

Educationism and its Influences

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Abstract

The present study examined the possible mechanisms by which education-based in-group bias (i.e., educationism) is developed. Especially, the roles of a diverse social network, different cultural preferences and meritocratic beliefs were scrutinized. In total, 229 participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Ninety-six participants were recruited through a SONA pool consisting of first-year psychology students and 133 participants through "snowball" sampling by the researchers. The participants filled in a questionnaire measuring education bias based on the composition of four profiles with varied education levels and cultural preferences. We measured diversity of social network and meritocratic beliefs as well. In line with previous research, those with a higher level of education demonstrated education bias. In addition, the analysis showed that high-brow cultural preferences are generally more liked than low-brow cultural preferences. However, cultural preferences failed to serve as an explanation for educationism. The same goes for meritocratic beliefs. Most importantly, the results indicated that a more diverse social network reduces educationism. This finding is consistent with social psychological literature and shows that educationism has similar dynamics to more classical forms of discrimination.

Keywords: educationism, educational discrimination, education bias, discrimination, social inequality

Educationism and Possible Influences

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” - John Dewey.

Education is life. Even though British philosopher John Dewey sounds radical in his quote, there is more than a bit of truth to what he is saying. Education is amongst the most important factors for positive life outcomes and well being (Easterbrook et al., 2018). Most importantly, though, education is the ticket for freedom and privileges. Lower educated people are systematically limited in their lifestyle choices. Since many pathways in life, primarily occupational, require a certain level of education, lower educated people do not have the whole spectrum of possibilities to choose from. On top of all that, it is demonstrated how factors outside of personal control also influence the education level one can reach. Is this education-based discrimination fair to begin with? Whereas classical types of discrimination are largely researched and globally acknowledged, discrimination based on education seems to be broadly accepted. Especially higher educated people, contrary to the moral enlightenment hypothesis (Lipset, 1959), frown upon lower educated people and demonstrate that not all types of discrimination seem to decrease with educational growth. Kuppens et al. (2018) first demonstrated and termed the effect of educationism. They showed how lower educated people are generally more negatively evaluated than higher educated people even by themselves!

We want to examine some interesting dynamics that could explain and reduce educational biases in the last consequence. Consider an individual of high academic success with a background of low parental education. It sounds logical to assume that the attitudes towards lower education will be more realistic in this case, namely, acknowledging factors other than a personal failure. Having lower educated parents implies having a very close relationship with lower educated people. In this case, education bias is reduced by knowing the circumstances

surrounding lower educated people. We expect a similar, albeit maybe weaker, effect for highly educated people with a more diverse social network. In this case, contact theory proposes that close relationships with the out-group lead to more positive attitudes toward the out-group (Allport, 1954).

There seem to be two different mechanisms at work, as you can see. One is based on knowledge and insight into the problems lower educated people face through partly being part of this group. In contrast, the other one is more about intergroup contact and feeling close to the out-group. Another factor we hypothesize to be forceful in educational biases is cultural preferences. It was demonstrated how tightly interwoven cultural preferences and stereotypes are with the attribution and discrimination of lower educated people (Young, 2011). We, therefore, examine how a variation in cultural preferences may influence the course of educational discrimination. More specifically, we expect cultural preferences to change the evaluation of lower educated people. Additional measures include the degree of meritocratic beliefs since we expect people endorsing this worldview to show higher levels of educationism.

Education(ism) and its Dimensions

Education is one of the most critical factors related to positive life outcomes. Having a high education is related to significant health benefits and more general well being (Easterbrook et al., 2016). Moreover, higher education provides more considerable influence and access to the upper classes. Most of the public system is designed by higher classed people. Examples include the educational system. Evidently, higher education offers more rights, privileges and freedom. Reversely, low education makes the aforementioned aspects less likely to achieve. Because education is only partly controllable and has a high correlation with parents' SES and other variables that lay outside of your influence (OECD, 2018), is this distinction fair, to begin with?

The consequences of educational discrimination sound hauntingly similar to those of more conventional forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity or sexuality. However, classical discrimination theory legitimizes educationism since education is seen as personal merit (Tannock, 2008). It gets obvious that the narrative of education being a legitimate way of discrimination may not be appropriate after all. A recent study showed how self-recognition and self-worth are related to education level, especially in countries with high levels of education, such as the Netherlands (van Noord et al., 2021). A driving force in this injustice is the erroneous belief that education is solely reflecting hard work and dedication, thus personal merit. This is a meritocratic view based on the equity principle that is largely endorsed in today's western societies (Son Hing. et al., 2011). However, plenty of evidence suggests that educational success is largely determined by parents' SES and family background (OECD, 2018).

Education as a Result of Hard Work?

There is plenty of evidence that education does not reflect mere effort and dedication exclusively. Goudeau and Croizet (2017) showed how children of working-class backgrounds are structurally discriminated against and discouraged to reach educational levels similar to their higher classed peers. Adding to this notion, Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) originally proposed that the mere construction of the classroom implies discrimination since high educated people design it. This leads to a structural bias favouring upper-class people because middle and upper-class children are brought up in a way that eases them into the classroom setting. Contrary to their working-class peers, they are probably more familiar with academic culture from an early age. The classroom setting is inherently easier to understand for children whose parents are higher educated themselves as they are more likely to understand norms and implicit rules.

Children asked to take over the role of a teacher discriminate against working-class children (Autin et al., 2019). Evidently, the classroom setting recreates social inequalities and structurally discriminates against high achieving low SES pupils (Batruch et al., 2017). Despite the massive inequalities in the access and opportunities for education, it is generally believed that education indicates personal success and hard work exclusively (Kuppens et al., 2018). On a more general level, Weiner et al. (1988) showed how reversible mental-behavioural stigmas are met with little pity and high levels of anger. Education could be seen as such a stigma since it is believed to be under personal control. Furthermore, Phillips and Lowery (2020) demonstrated how people defend educational successes as a sign of merit exclusively, even in the light of counter-evidence. People even added autobiographical events and life hardships to guide their argumentation of not being privileged but working hard when confronted with their own privilege and evidence of education being only partly controllable.

Meritocracy and Educationism

The overall picture is clear: education is a sign of personal achievement and merit, and a lack thereof reflects negative attributes. These viewpoints stem from meritocratic ideology, a prominent perspective based on the equity principle. Son et al. (2011) showed that the descriptive belief in meritocracy justified educational discrimination as people are held responsible. Meritocratic beliefs are prevalent in the current system since they maintain social inequalities and justify them (Son Hing. et al., 2011). All this adds together to show why educationism is accepted and maintained. Moreover, lower educated people are systematically disqualified from the scientific and political discourse. Whereas there are vast communities of discriminated people fighting their stigma for racial, sexual or ethnic discrimination, lower educated people are left behind. Partly responsible is that lower educated people themselves are

reluctant to take on the identity of their low education since it is so stigmatized and unfavourable (Stubager, 2009). There is no social pride in embracing to be low educated; thus, educationism even shows among the people affected (Kuppens et al., 2018). This reluctance to embrace a part of your social identity may provide ground for populist parties offering a "substitution identity" based on the erroneous belief that these parties provide an alliance fighting for lower educated people to be heard (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). Arguably, the effects of educationism and the resulting polarisation could have significant political consequences.

What Could Explain Educationism?

One theme we propose is that of social diversity. There are two reasons why diversity is related to less educationism among the higher educated. For the first one, we are interested in highly educated people with a low educational background. This scenario is particularly fascinating since these people experienced a drastic shift in social identities by climbing the social ladder. These people have a mixed educational identity (high and low), and it is fair to assume that they are still connected to lower educated people. Specifically, if the close family stems from a working-class background, there will be intimate relationships between a highly educated and a lower educated person. This is fair to assume since family relations are often categorized through similarity (Lamberth & Byrne, 1971) and reciprocity (Heider, 1958), which are the building blocks of maintained social relationships. Furthermore, they might feel belonging to lower educated people since they are still somewhat in-group members (Baumeister, 2012). It is logical to assume that people with this constellation show less of an education bias since they are involved with lower educated people and see the discrimination first hand while being able to withstand the biases mentioned earlier in the attribution of low education. This mechanism, as mentioned earlier, is based on knowledge of the problems lower

educated people face. On the other hand, there is also the case of higher educated people having intergroup contact with lower educated people while being out-group members. We expect these people to show a lower bias as well, however, based on a different mechanism. In this case, individuals have close connections to lower educated people while being in a different educational group. The contact theory would propose that negative stereotypes and social stigma are reduced if two groups interact and contact (Allport, 1954). In the described case, precisely this is happening. Moreover, the out-group homogeneity effect may be reduced since there are more diverse examples of out-group members (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). So, generally speaking, we assume a more diverse social network to reduce the effect of educationism. Keep in mind that we will focus on the attitudes of the higher educated.

Cultural Preferences as an Explanation for Educationism

Another factor we propose to explain educationism is that of cultural preferences. The division of classes is also a division of cultural preferences. The higher classes are more readily associated with activities like going to the opera or the art museum. In contrast, the working class is generally more related to popular preferences such as visiting the football stadium or going to a sports bar. Elchardus et al. (2007) demonstrated in their paper how cultural preferences are used to divide social groups from each other, serving as a marker to identify your group identity, which in turn is also related to differences in attitudes between groups. Consider also the work from Young (2012) on how the appropriation of Ned identity (a low-class Scottish youth identity) is primarily an appropriation of cultural preferences such as music taste or clothing style. Consequently, adolescents appropriating these cultural preferences inevitably reflect the whole Ned identity, prominently including low education. It shows how tightly knit particular

cultural preferences and low education are. Because of this, we assume that adopting stereotypically charged cultural preferences can change the negative evaluation of low education.

We expect a main effect of cultural preferences as well as an interaction with educationism. Regarding the main effect, we expect that people with high-brow preferences will be generally more liked than people with low-brow preferences. Regarding the interaction between cultural preferences and educationism, we expect educationism to depend on the levels of cultural preferences. Whereas for targets with low-brow (popular) preferences, education should show an effect, high-brow (i.e., high status) preferences alone lead to higher liking, and thus education has no effect. In other words, the effect of educationism is expected to depend on the different levels of cultural preferences. As an example of an interesting combination, low-educated people with high-brow cultural preferences should be evaluated as positively as highly educated people with high-brow cultural preferences. We expect no effect of education when the target has high-brow cultural preferences. First of all, lower educated people with high-brow preferences are pretty atypical for the lower educated stereotype, representing an anomaly, thus may require additional consideration. In addition to that, they share activities with higher educated people and therefore share a common ground and parts of their identity. The familiarity could be a building block for a relationship (Moreland & Beach, 1992) guided by an increased liking through similarity (Lamberth & Byrne, 1971). We, therefore, assume cultural preferences to (partly) explain educationism.

The Current Research & Hypothesis

In the present research, we try to replicate the findings from Kuppens et al. (2018). In addition, we want to test how the diversity of social network is related to educationism. We do so by including test items to identify the social network in terms of its diversity. In addition to that,

we want to test how different cultural preferences will influence educational bias. We will run a pretest to identify low and high-brow cultural preferences and manipulate four profiles to test the different variations. A cover story in which we ask people about their friendship preferences will be used. After reading the story, they were presented four different profiles, which are varied in education and cultural preferences in a 2 (Education: low versus high) by 2 (cultural preferences: low-brow versus high-brow) within-subject design. Participants then have to rate these profiles on different measures, including liking, befriending, and identification. These measures are merged into a single profile evaluation, our dependent variable. An additional measure includes the degree of meritocratic beliefs. We will operationalize meritocratic beliefs into test items and see the effect on educational bias.

First of all, we hypothesize a main effect for education. Lower educated people are expected to be evaluated more negatively than higher educated people. Second, we hypothesize a main effect for cultural preferences. People with high-brow cultural preferences should generally be more liked than people with low-brow preferences. Third, we hypothesize an interaction effect between social diversity and educationism. An increase in social network diversity should lead to a decrease in educationism and vice versa for a reduction in diversity. Finally, we expect cultural preferences to explain educationism partly. High-brow preferences will be a common ground for high and low educated people. If these preferences are shared, a part of identity is shared and thus similarity is expected to increase the liking. Since we measure the attitudes of highly educated people, any combination of low-brow preferences should result in a more negative rating compared to high-brow ratings. However, low educated people with high-brow preferences should be evaluated just as positively as highly educated people with high-brow preferences. Thus, we expect an interaction effect between cultural preferences and educationism

in which the levels of educationism depend on the levels of cultural preferences. More specifically, we expect educationism to show no effect when the target has high-brow cultural preferences. High-brow preferences are expected to be such a strong indicator of similarity and a strong predictor of liking that their educational background is less relevant for targets with high-brow preferences.

Method

Participants

A purposive sample ($n = 229$, M age = 22.28, SD age = 10.62) was recruited from the psychology student population at the University of Groningen using the SONA participant pool in exchange for course credits. The rest of the respondents were recruited within the researcher's social circle. Based on the 'snowball technique', participants were encouraged to share the questionnaire with people they knew to increase the sample size. Participants who did not classify as highly educated, did not fill out the informed consent, or did not fully complete the questionnaire were excluded ($n = 14$). Therefore, 229 responses were taken into account for the final analysis. Of these respondents, 96 people were collected from the SONA pool and 133 by the researchers. A total of 182 participants are currently studying, whereas 45 have obtained a degree already. Unfortunately, there were two missing answers. The online questionnaire was created in English to allow us to reach out to a more enormous target population. Demographics can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Socio-Demographics of Participants

Characteristics	Full Sample	
	<i>n</i> = 229	%
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	61	26.6
<i>Female</i>	165	72.1
<i>Other</i>	3	1.3
Nationality		
<i>Dutch</i>	81	35.4
<i>German</i>	90	39.3
<i>British</i>	0	0.0
<i>Other European</i>	36	15.7
<i>Non-European</i>	22	9.6

Design

A 2 ("cultural preference": high-brow vs low-brow) x2 ("education level": high education vs low education) experimental design was used. The independent variables were cultural preferences and education level. The dependent variables were the ratings of the different profiles composed of different education levels and cultural preferences. Meritocracy beliefs as well as diversity of network were used as covariates for this study.

Procedure

The online platform Qualtrix (www.qualtrics.com) was used to carry out the survey. A questionnaire consisting of 37 items (of which 25 are used in this paper) plus five general questions regarding demographics was used to collect the data. Participants could access the questionnaire via an online link or via the SONA website, an online research platform by the

University of Groningen. Data was collected from the 27th of November to the 7th of December. Before the start of the survey, participants gave informed consent. Every participant was presented with the same set of questions. All the items that were used can be found in Appendix A. The questions were presented in the following order.

Materials

General information.

Participant education level and other demographics. Focusing on questions regarding age, gender, nationality, employment status, their highest level of education achieved and the level of education they are currently following.

Diversity of social network.

Participants were measured on the diversity of their social network using three items ($\alpha=.755$) with questions about the characteristics of their social network, using a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 5=*strongly agree*). Some of these statements were "I have friends and family from different socioeconomic backgrounds"; "My acquaintances (Bekannte, Kennissen) come from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds". the quantity of contact with lower educated people, using a 7-point Likert scale (1= *none*, 7= *all*).

Attitudes towards different cultural preferences and education levels.

The questions were disguised with a cover story, through which the participants should believe that the research is about the process of making friends. After reading the story, they were presented with four different profiles; the profiles varied in education and cultural preferences in a 2 (Education: low versus high) by 2 (cultural preferences: low-brow versus high-brow) within-subject design. For high education we used "Final stage of their Bachelor in the faculty of Economics and Business" and "Working on their Bachelor thesis in the faculty of

Law" and for low education we used "Recently finished their Sales Employee training" and "Working on their final project for their carpenter apprenticeship". Cultural preferences were chosen using a presurvey to determine which preferences would qualify for high-brow and which would work for the low-brow. The manipulation of cultural preferences involved music, film, hobbies, and tv preferences. The full description of the cultural preferences can be seen in table 2. The four profiles can be seen in Appendix B. An example of a composed profile is as follows:

Low-brow and high education profile

- Education Level: Working on their Bachelor thesis in the faculty of Law
- Job outlook: Would like to end up working for the government as a legal specialist
- Likes playing online games like "Fortnite"
- Plays football in the local team and occasionally likes to visit matches in the stadium
- Loves watching Romcoms (romantic comedies) like "Friends with Benefits"
- Life motto: "Always be yourself, no matter what others think."

To measure the participants' attitudes towards these profiles, three items were used. Three items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (0= *Not likely at all*, 6= *Highly likely*). The questions aimed at assessing liking ("How much do you like this person?"), befriending("How likely is it that you would choose this person as your friend?") and identification("How much do you identify with this person?"). All three questions showed together after seeing each profile. They were averaged into a single score of profile evaluation ($\alpha = .577$). A final question asked participants to rank the four profiles from most likely to befriend to least likely to befriend using a ranking scale.

Table 2

Manipulation of cultural preferences (means indicate how typical each preference was judged to be for those with high education and low education in a pilot study)

Themes	Average Score
Profile A (High-Brow)	
Jazz	1.3
Indie	0.4
Playing a Musical Instrument	1.3
Tennis	1.2
Profile B (High-Brow)	
Documentaries	1.8
Independent Movies	1.2
Reading a Book	1.7
Visit a Museum	1.8
Sailing	1.4
Profile C (Low-Brow)	
Adventure Films	-0.4
Rap	-0.9
Doing TikTok Videos	-1.2
Going to Local Sports Bar	-0.9
Profile D (Low-Brow)	
Play Online Games (Fortnite)	-0.6
Football	-0.5
Romcom	-0.5
Watch a Football Match	-0.5

Note: The numbers refer to the average score on a scale from -3 to 3 in which -3 is considered typical for lower educated and 3 is typical for higher educated.

Thermometer ratings of educationism.

Two items were included that asked participants to indicate their attitudes towards people with different educational backgrounds ($\alpha = .686$). We used a thermometer scale (0 = *Extremely negative*, 100 = *completely positive*). Items included: "Please indicate how positive or negative you feel towards these groups, on a scale from 0-100 where 0 is *extremely negative*, and 100 is *extremely positive*." and "The following questions are about your attitude towards people with different educational backgrounds."

Meritocratic beliefs. Protestant work ethic scale.

We took the scale for meritocratic beliefs from Quinn & Crocker (1999). It is an updated and shortened version of the original scale from Katz & Hass (1988). The scale (8 items, $\alpha = 0.726$.) measures the extent to which people endorse hard work, self-discipline, and personal responsibility (e.g., "A distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character"). Furthermore, the variable "identification with education level" is based on this scale. The Ethical Committee of Psychology (ECP) from the Behavioral and Social Sciences faculty at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen approved this study design.

Results

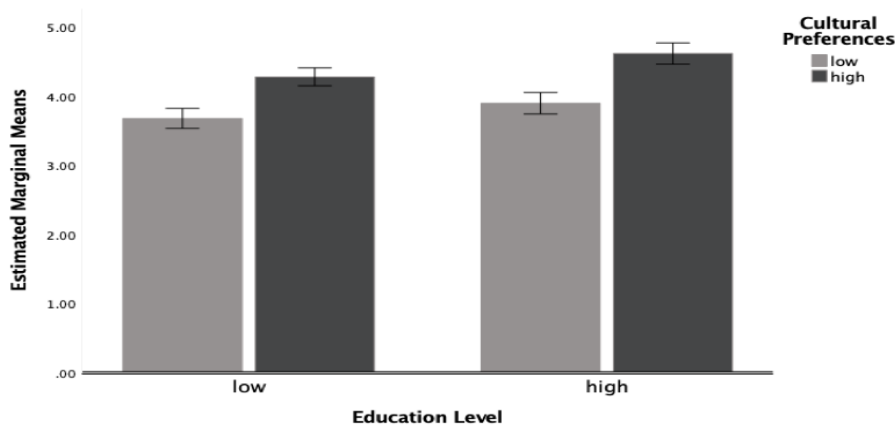
The population of interest for our hypotheses were highly educated individuals; thus, we excluded 14 participants who indicated that they do not fall into this category. Statistical analysis was conducted with the IBM SPSS Version 28 statistical software package. We used repeated measurements ANOVA to test our hypotheses. We ran a Repeated Measures ANOVA with an education main effect, a cultural preferences main effect, and three separate interaction effects for educationism and cultural preferences, educationism and meritocratic beliefs as well as educationism and diversity of social network. For significance testing, an alpha level of .05 was

used. For correlation matrices, significance is at the alpha level .01 (** $p < .01$). The composition of our profiles is based on a pretest run prior to the study. Upon checking the assumptions for the statistical procedures, no major violations were found. Further evidence for normality and homoscedasticity can be found in Appendix C. Independence can not be tested through analysis; however, the nature of our research provides independence of observations naturally. In addition to the main analysis, I engaged in exploratory analyses. These can be found in the correlation table under the heading exploratory analysis.

Outcome 1

The first hypothesis concerned the replication of educationism. In other words, we expected higher educated people to be rated more positively than lower educated people. Indeed, we found statistical evidence in our sample. Upon testing the within-subjects effect, we found a main effect for the factor education ($F(1,220) = 20.296$, $p < 0.001$, $MSE = 17,207$, $\eta^2 = 0.084$). This main effect indicates a difference in ratings for different education levels. Further analysis reveals that the mean for high education is significantly higher than for low education ($MLE = 3.98$, $MHE = 4.26$). Evidently, the first hypothesis receives statistical support. The main effect can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1



Outcome 2

The second hypothesis postulated that people with high-brow cultural preferences are generally more liked than people with low-brow preferences. Again, we found statistical evidence in our sample using the within-subject effects. There is a significant main effect for the factor cultural preferences ($F(1,220) = 84.189, p < .001, MSE = 96.452, \eta^2 = .277$). This indicates that the ratings indeed differ for different cultural preferences. Further analysis reveals that the mean for high-brow preferences is significantly higher than for low-brow preferences (MLCP = 3.790, MHCP = 4.451). The second hypothesis as well is backed by statistical evidence. The main effect is plotted in Figure 1. Interestingly, this factor has the biggest effect size and thus accounts for the most variance in the ANOVA model. In other words, the biggest difference in ratings is explained by cultural preferences.

Outcome 3

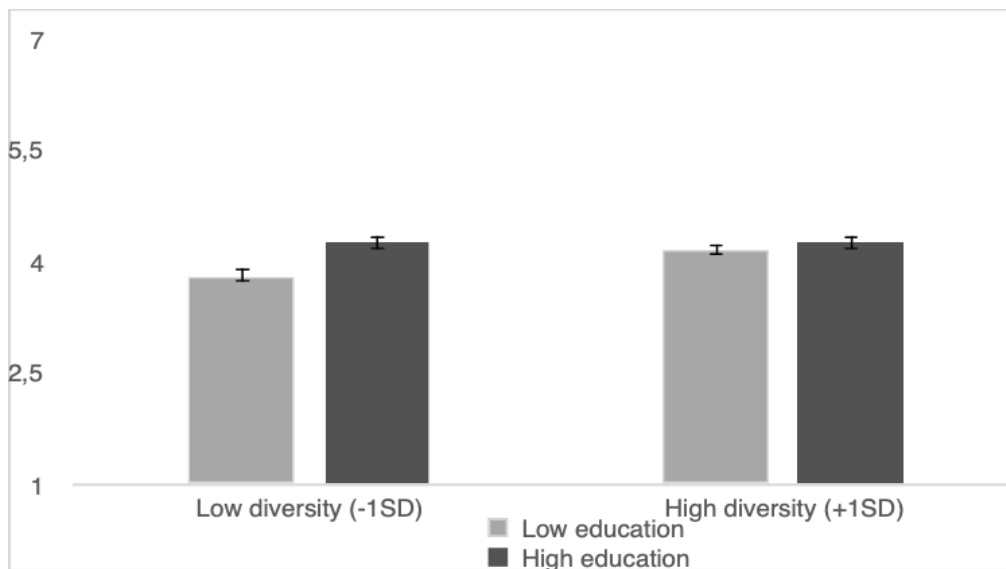
The third hypothesis was about cultural preferences as a moderator for educationism. We hypothesized that cultural preferences might partly explain educationism. To test this, we included an interaction term and checked its significance. Contrary to what we predicted, the interaction term is not significant ($F(1,220) = 1.028, p = 0.312, MSE = 0.765, \eta^2 = 0.005$). Consequently, in our sample, the effect of educationism does not depend on the different levels of cultural preferences. In other words, the magnitude of the effect of educationism is the same regardless of cultural preferences. The insignificant interaction gets visible in Figure 1.

Outcome 4

The fourth hypothesis is about the diversity of social network being a moderator for educationism. We expected lower values of educationism if the diversity of the social network is high. We included the interaction term of educationism and diversity of social network and

checked significance to test this. As it turns out, the interaction term is significant ($F(1,219) = 7.364, p = 0.007, MSE = 1.0, \eta^2 = 0.033$) and thus we have evidence for our hypothesis. This gets clearer when we look at the simple effects of social diversity on educationism. If diversity is low (social diversity = 1SD below the mean), the difference in the profile rating is significantly different for the different education levels ($MLE = 3.813, MHE = 4.259, M2 - M1 = .446, F(1,219) = 26.484, p < .001, \eta^2 = .108$). If diversity is high though (social diversity = 1 SD above the mean), the differences between the ratings are not different for the different education levels ($MLE = 4.149, MHE = 4.261, M2 - M1 = .112, F(1,219) = 1.683, p = .196, \eta^2 = .008$). This means that the values of educationism do change according to the values of social diversity. This is visualized in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Outcome 5

Lastly, we hypothesized that meritocratic beliefs might moderate educationism. Generally speaking, we expected participants indicating a high protestant work ethic to show high levels of educationism. Again, we included the interaction term and checked for it. Contrary to what we

hypothesised, the term is not significant ($F(1,211) = 0.062$, $p = 0.803$, $MSE = 0.053$, $\eta^2 = 0.000$).

This means there is no evidence for our sample's protestant work ethic moderating educationism.

Exploratory Analysis

In addition to the primary analysis, I examined the correlation between the profile ratings education bias and the self-reported education bias based on the thermometer ratings. Also, the correlation between identification with education level based on the meritocracy questions and the different measures of educationism. See table 3.

Table 3

Correlations

		Identification with Education Group	Education Bias (Thermometer Ratings)	Education Bias Based on Profile Evaluation
Identification with Education Group	Pearson correlation	1	.266**	.057
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.406
	N	214	213	214
Education Bias (Thermometer Ratings)	Pearson correlation	.266**	1	.128
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.060
	N	213	217	217
Education Bias Based on Profile Evaluation	Pearson correlation	.057	.128	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.406	.060	
	N	214	217	221

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The purpose behind this thesis was to examine possible mechanisms explaining and, in the last consequence, reducing the effect of educationism. We focused on the attitudes of the higher educated and hypothesized that lower educated people will generally be lower rated than higher educated people. We found a main effect of education supporting this hypothesis. The

main emphasis was on cultural preferences and their role in explaining the education bias. We found that people with higher cultural preferences are generally more liked, which is in line with our prediction; however the effect of educationism did not depend on the different levels of the cultural preferences. Interestingly though, the effect size of the main effect of cultural preferences was the highest relative to the others. Thus cultural preferences are accountable for most of the variance in the profile ratings. Nevertheless, cultural preferences do not explain educationism. This finding is contrary to our hypothesis. Also contrary to our hypothesis is the finding that meritocratic beliefs do not explain educationism. We expected educationism to go up when meritocratic beliefs are high; however, our sample did not show this effect. One of our covariates, however, revealed an interesting finding. The more diverse the social network, the less people show an educational bias. Even though the underlying mechanisms may differ for either a diverse family background or a diverse social network, the outcome is very similar. This finding verifies our predictions and provides a range of opportunities to decrease educationism. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with a previous bachelor thesis conducted on a similar topic (Aino Santavuori, 2021).

Our finding that social diversity reduces educational bias is congruent with literature on intergroup contact (Allport, 1954), (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). It shows that the same dynamics also apply to discrimination based on educational groups. As a logical consequence, you can use the same strategies to increase intergroup contact to decrease educational biases. One example would be to increase intergroup contact through common spaces. As mentioned in the introduction section, educational discrimination starts from an early age, and children are very susceptible at a young age. Especially the early school years are critical periods in forming stereotypes and cognitive schemas. Thus intergroup exposure from early on should be helpful.

More common and neutral spaces should be provided for children regardless of their socioeconomic background. Most importantly, these spaces should be free of cost and accessible for all classes. The Scandinavian model of free sports clubs and museums is a European example of increasing intergroup contact and thus social diversity. This idea also intersects with the diversification of cultural preferences since museums, theatres and sports clubs are places where people live out their preferences. Making these places more equal and accessible should reduce bias in the last consequence. Moreover, children would be encouraged to engage in leisure time activities such as sports clubs or music choirs with a diverse composition of group members and a setting in which educational differences are not salient and important. This constellation provides principles for enhancing intergroup contact. There would be cooperation, equal status of all group members, shared goals and a supportive context (Allport, 1954). Group dynamics like these may help recategorize and establish an identity independent of educational status, including people regardless of their education level (Gaertner et al., 1996).

Another interesting thought is that of a basic income. As mentioned earlier, upper- and middle-class children are more familiar with academic culture from early on than lower-class children. For the following argument, consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Lower class families are constantly fighting to reach the first and basic levels of physiological needs and safety, whereas upper and middle-class children are already accessing higher levels (Maslow, 1943). A basic income would grant everybody the lowest and most essential levels of living to guarantee self-realization and help create equality of opportunities. A recent meta-study examining the effect of basic income on mental health found similar effects. Basic income indeed improved living conditions and also outlook on life (Wilson & McDaid, 2021). In addition to that, another study concluded that a basic income is a reasonable solution in the frame

of the current capitalistic system to reduce inequalities and reinforce socially neglected groups (Hamilton & Martin-West, 2019). Of course, basic income is a highly complex and political idea that does not go without consideration from more levels than just a psychological one; however, it is worth taking into account.

One major limitation of our study is that we did not include the attitudes of lower educated people. This should be interesting to see since previous research indicated that the education bias even affected lower educated people themselves (Kuppens et al., 2018). Moreover, in our study, we focused on combinations of education level and cultural preferences. One interesting combination was that of high education and low cultural preferences. This profile would appear more grounded and thus more likeable for people with similar preferences and low education. However, since we focused on the attitudes of the higher educated, who more prominently engage in high-brow cultural activities, this effect did not show in our sample. Next to this specific combination, either combination of education and cultural preferences should be interesting to see in a more diverse sample. Future research could take over the profile design used in our study with a sample of lower educated people. Also, our sample was collected with the 'snowball' tactic instead of random sampling. Hence, the results are not representative of any real population. Further research should extend to a random sample with more diverse education levels.

Interestingly, contrary to what we hypothesized, protestant work ethic did not interact with educationism, meaning that educational bias did not change according to the levels of meritocratic beliefs. However, we exclusively sampled highly educated social sciences students from a western university. Consequently, meritocratic beliefs were not as high as may be necessary to find an actual effect. Further research could focus on studying students' attitudes in

fraternities or strict associations. It is fair to assume that the hierarchical structures of these institutions will propagate meritocratic beliefs more likely. You could test for this effect again with a sample like that since the literature backing our hypothesis seems promising to find an effect with the right sample.

Next to the main analysis, there were also some other interesting findings. The correlation between self-reported educationism based on the thermometer ratings and identification with the education group is relatively high (see table 3). This could show again that higher educated people consider educationism as an appropriate form of discrimination. Once the identification is high with your education group, the biases mentioned in the introduction come into play, and education is seen as merit. In contrast, lack of education is seen as a personal failure and thus, blaming people is adequate. This explanation would be consistent with the work from Son et al. (2011). They proposed that people who incorporate their education as central to their identity quickly judge lower educated people on their alleged lack of work and dedication.

Furthermore, self-reported educationism based on thermometer ratings and the measurements of educationism based on the profile ratings do not correlate highly. People thus think they do not display this type of discrimination; however, they do. It may be worth examining whether educationism is also an implicit form of discrimination. Similar dynamics can be seen with racism; explicitly, people deny discriminatory behaviour; however, they display biases implicitly (Payne & Hannay, 2021). Future research could try the same priming procedures they do with other forms of discrimination and measure reaction times to see how fast a stereotype is matched to a certain group. Interesting measures to reduce implicit educationism could be, among others, counter stereotyping where you repeatedly expose participants to stereotypes contrary to what is generally believed (Burns et al., 2017). Measures

like these proved efficient in reducing racial biases in the past (Gonzalez et al., 2021). It is thus reasonable to assume that this could work for educational bias; however, this goes well beyond the scope and findings of our thesis, and further research would need to dive further into that.

Despite the limitations of this study we replicated the educationism effect once again and scratched on the role of cultural preferences. Most importantly, we verified the finding that social diversity decreases educational bias. This finding opens the door for many more research ideas to come as well as solutions to reduce discrimination based on the social-psychological literature.

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Appendix A

Introduction

Thanks for your interest in our study. This study is run by Toon Kuppens, Ella Geelink, Nynke Hielkema, Marieke Goedecke, Katharina Hildebrandt, Valeria Osorio, and Thies Gehringhoff from the University of Groningen. Participation in the study is voluntary. You do not need to participate. You can stop at any time and leave questions blank that you do not wish to answer, without negative consequences. The study is about friendship preferences. We will ask how much you like a series of individuals, and whether you think they could be a friend of yours. We also ask a range of background questions about your cultural preferences, the people you know, and what you believe in. Participation in this survey study will take about 15 minutes. There are no direct benefits from participation, but there are also no negative consequences. Data is collected anonymously and nobody will be able to identify you. Anonymous data will be stored indefinitely and might be shared with other researchers. If you have questions or concerns, you can contact the researchers (t.kuppens@rug.nl). Do you have questions/concerns about your rights as a research participant or about the conduct of the research? You may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: ec-bss@rug.nl. Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: privacy@rug.nl.

I have read the information above and I consent to participate in this study

Yes, I consent (1)

No, I do not consent (4)

How old are you?

What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

None of the above (3)

What is your nationality?

Dutch (1)

German (2)

British (3)

Other European (4)

Non-European (5)

Which of the following describes best what you have been doing for the last two weeks?

In paid work (or away temporarily, employee, self-employed, working for family business) (1)

In education (not paid by employer) even if on vacation (2)

Unemployed (3)

Permanently sick or disabled (4)

Retired (5)

Doing housework, looking after children or other persons (7)

Other (please specify) (8) _____

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

No qualifications (1)

Less than an upper secondary diploma (2)

Upper secondary diploma or equivalent (general or vocational; e.g., A-level, BTEC, Abitur/ Fachhochschulreife, HAVO, VWO, MBO 2-3-4, matricular examination) (3)

Short-cycle or vocational tertiary education (e.g., MBO-4 specialist, HBO Associate degree, Ausbildung, Berufsoberschule, Abendgymnasium, specialist Vocational

Qualification, Higher national certificate/diploma, or equivalent) (4)

Bachelor's degree or equivalent (University, Applied Sciences, Fachhochschule (FH), WO, HBO) (5)

Masters degree or equivalent (6)

Doctoral degree or equivalent (7)

Other (please specify) (8)

What level of education are you currently following?

Upper secondary diploma or equivalent (general or vocational; e.g., A-level, BTEC, Abitur/ Fachhochschulreife, HAVO, VWO, MBO 2-3-4, matricular examination) (3)

Short-cycle or vocational tertiary education (e.g., MBO-4 specialist, HBO Associate degree, Ausbildung, Berufsoberschule, Abendgymnasium, specialist Vocational

Qualification, merkonomi, Higher national certificate/diploma, or equivalent) (4)

Bachelor's degree or equivalent (University, Applied Sciences, Fachhochschule (FH), WO, HBO) (5)

Master's degree or equivalent (6)

Doctoral degree or equivalent (7)

Other (please specify) (8) _____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Parental education

Q1 What is the highest level of education completed by your father?

No qualification (1)

Less than an upper secondary diploma (2)

Upper secondary diploma or equivalent (general or vocational; e.g., A-level, BTEC, Abitur/ Fachhochschulreife, HAVO, VWO, MBO 2-3-4, matricular examination) (3)

Short-cycle or vocational tertiary education (e.g., MBO-4 specialist, HBO Associate degree, Ausbildung, Berufsoberschule, Abendgymnasium, specialist Vocational

Qualification, Higher national certificate/diploma, or equivalent) (4)

Bachelor's degree or equivalent (University, Applied Sciences, Polytechnics,

Fachhochschule (FH), WO, HBO) (5)

Masters degree, or equivalent (6)

Ph.D. or equivalent (7)

I dont know (8)

Other (please specify) (9)

Q2 What is the highest level of education completed by your mother?

No qualification (1)

Less than an upper secondary diploma (2)

Upper secondary diploma or equivalent (general or vocational; e.g., A-level, BTEC, Abitur/ Fachhochschulreife, HAVO, VWO, MBO 2-3-4, matricular examination) (3)

Short-cycle or vocational tertiary education (e.g., MBO-4 specialist, HBO Associate

degree, Ausbildung, Berufsoberschule, Abendgymnasium, specialist Vocational

Qualification, Higher national certificate/diploma, or equivalent) (4)

Bachelor's degree or equivalent (University, Applied Sciences, Polytechnics,

Fachhochschule (FH), WO, HBO) (5)

Masters degree, or equivalent (6)

Ph.D. or equivalent (7)

I don't know (8)

Other (please specify) (9)

Groningen is an international city where various nationalities come together. However, knowledge about the nationality or solely hearing an accent leads to the automatic activation of stereotypes. In this study we want to focus on the process of choosing friends, independently of their nationality but based on who that person really is. In the following part of the study descriptions of four individuals will be presented. You will be asked to indicate how much you like each of them.

High-brow Low Education profile

- Education Level: Recently finished their Sales Employee training/studies
- Job outlook: Applying to work in a store in the city centre
- Listens to jazz and indie music "Miles Davis" and "arctic monkeys"

- Plays the guitar
- Plays tennis twice a week
- Life motto: “Every day is a day you have never seen before.”

Q1 How much do you like this person?

0 Do not like at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Like very much (7)

Q2 How likely is it that you would choose this person as your friend?

0 Not likely at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Highly likely (7)

Q3 How much do you identify with this person?

0 Not at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Very much (7)

End of Block: Friend A

Start of Block: Friend B

High-brow High Education profile

- Education Level: Final stage of their Bachelor in the faculty of Economics and Business
- Job outlook: Currently deciding on whether to enrol for a master's programme or take a gap year first
- Enjoys watching movies, mostly documentaries like "Our Planet" and independent movies like "Pulp Fiction"

- Likes reading books in the evening
- Goes sailing during summer
- Life motto: “Every day is an opportunity for joy.”

Q1 How much do you like this person?

0 Do not like at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Like very much (7)

Q2 How likely is it that you would choose this person as your friend?

0 Not likely at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Highly likely (7)

Q3 How much do you identify with this person?

0 Not at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Very much (7)

Low-brow High Education profile

- Education Level: Working on their Bachelor thesis in the faculty of Law
- Job outlook: Would like to end up working for the government as a legal specialist
- Likes playing online games like “Fortnite”
- Plays football in the local team and occasionally likes to visit matches in the stadium
- Loves watching Romcoms (romantic comedies) like “Friends with Benefits”
- Life motto: “Always be yourself, no matter what others think.”

Q1 How much do you like this person?

0 Do not like at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Like very much (7)

Q2 How likely is it that you would choose this person as your friend?

0 Not likely at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Highly likely (7)

Q3 How much do you identify with this person?

0 Not at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Very much (7)

Low-brow Low Education profile

- Education Level: Working on their final project for their carpenters apprenticeship
- Job outlook: Wants to work as part of a larger building company or contractor
- Likes rap music a lot especially “Drake” and “Eminem”
- Enjoys doing tiktok videos and going to the local sports bar
- Watches lots of films, with a preference for adventure films like “Indiana Jones”
- Life motto: “If you need something to believe in, start with yourself.”

Q1 How much do you like this person?

0 Do not like at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Like very much (7)

Q2 How likely is it that you would choose this person as your friend?

0 Not likely at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Highly likely (7)

Q3 How much do you identify with this person?

0 Not at all (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

6 Very much (7)

Q1 Rank the profiles from most likely to befriend to least likely to befriend (you can see the descriptions below)

_____ Friend A (1)

_____ Friend B (2)

_____ Friend C (3)

_____ Friend D (4)

Now we would like to know about the characteristics of your social network. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

Strongly disagree (11)

Somewhat disagree (12)

Neither agree nor disagree (13)

Somewhat agree (14)

Strongly agree (15)

I have friends and family from different socioeconomic backgrounds (1)

My acquaintances(Bekannte, Kennissen) come from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds (2)

When I was growing up, I had contact with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds(3)

Now we would like to ask you a few questions about your contact with people who have lower levels of formal education. Lower educated people are those who dropped out or stopped studying after secondary school (high school).

Please take a guess as to how many people in your network are lower educated.

None (1)

A few (2)

A fair amount(3)

About half (4)

More than half(5)

Most (6)

All (7)

Among your family andclose friends (1)

Among less close contacts such as neighbours,colleagues, acquaintances (2)

Please indicate how positive or negative you feel towards these groups, on a scale from 0-100 where 0 is extremely negative and 100 is extremely positive.

Extremely negative

Extremely positive

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Higher educated people ()

Lower educated people ()

Poor people ()

Rich people ()

Artists ()

Immigrants ()

I feel a bond with people who have a similar level of education to my own. (1)

I feel solidarity with people who have a similar level of education to my own. (2)

I think that people with a similar level of education to my own have a lot to be proud of. (3)

I have a lot in common with the average person who has a similar level of education to my own.

(4)

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below

Strongly disagree (1)

Somewhat disagree (2)

Neither agree nor disagree(3)

Somewhat agree (4)

Strongly agree (5)

Getting ahead is a matter of working hard and relying only on yourself

People are responsible for their own situation in life ()

People should not count on others to solve their problems for them

If you want to be successful, all you need to do is work hard and improve yourself

You have reached the end of the study, thanks for taking part!

If you have any comments for the researchers, you can leave them here

Appendix B

PROFILES

High-brow Low Education profile

- Education Level: Recently finished their Sales Employee training/studies
- Job outlook: Applying to work in a store in the city centre
- Listens to jazz and indie music “Miles Davis” and “arctic monkeys”
- Plays the guitar
- Plays tennis twice a week
- Life motto: “Every day is a day you have never seen before.”

High-brow High Education profile

- Education Level: Final stage of their Bachelor in the faculty of Economics and Business
- Job outlook: Currently deciding on whether to enrol for a master’s programme or take a gap year first
- Enjoys watching movies, mostly documentaries like “Our Planet” and independent movies like “Pulp Fiction”
- Likes reading books in the evening
- Goes sailing during summer
- Life motto: “Every day is an opportunity for joy.”

Low-brow High Education profile

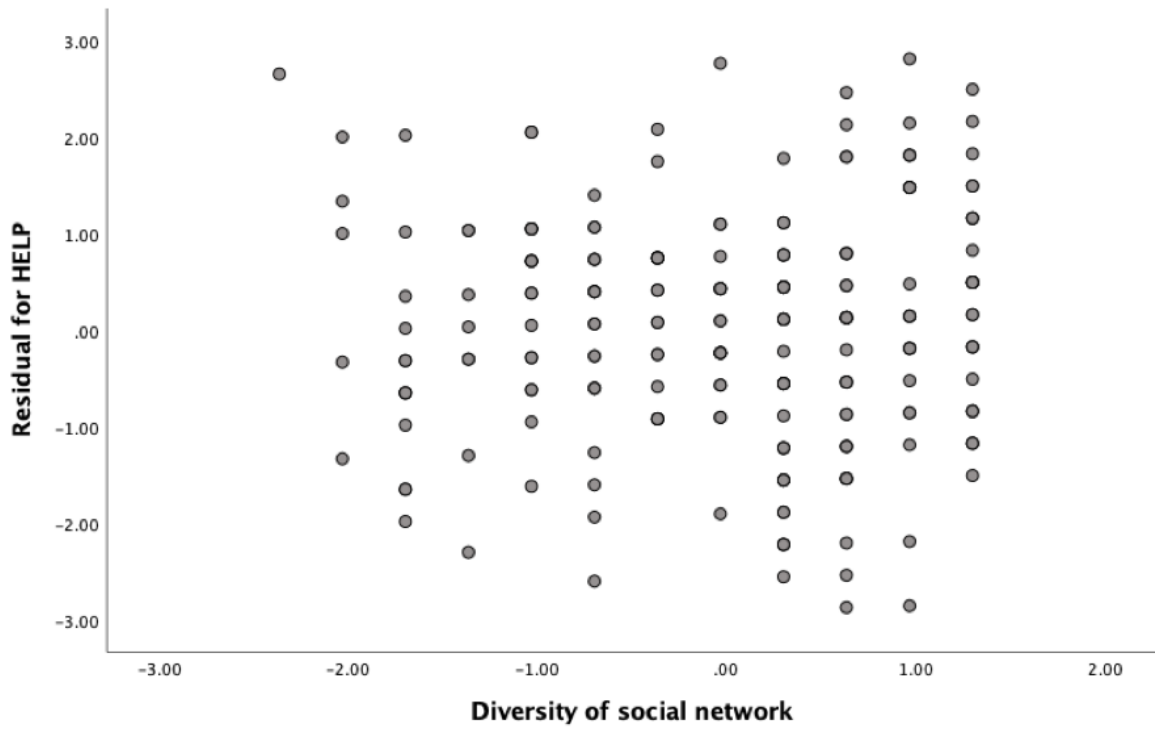
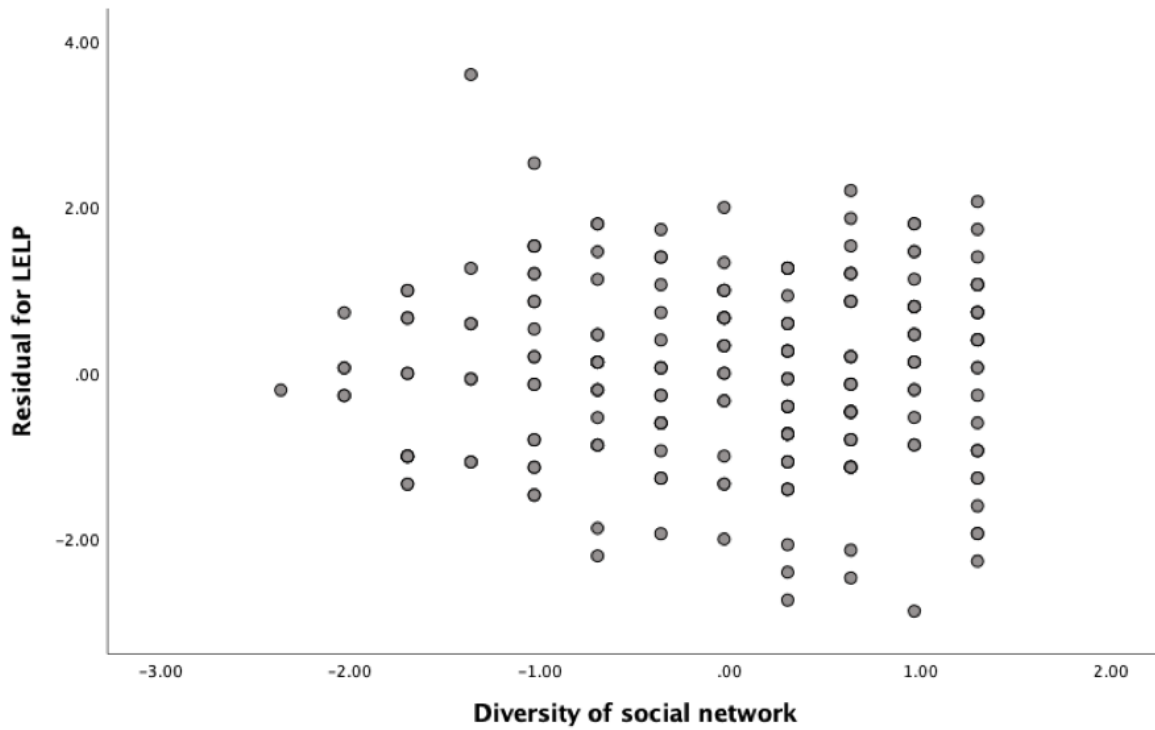
- Education Level: Working on their Bachelor thesis in the faculty of Law
- Job outlook: Would like to end up working for the government as a legal specialist
- Likes playing online games like “Fortnite”
- Plays football in the local team and occasionally likes to visit matches in the stadium
- Loves watching Romcoms (romantic comedies) like “Friends with Benefits”
- Life motto: “Always be yourself, no matter what others think.”

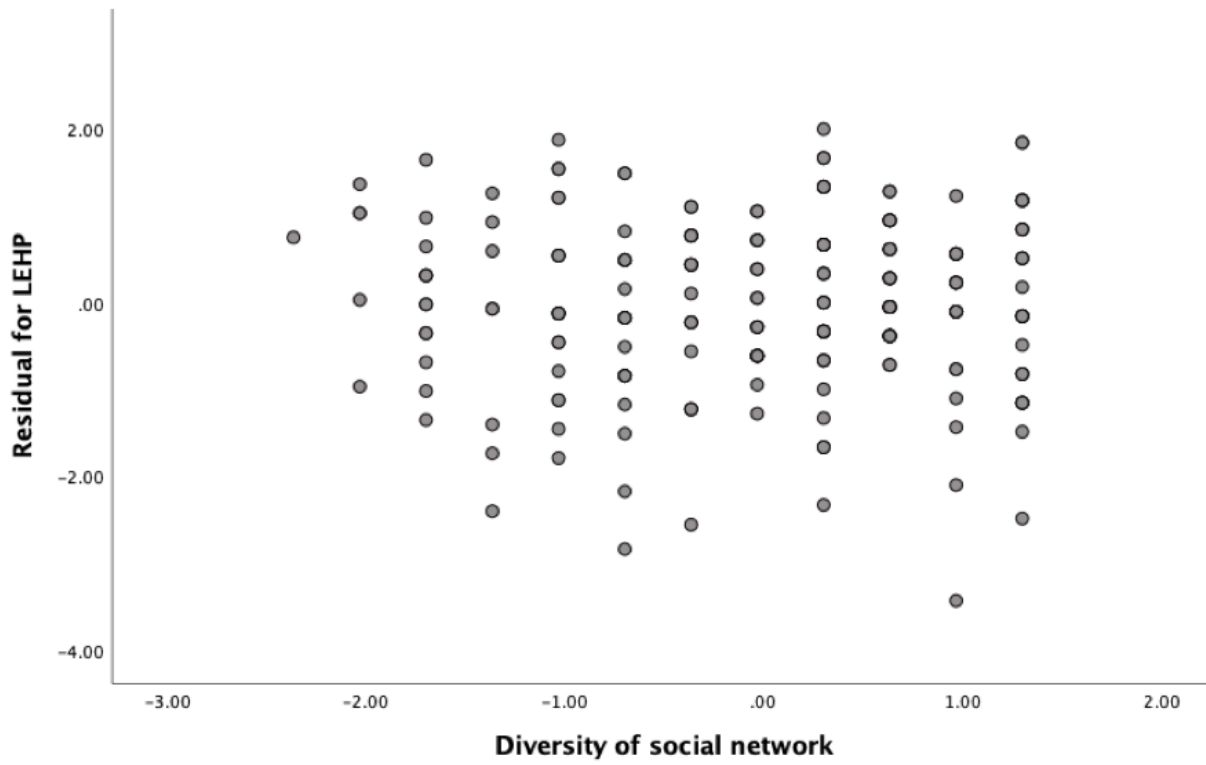
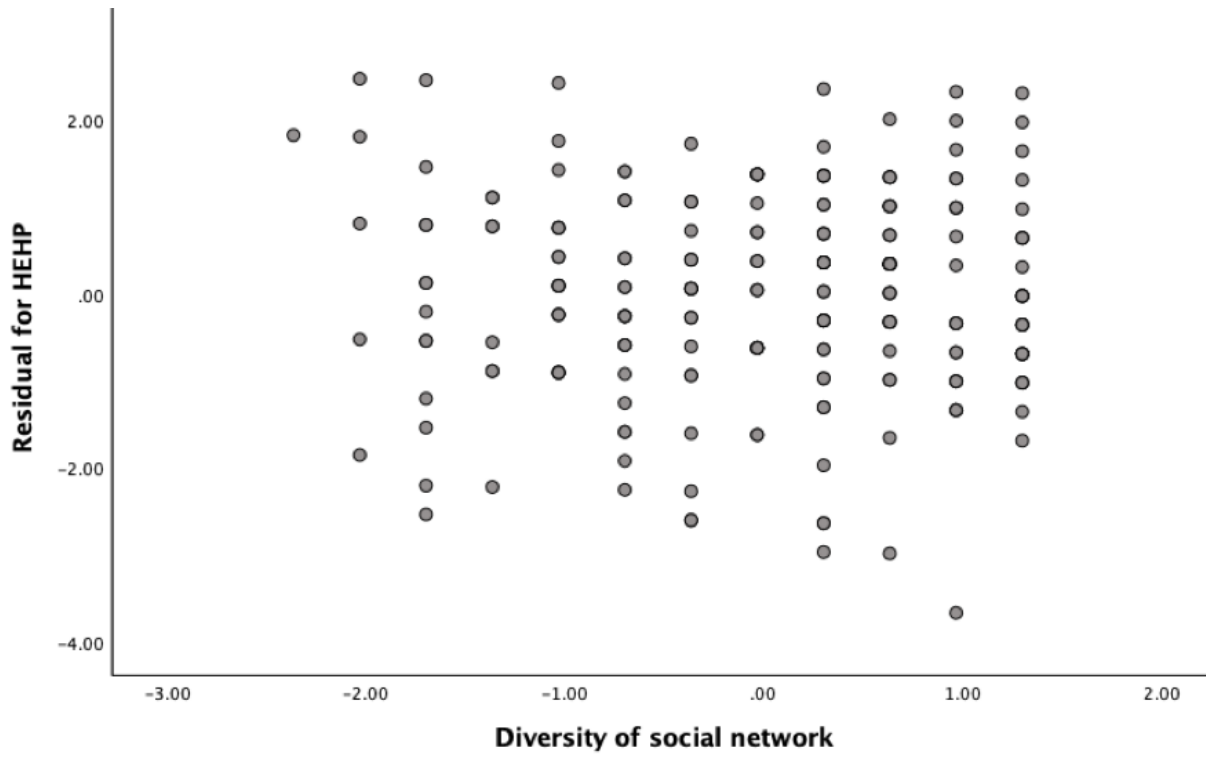
Low-brow Low Education profile

- Education Level: Working on their final project for their carpenters apprenticeship
- Job outlook: Wants to work as part of a larger building company or contractor
- Likes rap music a lot especially “Drake” and “Eminem”
- Enjoys doing tiktok videos and going to the local sports bar
- Watches lots of films, with a preference for adventure films like “Indiana Jones”
- Life motto: “If you need something to believe in, start with yourself.”

Appendix C

Homoscedasticity





Normality of the residuals

