompassing and exists alongside others (see e.g., Kendall et al., 2009 for a useful typology). This is hence not an exhaustive list of cosmopolitan performances. While we do not claim that the performances of parents, teachers and pupils can be completely reduced to one of the three types – on the contrary, respondents may express different forms of cosmopolitanism – we mainly describe here how the parents and teachers, compared to their children or pupils, tend towards a specific form of cosmopolitanism in an interview setting and what contradictions arise while they do so.

Culturally and socially cosmopolitan: parents and children

After an interview with Victor (pupil), the researcher lingered in the kitchen in his home to exchange pleasantries with his parents and to ask if they are willing to participate in the study themselves. While

describing the research objectives, Pieter (Victor's father) curiously interjects: '*I assume you're not of Belgian descent, can I ask where you are from?*' The researcher, who is somewhat taken aback by his question, answers that her parents are of Moroccan descent and deflects the conversation back to the ongoing project. A few weeks later, when she interviews Pieter himself, he illustrates his cultural openness in the following way:

Pieter: I also know, I have a few Moroccan friends and it's very important that the whole family eats together. (...) I've attended [a meal] (...) there's a large plate, and that part is for you and then yeah... It's... *You* [Moroccans, addresses the researcher directly] are very tactile, you know, you smell and feel a lot, while *we* [Belgians] eat with a knife and fork. It's different, there's no right, there's no wrong, but there are cultural differences.
(Victor's father, Belgian descent, primary school teacher)

Contradictorily, while Pieter repeatedly stressed that he does not like to think in 'lines or boxes', he places the researcher in a clear-cut category because he now knows that she is of Moroccan descent. Although he means very well, this makes the researcher feel quite uncomfortable, as she would not describe herself as very tactile nor as someone who smells and feels a lot at the dinner table. In this sense, Pieter's performances allude to what Hage (1997) calls 'cosmo-multiculturalism'. As an act of distinction, he aims to show both his interests for and his knowledge of the 'exotic other', but in doing so, the researcher is reduced to a passive subject. To be able to perform his cultural openness, the researcher indeed had to be 'otherized'. This rather awkward group ascription was not unique during the interviews with the parents and gave a first impression of how they perform their cultural openness in a specific social setting. Their comments illustrate how they are not only concerned with their performances, but that they are also highly aware of whom they think they are performing for. The researcher's (assumed) ethnic background most likely made certain speech norms to which the respondents intend to adhere even more present. They seemingly assume that, in the context of this research, diversity has to be seen as an unconditional 'enrichment' – not only because the study is about diversity but also because the researcher is seen as 'diverse' herself

While they stress their openness, some parents clearly attach a different meaning to diversity than do their children. Ilse (Oskar's mother) reports that she is very open to ethnic differences and that she supports ethnic mixing. As they live in a white neighbourhood, she and her husband decided to enrol their children in a school in an adjacent district. She even promotes the school on its website, where she states that they have deliberately chosen this urban school for its diversity. Ilse further reports that she truly loves how Oskar is repeatedly invited to the birthday parties of minority classmates and how he once participated in a school project with children of various ethnic backgrounds, which allowed her to interact with those children and their parents as well. While she draws strongly on culturally cosmopolitan repertoires on diversity, and even what is called 'banal' cosmopolitanism (see Kendall et al., 2009), her son speaks much less in celebratory terms:

Researcher: Do you believe that the class' diversity is positive or negative? (...)
Oskar: I'm a bit neutral in that case, because I don't think it matters [in] what you do or

who you are, so... I mean, it matters if you do stuff according to your religion, but I don't think it matters a lot. (...) I don't think it's [ethnic diversity] necessarily nice, I also don't think it's necessarily bad because yeah... You're all just human.
(Ilse's son, 11y, Belgian descent, R1)

Oskar's perception does not differ from his mother's in terms of respect and mutual acceptance. For him, however, diversity is a quite ordinary phenomenon one should not be particularly enthusiastic about – by which he is in no way saying that diversity is bad. He rather alludes to a certain 'normality' present among children who experience diversity as a commonplace aspect of their everyday lives, as we elaborately discuss elsewhere (Kostet et al., 2021; see also Wessendorf, 2013). While it may seem that Oskar draws on a repertoire of colour-blindness when he says that 'you're all just human', he does not engage in such rhetoric and further in the interview he mentions ethnic differences when he speaks of racism, which he considers especially prominent against Muslims. Although some of our child-respondents clearly adopt colour-blind approaches (see Kostet et al., 2021), Oskar mainly aims to emphasize that he does not understand what 'all the fuss' is about when it comes down to celebratory approaches of diversity. He does not say that he 'does not see differences' (or colour), but rather hints that there is no point in exoticizing, essentializing or celebrating those, as his mother does when she refers to how she enjoys seeing people of different ethnic backgrounds mixing with each other. Although not explicitly, Oskar in fact uses 'you're all just human' to distance himself from the cosmopolitanism that lurks in many of the adults' performances, which reduces minorities to passive subjects, to 'cultures to be enjoyed' rather than humans. As also Pieter shows, many parents indeed rather draw on these celebratory repertoires for their own enjoyment, and to say something positive about *themselves* rather than about minority groups or diversity:

Pieter: I'm also someone who thinks that... I don't know if you're familiar with the commercials of Benetton? United Colors of Benetton? That's my belief, or that was my goal. I wanted my, my friendship group to look like a coloured box of Caran D'Ache. That's a kind, that's a kind of coloured pencils, you know. Yes, I'm, I'm really a philanthropist. I'm someone who has become interested in other cultures from early on.
(Victor's parent, Belgian descent, primary school teacher)

Compared to their parents, our child-respondents are generally (yet not all) less inclined to strongly perform cultural cosmopolitan attitudes (e.g., their openness towards the ethnic other), as their narratives rather reflect 'social' cosmopolitanism. With 'social cosmopolitanism', we allude to what Woodward and Skrbis (2012: 130) describe as an 'accidental' dimension of cosmopolitanism: '*a form of subjectivity and set of cultural practices and attitudes individuals come to develop passively, perhaps even accidentally via immersion within a globalizing social and cultural field or exposure to cultural difference*'. In the context of our research, however, 'accidentally' developing cosmopolitanism does not mean that the children do not express reflexivity or consciousness when navigating diversity. Hence, while cultural cosmopolitanism is about discursively valuing cultural differences, we use social cosmopolitanism to refer to easily encountering and navigating (social, ethno-cultural, racial) differences in everyday life.

The parents, however, mainly operate in homogeneous networks (friendship groups, workplace, etc.), and those who report encounters with people from another ethnic background allude to connections via the children rather than intimate friendships. Helene, for instance, states that she finds it important to mix with others and that she therefore deliberately says hello to the Muslim mothers of her children's classmates and invites those children to her own children's birthday parties. When Pieter is asked how diverse his network is, he answers 'We also have friends... My daughter her best friend is uhm, her dad is from Haiti and her mum from Belgium'. This tends towards what Kendall et al. (2009: 115) describe as a sampling style of cosmopolitanism, which '*implies engagement and contact, but only as a form of temporary, fleeting connection*'. The commonplace diversity evidenced by Wessendorf (2013) among London adults, may be less present among our adult-respondents as the largest minority ethnic groups in Flanders are socio-economically more strongly disadvantaged. While Wessendorf refers to the emergence of commonplace diversity among doctors and employees in a local hospital (see e.g., Wessendorf, 2014: 43), our highly educated respondents mainly encounter diversity in their neighbourhoods and their children's schools. Intimate friendships, however, were made at university or in the workplace, sites which were indeed predominantly ethnically white. Most of the children, on the other hand, interact daily and often intensely at school with peers with backgrounds from all over the world; cosmopolitanism is therefore more strongly reflected in their everyday practices than in a consciously enacted repertoire of cultural openness (see also e.g., Harris, 2009; Iqbal et al., 2017; Visser and Tersteeg, 2019).

Some of the parents perform their cultural cosmopolitanism to such an extent that they feel they have to justify the composition of their children's friendship group. Although there is little evidence that Victor (Pieter's son) has a homogeneous friendship group, as one of his three best friends is of Moroccan descent, Pieter seems to become uncomfortable when asked about his son's friends. Strikingly contradicting his own assertion that he wanted his own friendship group to be like a box of coloured pencils, the father now argues:

Researcher: Would you say that Victor has a mixed friendship group?

Pieter: Uhm he has... One of his best friends at school uhm is Ilyas and yes, he's Muslim. Uhm, uhm, he, he also plays basketball and basketball is a sport which is very multicultural too. (...) Yes, it's not like we, like we seek it. We, we look at the personality and not the background. I think it's always... I, I, I don't like to think in boxes, in colours, I don't care, I really don't care. Uhm, it has to be about the person who's interesting and not about which col... which skin colour or which... (...). I mean, it's not like we look for it like 'and now you have to make an African friend because it otherwise wouldn't be in proportion!' I mean, that... that wouldn't be ok either, you know.
(Victor's parent, Primary school teacher, Belgian descent)

Victor himself, on the other hand, speaks in quite a relaxed way about his friendship group. According to him, his three friends are simply his friends because he has known them since preschool. Emiel (Alexia's son), who in contrast to Victor does have a significantly homogenous group of friends, reports that he especially hangs out with these boys as they share his interests and that he does not know many minority ethnic children who are interested in skiing and snowboarding, like his friends. However, when

we gauge Emiel's mother's perception of his friendship group, Alexia argues that she read in the newspaper that according to research people tend to hang out with those of the same ethnic descent and that it hence may be 'merely human' that Emiel hangs out with majority ethnic friends. This illustrates that, where children speak quite happily about their friendship group, their parents seemingly feel that they have to justify a perceived lack of diversity, probably assuming that the researcher expects this diversity, at least to a certain degree.

Children and parents' understandings also differ in the ways in which they talk to each other about diversity. In their family context, it appears that some parents look more strongly through an ethnic lens. They do not necessarily do so out of 'ill will', but rather from a great interest in ethnic diversity. Kristien, for instance, reports that her daughter Niyah (whose father is of Nigerian descent) is not concerned with ethnic differences, which corresponds with Niyah's narrative, yet she points to these differences anyway:

Kristien: I asked her, and I was kinda surprised, at the beginning of the school year, yes, the first day probably, I asked whether there were a lot of coloured children in her classroom or a lot of whites. And then she said 'no I think only I and another pupil are, are darker.' And I thought wow that's strange, and uh... A month later, I looked at their class picture and that's not true at all, but she doesn't notice. Like, I mean, like your (addresses the researcher) skin colour is the same as mine to her. It's all the same to her, so only really dark, dark, is different to her. So, then I thought 'oh Niyah, look, half of your class, there's almost no one white, white and you say that you're nearly the only one'? And she was like 'well yes, you see it for yourself no? I'm darker, and, and Diana is darker, and the rest aren't.' And I thought welllll (laughs)....
(Niyah's mother, Belgian descent, logistic employee)

On the other hand, parents and children largely see eye to eye regarding racism and discrimination. Both show awareness of ethnic and racial exclusion and report that they talk about these inequalities at home, hence they do not really adopt a 'colour-blind approach'. Furthermore, repertoires of group disadvantages (see Kostet et al., 2021) seem to be especially shared. While Malika (Layla's mother) strongly emphasises, during the interview, her many experiences with religious-based racism, Layla's stories are permeated with fear of such racism, largely based on these family stories. Although she has experienced racism herself too, she draws most strongly on her parents' stories.

However, some of the other parents with a migration background report that they disagree with their children regarding racism and that they consider that their children's opinions are too strong. Vera (Olivia's mother) and Sahira (Doha's mother), for instance, report that their daughters react too fiercely when something racist happens in their presence and they both believe that their strong opinions are related to puberty, the impact of social media and the Black Lives Matter movement. These discussions are especially intense in Vera's household - she is of Northern European descent herself and separated long ago from Olivia's father, who is of Western African descent. When we interview Vera, she explains that her daughter has become very concerned with racism over the past months, that she has started identifying herself as 'Black', and that her daughter becomes furious - in her opinion too furious - when someone uses the 'N-word'. Vera argues that she tries not to respond to her daughter's self-identification

as Black as she aims to ‘raise her as human, not as white nor black, but just in a universal way’. However, Olivia is highly critical of her mother’s ‘universalist’ approach to her own racial identity. She explains that once when she did not clean her room, her mother uttered: ‘*You’re really an African*’ and that she ‘*was like okay (...) isn’t that racist?*’ This interestingly illuminates how some people assume that they are acting on the backstage when bringing up race as they talk to their own family members but how this setting can transform into frontstage when a disagreement occurs (see Nelson, 2021). Olivia says that she explicitly condemned her mother’s racist statement and that they got into a heated discussion:

Olivia: I was like wauw, yeah. ‘Very sweet... Like Africans never clean their rooms (sarcastic)?’ I said, ‘sorry, that’s just who I am, it has nothing to do with Africa’. I was very mad... (...) I said, ‘mum no, you can’t say such things, that’s not funny.’ (...) And then one time she said like ‘when I was little, a girl told me that she’s not allowed to hang out with me because I’m a foreigner’ and I was like ‘but that’s not the same! Just stop!’

While the parents stress their cultural openness, in Oliva and some other children’s narratives (see also further), speech norms regarding racial awareness and social justice seem more present and pertinent. Olivia emphasises that her mother should not equate their experiences of racism because her mother is Northern European and therefore white. According to her, her mother will not suffer because of her skin colour: ‘*If people know she’s from [Northern European background] they’re like “oh cool”, she’ll never experience like blacks that they’re like “oh are you going to steal something?”*’

Performing Non-racism in Front of a Racism-Aware Audience: Teachers and Children

Evidently, the teachers have a different relationship with our child-respondents from their parents. As a result, teachers’ performances of cosmopolitanism also differ to a certain extent, as they are more concerned with their professional role. While the parents heavily stress their cultural cosmopolitanism, teachers more strongly emphasize a ‘moral cosmopolitanism’, expressing a sense of responsibility for their pupils with a minority and/or disadvantaged background (see also Vandevordt, 2017), and foregrounding their efforts to educate these children to become active citizens in this society. One way in which teachers express their commitment to social responsibility and cultural openness is by highlighting their ‘choice’ to teach in a super diverse school:

Amélie: You can’t work at our school if you don’t take societal responsibility in the first place. (...) I know that all my colleagues are socially engaged in some way, because otherwise they wouldn’t be able to teach at this school.
(Enes’ teacher, Belgian descent)

The fact that these teachers are employed in super diverse schools is even used to perform non-racism (Bonnet, 2014). Several teachers in various schools repeatedly report that they, or some of their colleagues, have been accused of racism by their pupils, yet respond as follows:

Hanne: What racist would want to teach in a programme where 90% are allochthon [contested term for those of non-native descent]? That would be like hurting yourself every day again and again. So, I try to make them [pupils who accuse teachers of being racist]

rationalize but I don't manage to do so.
(Emiel's and Ana's teacher, Belgian descent)

Although some of these teachers acknowledge that a tiny minority of the teachers in their schools may be racist, they all believe such teachers will sooner or later transfer to other (white) schools. In this way, our respondents display and safeguard an image of their schools as 'free from racism' (see also Vaught and Castagno, 2008). Matthias, who works in a relatively white school, and Mehdi, the only teacher with a minoritized ethnic background in our study, are the only ones to report that some of their colleagues undoubtedly have racist attitudes.

The way in which most teachers downplay racism among their colleagues contrasts sharply with the experiences of pupils, who report several situations in which they felt treated in a racist way, whether explicitly or implicitly. As Hanne already hints, the children often discuss these incidents with their teachers, although the latter generally try to make their pupils 'rationalize', that is, they try to make the children 'understand' that most of the time there is no racism involved. Teachers, including Matthias and Mehdi, report that minority children often misuse the word racism as an excuse when they are held accountable for their misbehaviour. Hanne believes that this overly strong focus on racism is also part of children's identity development and puberty, which will wither over time. Having said that she does not manage to make them 'rationalize', she strikingly continues:

Hanne: Sometimes it's frustrating, you know, that you think like come on, just stop with all your 'us-versus-them-stories', because they create those themselves. (...) Because often they refer to older teachers and I think that they indeed may come across [as racist], but I'm convinced they're not. I don't want to... I don't want to believe that they are.
(Emiel's and Ana's teacher, Belgian descent)

Some majority ethnic children challenge their teachers' understandings of current debates regarding racism and diversity too. These pupils do not blindly adopt their teachers' views, but actively question their opinions. Roos (Jonas' pupil), for instance, explains:

Researcher: Do you ever disagree with your teachers' opinions?
Roos: Uhm yes. Our teacher who, at the beginning of the year, he said that he's for All Lives Matter and almost all [pupils in the classroom] stood up for (...) Black Lives Matter and Muslim Lives Matter. So, that's what we stood up for. And also, he, he also tries to change our opinion in class, he always tries to uhm... yes, to contradict us. (...)
(13y, Jonas' pupil, Belgian descent, R3)

Jonas himself, on the other hand, who describes his pupil population as a 'left liberal public', argues that majority ethnic children have also become very quick to use the word racism, while they 'hardly know what they are talking about'. He explains that when he had told his pupils that he supports the headscarf ban in education, the pupils said to him that they found his opinion slightly racist; this led him to explain the context of the headscarf ban, so that his pupils would form a more nuanced opinion. He explicitly says that he fails in making them change their opinions and that '*they carried on thinking in black and white.*' While many teachers, hence, aim to 'nuance' children's perceptions, several children seemingly are very aware of the problematic nature of 'nuancing' racism and seem to strongly draw on repertoires of social justice. They are strongly concerned with current events that they follow closely,

as Roos shows when she says that Black and Muslim lives matter because of the events ‘*in China with those internment camps and in America with George Floyd.*’ These children seem to find it important to be aware of injustices, which is reflected not only in what they say about racism but also in the way they talk about gender issues, to give one example.

However, similarly to some of the parents (e.g., Sahira and Vera), other teachers (Jonas but also Hanne) do not take their children’s anti-racist (and activist) attitudes very seriously and dismiss them as a pubertal life phase. Jonas hints that these children blindly form opinions, and Nele (Niyah’s teacher), whose pupils are, according to her, quasi unanimously against the Muhammad cartoons, downplays her pupils’ opinions and openness towards each other’s religion as a form of ‘blind respect’:

Nele: I notice, compared to 15 years ago, a very big difference, in the sense of uhm... I now have the feeling that, regardless of home situation or culture, that the children enter the classroom and that they all agree that you can’t joke about everything, that one shouldn’t joke about certain things, and that’s something I worry about because I think uhm... If you don’t have a religion, that shouldn’t be so sensitive to you. (...)

Researcher: And how tolerant are the children towards each other religions as such, do they also express respect for each other’s religion?

Nele: Yes, but to be honest it’s blind respect, like I said.
(Niyah’s teacher, Belgian descent)

Conclusion

How and to what extent do children’s performances of cosmopolitanism differ from and interact with those of their parents and teachers, the most important adult ‘agents of socialization’ in children’s lives? By adopting a relational approach and investigating the speech norms which emerged during the interviews, we have shown that children and their parents and teachers perform their cosmopolitan attitudes differently, and illustrated how they challenge each other’s performances.

This article offers various contributions to the literature. First and foremost, this study unpacks the ways in which cosmopolitanism is enacted differently among the different generations. While previous research has argued that young people in super diverse cities find their ability to engage with ethnic differences rather unexceptional (Visser and Tersteeg, 2019), our findings provide more details about how adults and children perform their everyday cosmopolitanism. Whereas children come across as ‘socially cosmopolitan’, encountering differences in everyday life, it seems that parents and teachers are more likely to perform, respectively, cultural and moral cosmopolitanism. In contrast to most of the adults, children seemingly do not aim to be seen as ‘culturally open’ nor do they intentionally engage with different ethnic groups out of cultural openness.

Our findings, secondly, suggest that the main reasons for these different performances of cosmopolitanism across generations are related to the structure of networks and context. While the vast majority of parents operate in ethnically homogeneous networks (friendship groups, workplace, etc.),

most of the children interact daily and often intensely with diverse peers at school. This explains their social cosmopolitanism, which is perceived as a fact of life, so to say, which is rooted in their everyday social interactions. Parents and teachers seem to have had fewer opportunities to build everyday intimate relations across differences, although especially the teachers navigate super diverse environments, for instance by working in Antwerp schools. Therefore, they put a premium on displaying cultural or moral 'cosmopolitanism' when discussing interethnic relations and diversity, mainly in relation to their children's peers (and their parents) or when being interviewed by a minority ethnic researcher. As we have argued, the differences between the parents' and teachers' performances of cosmopolitanism can be explained mainly by taking into account role differences and context. While teachers foreground their professional role by expressing a sense of moral responsibility to educate and emancipate their pupils with a minority and/or disadvantaged background, parents have a more diffuse relation with their children and are expected to accept their diverse group of friends.

Thirdly, our results shed light on children's agency in challenging their parents' and teachers' repertoires on diversity and racism and show how they stand up for their own opinion. Adults tend to dismiss children's perspectives as 'blind', 'naive' or 'irrational', yet children display awareness of societal tensions around diversity and sometimes contradict adults' views. In this sense, our analysis shows the profoundly situated nature of 'speech norms' concerning race and diversity and how they are contested across generations. Both adults and children seem to closely watch their words when talking about ethnic diversity and racism, anticipating on each other's reactions and drawing on different repertoires and implicit norms while doing so. Parents and teachers initially emphasize their cultural openness and knowledge of the 'other', often in celebratory terms, suggesting that they are primarily concerned with being recognized as cosmopolitan citizens. In line with previous research, these adults focus mainly on 'positive' or 'hopeful' messages, meaning that they tend to put little emphasis on topics such as racism. On the other hand, their children and pupils draw more strongly on their sense of social justice and current debates on power relations. In contrast to their parents and teachers, they are seemingly more concerned with being recognized as 'socially aware' young citizens in an unequal society. Consequently, the children and adults disagree about which norms and judgments should prevail in their discussions about diversity: children's 'anti-racism' or adults 'happy talk'. As some adults tend towards what Hage (1997) calls 'cosmo-multiculturalism', their children are more careful about reducing ethnic minorities' cultural backgrounds to 'cultures to be enjoyed'. While there is some literature on how adults prepare children for a globalized world (e.g. Weenink, 2008; Keating, 2015), our results hence suggest that future research should pay more attention to processes of 'reverse socialization', in which parents and teachers may acquire skills and knowledge through their children (Ekstrom et al., 1987). Our child-respondents, who seemingly develop their cosmopolitan orientations - as Woodward and Skrbis (2012: 130) would say - 'passively, perhaps even accidentally', show a more reflective attitude when discussing themes such as diversity and racism. Supposedly, this makes them

sometimes correct their own parents and teachers, showing them how to navigate a super diverse context, when they feel the adults lack a profound awareness of ethnic or racial tensions.

Also, our focus on the discursive enactment or performance of cosmopolitanism points to some more general conclusions which are relevant to ongoing research on racism and diversity. By clarifying the speech norms that are activated in discussions about cultural openness, diversity and racism, we have shown how public repertoires about diversity affect people's everyday speech and how they engage in identity work to be seen as 'morally on the right side' (see also Boli and Elliott, 2008). While speech norms are often present when discussing issues such as diversity (see also Bonnet, 2014; Bonnet and Caillault, 2015), we have argued that they become more pronounced when people are interviewed by a minority ethnic researcher, who is seen as 'diverse' herself. Our analysis of these interactions clearly shows that speech norms matter: while the adult-respondents want to be recognized for their openness, they employ well-intended but stereotypical representations of the researcher to perform their cosmopolitanism. In line with earlier literature (e.g. Romm, 2010), we argue that researchers inquiring into racism and diversity have to be mindful of the potential impact of their inquiries and/or their background on how cultural openness, racism or anti-racism is performed. Rather than seeing this social desirability as an obstacle to our research, we approached these responses as important data to analyse and to gain a better grasp of the mechanisms at play.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek [grant number 1112819N].

References

- Bell JM and Hartmann D (2007) Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk'. *American Sociological Review* 72(6): 895–914.
- Blokland T and van Eijk G (2010) Do People Who Like Diversity Practice Diversity in Neighbourhood Life? Neighbourhood Use and the Social Networks of 'Diversity-seekers' in a Mixed Neighbourhood in the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(2): 313–332.
- Boltanski L (2011) *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boltanski L and Thévenot L (2006) *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bonnet F (2014) How to Perform Non-racism? Colour-blind Speech Norms and Race-Conscious

- Policies among French Security Personnel. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40(8): 1275–1294.
- Bonnet F and Caillault C (2015) The invader, the enemy within and they-who-must-not-be-named: how police talk about minorities in Italy, the Netherlands and France. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(7): 1185–1201.
- Crozier G and Davies J (2008) ‘The trouble is they don’t mix’: self-segregation or enforced exclusion? *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11(3): 285–301.
- Crul M (2018) A new angle to the assimilation debate in the US. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(13): 2258–224.
- Ekstrom KM, Tansuhaj PS and Foxman ER (1987) Children’s Influence in Family Decisions and Consumer Socialization: a Reciprocal View. *Advances in Consumer Research* 14: 283–287.
- Eliasoph N (1999) ‘Everyday Racism’ in a Culture of Political Avoidance: Civil Society, Speech, and Taboo. *Social Problems* 46(4): 479–502.
- Gilroy P (2004) *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goffman E (1981) *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Hage G (1997) At home in the entrails of the West. In: Grace H, Hage G, Johnson L, et al. (eds) *Home/World: Communitarity, Identity and Marginality in Sydney’s West*. Sydney: Pluto Press, pp. 99–153.
- Harris A (2009) Shifting the boundaries of cultural spaces: young people and everyday multiculturalism. *Social Identities* 15(2): 187–205.
- Iqbal H, Neal S and Vincent C (2017) Children’s friendships in super diverse localities: Encounters with social and ethnic difference. *Childhood* 24(1): 128–142.
- Keating A (2015) Are cosmopolitan dispositions learned at home, at school, or through contact with others? Evidence from young people in Europe. *Journal of Youth Studies*.
- Kendall G, Woodward I and Skrbis Z (2009) *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kostet I, Verschraegen G and Clycq N (2021) Repertoires on diversity among primary school children. *Childhood* 28(1): 8–27.
- Lamont M and Aksartova S (2002) Ordinary Cosmopolitanisms: Strategies for Bridging Racial Boundaries among Working-Class Men. *Theory, Culture & Society* 19(4): 1–25.
- Lamont M and Small ML (2008) How culture matters: Enriching our understanding of poverty. In: Chin Lin A and Harris DR (eds) *The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 76–102.
- Müller F (2011) Urban Alchemy: Performing Urban Cosmopolitanism in London and Amsterdam. *Urban Studies* 48(16): 3415–3431.
- Neal S, Bennet K, Cochrane A, et al. (2013) Living multicultural: understanding the new spatial and social relations of ethnicity and multicultural in England. *Environment and Planning C* 31: 308–323.
- Nelson JK (2021) Contesting racist talk in families: strategies used, and effects on family practices and social change. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 1–18. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1929106.
- Noble G (2011) Belonging in Bennelong: ironic inclusion and cosmopolitan joy in John Howard’s (former) electorate. In: Jacobs K and Malpas J (eds) *Ocean to Outback: Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Australia*. Crawley: UWA Press, pp. 150–174.
- Noble G (2013) Cosmopolitan Habits: The Capacities and Habitats of Intercultural Conviviality. *Body & Society* 19(2 & 3): 162–185.
- Noble G and Watkins M (2014) *Rethinking Multiculturalism. Reassessing Multicultural Education. Perspective on Multicultural Education Project Report Number 2*. Sydney: University of Western Sydney.
- Pichler F (2008) How Real Is Cosmopolitanism in Europe? *Sociology* 42(6): 1107–1126.
- Plage S, Willing I, Woodward I, et al. (2017) Cosmopolitan encounters: reflexive engagements and the ethics of sharing. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(1): 4–23.
- Pollock M (2004) *Colormute. Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Priest N, Walton J, White F, et al. (2016) ‘You are not born being racist, are you?’ Discussing racism

- with primary aged-children. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 19(4): 808–834.
- Radice M (2016) Unpacking Intercultural Conviviality in Multiethnic Commercial Streets. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37(5): 432–488.
- Romm NRA (2010) *New Racism. Revisiting Researcher Accountabilities*. Dodrecht: Springer.
- Sedano LJ (2012) On the irrelevance of ethnicity in children’s organization of their social world. *Childhood* 19(3): 375–388.
- Stad Antwerpen (2020) *Stad Antwerpen in cijfers*. Available at: <https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be>.
- Swidler A (1986) Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review* 51: 273–286.
- Titley G (2020) *Is Free Speech Racist?* Oxford: Polity Press.
- Valentine G (2008) Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter. *Progress in Human Geography* 32(3): 323–337.
- Vandevoordt R (2017) Moral cosmopolitanism and the everyday life: how students encounter distant others. *Media, Culture & Society* 40(2): 195–210.
- Vaught SE and Castagno AE (2008) ‘I don’t think I’m a racist’: Critical Race Theory, teacher attitudes, and structural racism. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11(2): 95–113.
- Vertovec S and Cohen R (2002) *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Visser K (2020) ‘I didn’t listen. I continued hanging out with them; they are my friends.’ The negotiation of independent socio-spatial behaviour between young people and parents living in a low-income neighbourhood. *Children’s Geographies* 18(6): 684–698.
- Visser K and Tersteeg A (2019) Young People are the Future? Comparing Adults’ and Young People’s Perceptions and Practices of Diversity in a Highly Diverse Neighbourhood. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 110(2): 209–222.
- Weenink D (2008) Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital: Parents Preparing their Children for a Globalizing World. *Sociology* 42(6): 1089–1106.
- Weller S and Bruegel I (2009) Children’s ‘Place’ in the Development of Neighbourhood Social Capital. *Urban Studies* 46(3): 629–643.
- Wessendorf S (2013) Commonplace diversity and the ‘ethos of mixing’: perceptions of difference in a London neighbourhood. *Identities* 20(4): 407–422.
- Wessendorf S (2014) *Commonplace Diversity: Social Relations in a Super diverse Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilson HF (2011) Passing propinquities in the multicultural city: the everyday encounters of bus passengering. *Environment and Planning A* 43: 634–649.
- Wilson HF (2013) Collective life: parents, playground encounters and the multicultural city. *Social & Cultural Geography* 14(6): 625–648.
- Woodward I and Skrbis Z (2012) Performing cosmopolitanism. In: *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism*. Routledge, pp. 127–137.