

# The importance of relationships with parents and best friends for adolescents' romantic relationship quality: Differences between indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents

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## Abstract

This study examined how the quality of relationships with parents and friends were related to intimacy, commitment, and passion in adolescents' romantic relationships for indigenous Dutch and ethnic Dutch adolescents. Self-report survey data were used from 444 (88.9%) indigenous Dutch and 55 (11.1%) ethnic Dutch adolescents between 12 and 18 years of age ( $M = 15.34$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), all of whom were involved in a romantic relationship. About 61.6% ( $n = 307$ ) were girls. For both indigenous and ethnic Dutch youths, the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship was positively associated with romantic relationship intimacy, whereas the quality of one's best friendship was related to higher commitment to one's romantic partner. Significant interactions in hierarchical regression analyses revealed that only ethnic Dutch adolescents who experienced low-quality parent–adolescent relationships showed more commitment to their romantic relationships. Additionally, ethnic Dutch adolescents who experienced low-quality best friendships showed more passion in their romantic relationships as compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents. These findings are indicative of ethnic differences in the roles that parents and friends play in the romantic lives of Dutch adolescents.

## Keywords

adolescence, cultural context, relationships with best friends, relationships with parents, romantic relationships

Dating and romantic relationships become increasingly important during adolescence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). These early romantic experiences form the basis for other, more committed romantic relationships later in life and are of importance for individuals' mental well-being (Berscheid, 1999; Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels, 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Many studies showed that the quality of relationships with both parents and friends is important for adolescents' romantic relationship development (e.g., Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004; Feiring, 1999).

It is unclear, however, to what extent and how the cultural context affects adolescents' romantic development. Most studies on romantic development were conducted with primarily European or North-American adolescents, and for the most part did not take into account adolescents' different cultural contexts within a country. Ethnic adolescents have cultural backgrounds that are different from the dominant culture they live in, and the significance of interpersonal processes with parents and friends might be different in both contexts. For example, in Western cultures—in this case the dominant culture—it is normative that relationships with parents become less important in the face of increasing interactions with peers. For ethnic minorities, however, these changes may be less profound (Brown & Mounts, 2007). It has been argued that aspects of the cultural background might impact adolescents' romantic relationship development (Coates, 1999). Milbrath and colleagues (Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009) even found profound differences in cultural models of romantic relationships between African American and

Mexican American adolescents who were in the same school. Nowadays the majority of societies are multicultural and hence ethnic-comparative designs offer essential insights into how relationships with parents and friends may relate to adolescents' romantic relationships across ethnic groups. Therefore, we examined how the quality of indigenous Dutch and ethnic Dutch adolescents' relationships with parents and friends were related to the quality of their romantic relationships.

## Romantic relationships of indigenous Dutch and ethnic Dutch adolescents

Dion and Dion (1996) argued that collectivism and individualism are useful concepts in developing a more complete understanding of romantic relationships. Values and characteristics of individualism and collectivism at a societal level are reflected at a psychological level in individuals within a society. Dutch adolescents are commonly characterized by a strong individualistic cultural orientation (Oppenheimer, 2004). In the context of romantic relationships, this means that individuals value the freedom to seek

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partners who gratify their own personal development without parental interference (Dion & Dion, 1993). Although ethnic Dutch adolescents live within this individualistic culture, it is likely that they will also be influenced by their ethnic cultural background. Currently, 20% of the inhabitants of the Netherlands are classified as ethnic, with the largest ethnic groups coming from Morocco and Turkey. Members of both ethnic groups first came to the Netherlands during the 1960s for economic reasons. Although there are differences between these two ethnic groups, such as that the Turkish tend to have a somewhat higher educational level, both groups share significant similarities. Both the Turkish and Moroccan people have the same Islamic religion and share the Arabic civilization, and, more importantly, both have a predominant collectivistic cultural orientation (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Uskul, Hynie, & Lalonde, 2004). People with collectivistic orientations are integrated into strong cohesive family groups, and romantic relationships are defined in terms of interconnectedness and interdependence with the family. Thus, due to differences in cultural orientation, it is possible that ethnic and indigenous Dutch adolescents differ in the way important social agents like parents and friends affect their romantic experiences (Brown & Mounts, 2007; Milbrath et al., 2009).

### Relationship quality with parents and friends

Furman and Wehner (1994, see also Collins et al., 2009) have theorized that the quality of relationships with parents and friends is pivotal for adolescents' romantic relationship quality; that is, warm and secure relationships with parents and friends are important for achieving satisfying romantic relationships. Based on earlier experiences in relationships with parents, people develop cognitive-affective representations of intimate relationships with others. These representations guide adolescents' behaviour towards friends and romantic partners (Furman & Simon, 2006). Over the course of adolescence, friends become an increasingly important source of social support and information concerning romantic relationships. Consequently, friends may function as models for initiating and maintaining romantic relationships. In contrast to hierarchical parent-adolescent relationships, both friendships and romantic relationships are egalitarian relationships and share important similarities such as intimacy and companionship. It is in the unique context of voluntary and close friendships that adolescents can practise egalitarian interactions and learn to manage their emotions (Collins et al., 2009). Given the similarities between friendships and romantic relationships, it is likely that adolescents develop expectations regarding romantic relationships based on their experiences in interactions with friends (Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels, & Meeus, 2003). Indeed, research has shown that high-quality relationships with parents were related to high-quality relationships with friends and high-quality relationships with romantic partners (Connolly & Johnson, 1996).

The quality of romantic relationships encompasses distinguishable components, such as intimacy, commitment, and passion (Sternberg, 1986). It has been shown that from these concepts, we are able to assess love on a continuum of romantic relationships from dating adolescents to married individuals. Specifically, higher levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment were more characteristic of long-term romantic relationships (Lemieux & Hale, 1999). This was also found in a cross-cultural study comparing Chinese

and US students (Gao, 2001), which suggests that intimacy, commitment, and passion are important concepts in defining romantic relationships in countries with different cultural orientations. However, since interpersonal processes with parents and peers vary depending on cultural orientations, it might be that the quality of parent-adolescent relationships and friendship quality relate differently to these components of romantic relationship quality for indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents. First, intimacy refers to feelings of closeness and connectedness in romantic relationships. Friendships offer opportunities to practise interactions in an egalitarian and voluntary relationship, while the basis for expressing intimacy is learned in the parent-adolescent relationship. Therefore, we expect that the quality of relationship with both parents and best friends will be linked with intimacy. This might be similar for indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents, since both groups have ample opportunities to engage in egalitarian friendship dyads.

Second, commitment refers to the desire to stay involved in one's romantic relationship and to maintain a potential long-term relationship. Commitment to a relationship is especially valued in collectivistic societies (Gao, 2001). As the relationship with parents is generally important for ethnic adolescents, and parental interference with engagement and maintenance of romantic relationships is common, the quality of parent-adolescent relationships might be more relevant for romantic relationship commitment to ethnic Dutch adolescents compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents. Specifically, high-quality parent-adolescent relationships might be related to high levels of commitment in romantic relationships in ethnic Dutch youths.

Third, passion refers to feelings of romance, attraction, and sexuality. In a recent review of Zimmer-Gembeck and Helfand (2008) it was found that supportive relationships with parents had only small effects on delaying the onset of sexual intercourse; peers were found to be more important. Moreover, friends are an essential source of information and contribute to the communication of norms and values regarding passion in romantic relationships. Dependent on their cultural group, ethnic adolescents develop dating scripts that shape their attitudes and expectations of sexual behaviours. Milbrath and colleagues (2009) found that Mexican American adolescents, who have collectivistic orientations, were more inhibited in their sexual expressions than African American adolescents. In individualistic societies much emphasis is placed on passionate love in relationships, which stems from a general belief in the individuality and free choice of a person in finding a romantic partner (Triandis, 1994). As it might be less applicable to ethnic Dutch adolescents to engage in highly passionate romantic relationships, we expect that low-quality friendships will be related to more passion for ethnic Dutch adolescents.

### The present study

We examined how and to what extent the quality of indigenous Dutch and ethnic Dutch adolescents' relationships with parents and best friends were related to the quality of their romantic relationships. First, we expected that both high quality of parent-adolescent relationships and high quality of best friendships would be related to higher levels of intimacy in romantic relationships. This would be similar for indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents. Second, we expected that high quality of parent-adolescent relationships would be predictive of high commitment in romantic relationships

for ethnic Dutch adolescents, but not for indigenous Dutch adolescents. Third, we investigated whether lower quality of friendships was related to higher levels of passion in romantic relationships for ethnic Dutch adolescents.

## Methods

### Procedure

We approached a total of 28 high schools in a 100 km radius around the city of Nijmegen, in the east of the Netherlands. In this part of the Netherlands, 10% of the inhabitants are from ethnic groups; this is a lower percentage than the national average and the majority groups are from Turkey and Morocco. These schools were sent a letter of introduction and were contacted by telephone. Finally, 23 schools decided to participate in this study (82%). From January to March 2006, questionnaires were administered to the adolescents by undergraduate students involved in our Masters programme. These students were given instructions regarding the content of the questionnaire and the administration procedure in a classroom situation. The classroom assessments were performed during regular school hours and lasted 50 minutes. Both adolescents and parents were informed about the content and purpose of the study. All parents agreed to the participation of their children. In the instructions to the adolescents, it was emphasized that they were not allowed to discuss their answers with other pupils and they were guaranteed that their answers would not be shared with a third party (i.e., teachers or parents).

### Sample

The total sample consisted of 2,688 adolescents between 12 and 19 years of age ( $M = 14.94$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). About 49.1% ( $n = 1,320$ ) of the sample were girls. Concerning educational level, 1,409 students (52.5%) followed lower vocational education programmes, and 1,273 students (47.5%) were enrolled in middle- or higher-level education programmes (pre-university). In total, 380 (14.1%) adolescents reported that their parents were divorced, and 90 (3.3%) adolescents reported that one of their parents or both parents had passed away. The majority of the adolescents lived with their biological parents ( $n = 2,256$ ; 84.0%) and 229 (8.5%) lived with a stepparent; the remaining adolescents lived in other circumstances. Most adolescents reported having a best friend ( $n = 2,280$ ; 84.8%), and 82.3% ( $n = 2,211$ ) had been best friends for a period longer than six months. On average, adolescents reported having 11.17 close friends ( $SD = 6.01$ ;  $n = 2,199$ ; those with 25 or more close friends were considered outliers). We identified adolescents as ethnic Dutch only if both of their parents were born in collectivistic cultures (i.e., Turkey, Morocco, or an "elsewhere" category).<sup>1</sup> Note that ethnic Dutch adolescents who were born either in the Netherlands or in their country of origin were both included. This resulted in 2,376 (89.8%) indigenous Dutch adolescents and 269 (10.2%) ethnic Dutch adolescents, which is representative for the east of the Netherlands.

**Attrition.** We performed analyses to examine whether sample characteristics differed between the total sample and the selected sample (i.e., adolescents who were involved in a heterosexual relationship at the time of the assessment). Independent *t*-tests showed that the selected adolescents were slightly older than the non-

selected adolescents ( $M = 15.34$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ,  $t(2526) = 9.00$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In addition, more girls (61.6%) than boys (38.4%) were in the selected sample as compared to the total sample ( $\chi^2(1) = 33.41$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Selected adolescents were somewhat less educated, 57.5% followed lower vocational education programmes, and 42.5% were enrolled in middle- or higher-level education programmes ( $\chi^2(1) = 17.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Finally, selected adolescents reported having a best friend more often (90.1%,  $\chi^2(1) = 12.70$ ,  $p = .000$ ). No differences were found for divorce rates, living situations, number of close friends, or percentages of youths belonging to indigenous or ethnic Dutch groups.

### Measures

**Parent–adolescent relationship quality.** The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to measure the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship. We used a translated and adapted version (Deković & Noom, 1996). This 24-item version consists of three subscales of eight items each (four items for each parent). The subscales are: Trust (e.g., "My mother/father respects my feelings"); Communication (e.g., "I always tell my mother/father about my problems and worries"); and Alienation (e.g., "I am angry with my mother/father"). Response categories ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Empirical research on the psychometric properties showed high internal consistencies and a high three-week test–retest reliability (e.g., Nada Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992). It has been found that the IPPA is related to competence in relationships with peers and romantic partners in a Dutch sample (Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus, & Deković, 2001). A mean score was calculated based on combined fathers' and mothers' scores ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see also Engels et al., 2001). Cronbach's alpha was .87.

**Best friendship quality.** The Investment Model Scale was used to measure relationship quality with best friends (IMS; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The IMS was originally developed to measure commitment level, satisfaction level, investment size, and quality of alternatives (for a meta-analysis see Le & Agnew, 2003). The IMS has good reliability and validity and it has been shown that it meaningfully assesses these four subscales in a Dutch sample of adolescents (Branje, Frijns, Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2007). In the present study we used the subscales satisfaction and commitment to one's best friendship: both subscales comprised four questions. Satisfaction assesses the extent to which participants are satisfied with their relationship (e.g., "My relationship with my best friend makes me very happy"). Commitment refers to the intent to maintain a relationship (e.g., "I wish the relationship with my best friend would stay the way it is"). Response categories ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores of satisfaction and commitment were combined into a single mean score ( $r = .73$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Alpha was .89.

**Romantic relationship status and satisfaction.** Adolescents indicated whether they were currently involved in a romantic relationship: 0 (not involved) and 1 (involved). If they were currently involved in a relationship they rated their satisfaction based on the Dutch translation of the Triangular Love Scale—Adolescents (TLSA; Lemieux & Hale, 1999; translation in Overbeek, Ha, Scholte, De Kemp, & Engels, 2007). The TLSA consists of 19 items that tap into the dimensions of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Response categories ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The dimension of intimacy was assessed using seven items (e.g., “X understands my feelings”), while the dimension of passion was measured using six items (e.g., “X and I are very passionate together”), and the dimension of commitment was tapped into using six items (e.g., “I think of my relationship with X as a permanent one”), where “X” stood for romantic partner. Mean scores for each subscale were calculated and Cronbach’s alpha was .90 for the intimacy subscale, .66 for commitment, and .88 for passion.

### Romantic relationship duration and age limit setting.

Romantic relationship duration was assessed with the question “For how long have you been going steady with your current boyfriend/girlfriend?” Adolescents could choose one of six possible answers: (1) 0–4 weeks; (2) 1–3 months; (3) 3–6 months; (4) 6–12 months; (5) 1–2 years; (6) 2 years or longer. In addition, we examined the age at which parents allowed their offspring to engage in dating behaviours. Based on Raffaelli (2005), adolescents were asked with a single question whether parents had set an age limit to dating: “Were you prohibited by your parents to go on dates before a certain age?” Affirmative responses were followed with a question to elicit that specific age.

## Results

### Descriptive analyses

Descriptive analyses (*t*-tests) showed that 19.3% ( $n = 519$ ) of all adolescents were currently involved in a romantic relationship. The duration of their current romantic relationship ranged from 0–4 weeks (26.5%), 1–3 months (29.6%), 3–6 months (14.1%), 6–12 months (18.9%), to 1–2 years (10.9%). On average, adolescents reported having been involved in three romantic relationships up to the moment of data collection. In total, 6.0% ( $n = 11$ ) of all boys and 3.1% of all girls ( $n = 9$ ) reported having a partner of the same sex and these were excluded from further analyses. No significant difference emerged between indigenous Dutch and ethnic Dutch adolescents’ current involvement in a romantic relationship:  $n = 444$  (19.4%) for indigenous Dutch adolescents and  $n = 55$  (21.1%) for ethnic Dutch adolescents.

Note that we performed follow-up analyses on the subsample of adolescents who were involved in a romantic relationship. Ethnic Dutch adolescents reported that their parents set age limits to dating more often (32.1%) than parents of indigenous Dutch adolescents (13.3%,  $\chi^2(1) = 32.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, the age at which ethnic Dutch adolescents were allowed to start dating ( $M = 13.75$ ,  $SD = 4.00$ ) was significantly higher than for indigenous Dutch adolescents ( $M = 11.88$ ,  $SD = 5.23$ ,  $t(214) = 2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Ethnic Dutch adolescents achieved lower levels of education than indigenous Dutch adolescents ( $\chi^2(1) = 7.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ); 75.5% of the ethnic Dutch adolescents attended lower-level education, compared to 56.2% of the indigenous Dutch adolescents. In addition, only 24.5% of the ethnic Dutch adolescents attended middle-level or higher-level education (i.e., preparatory secondary school for college and university), as compared to 43.8% of the indigenous Dutch adolescents. Independent *t*-tests showed that ethnic Dutch adolescents were on average older ( $M = 15.63$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) than indigenous adolescents ( $M = 15.30$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ,  $t(478) = 1.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, parents of ethnic Dutch adolescents were less often divorced (60.0%) than indigenous Dutch adolescents (85.9%,  $\chi^2(3) = 9.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Although ethnic and indigenous Dutch

**Table 1.** Adolescent-reported quality of relationship with best friend and parents, and romantic relationship intimacy, commitment, and passion

	Indigenous Dutch		Ethnic Dutch	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Quality of best friendship	4.20	.63	4.27	.66
Quality of parent–adolescent relationship	4.12	.62	4.13	.73
Intimacy	5.02	1.08	5.04	.72
Commitment	5.00	1.20	4.76	1.45
Passion	4.77	1.15	4.22**	1.43

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

adolescents reported no differences in terms of having a best friend, indigenous Dutch adolescents reported having more friends ( $M = 11.65$ ,  $SD = 6.23$ ) than ethnic Dutch adolescents ( $M = 8.42$ ,  $SD = 5.33$ ,  $t(361) = 2.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 1 shows no differences between indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents in relationship quality with best friends and quality of parent–adolescent relationships. Additionally, ethnic Dutch adolescents reported significantly lower levels of passion in their romantic relationships than indigenous Dutch adolescents. More specifically, ethnic Dutch adolescents described their romantic relationships less in terms of sexual feelings and arousal.

Bivariate correlational analyses (see Table 2) showed that for indigenous Dutch adolescents, high quality of best friendship was associated with high quality of parent–adolescent relationships. High quality of best friendship was related to more intimacy and more commitment to a romantic relationship. High quality of the parent–adolescent relationship related to more intimacy in a romantic relationship. Finally, more intimacy in a romantic relationship was related to more commitment and passion. For ethnic Dutch adolescents, quality of parent–adolescent relationship related negatively to commitment, indicating that high quality of the parent–adolescent relationship related to less commitment in romantic relationships.

Fisher *Z*-tests demonstrated that for indigenous Dutch adolescents, passion related more strongly to intimacy in romantic relationships than for ethnic Dutch adolescents ( $Z = 3.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For ethnic Dutch adolescents, quality of parent–adolescent relationship related more strongly to adolescents’ report of commitment in their romantic relationship than for indigenous Dutch adolescents ( $Z = 3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A similar trend suggested that there was a stronger correlation of quality of relationship with best friend and passion in romantic relationships for ethnic Dutch adolescents than for indigenous Dutch adolescents ( $Z = 1.73$ ,  $p = .08$ ).

### Quality of parent–adolescent relationship and friendship and relationship quality

Table 3 shows the hierarchical regression analyses in which we predicted romantic relationship intimacy, commitment, and passion.<sup>2</sup> In Step 1 we controlled for sex and age. Generally, older adolescents reported more intimacy, commitment, and passion.<sup>3</sup> Significant main effects in Step 2 of the regression model showed that adolescents reported more intimacy in their romantic relationships when they experienced high-quality relationships with parents, and were more committed to their romantic relationship when they experienced high-quality relationships with their best friends.

**Table 2.** Pearson correlations for indigenous Dutch (lower left) and ethnic Dutch (upper right) adolescents.

	Best friendship	Parent–adolescent relationship	Intimacy	Commitment	Passion
Quality of best friendship	—	.06	-.10	.20	-.23
Quality of parent–adolescent relationship	.16**	—	-.07	-.42**	-.07
Intimacy	.11*	.14*	—	.19	-.10
Commitment	.20**	.08	.26**	—	-.13
Passion	.02	.01	.40**	.07	—

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 3.** Hierarchical regression analyses for romantic relationship intimacy, commitment, and passion (standardized beta coefficients)

	Relationship intimacy	$\Delta R^2$	Relationship commitment	$\Delta R^2$	Relationship passion	$\Delta R^2$
Gender	-.04	.01	-.01	.02*	.05	.04***
Age	.11*		.14**		.20***	
Ethnic background	-.01	.02	-.06	.03**	-.15**	.04**
Quality of parent–adolescent relationship	.13*		.00		.03	
Quality of best friendship	.02		.18***		.02	
Parent–adolescent relationship x ethnicity	-.06	.00	-.16***	.03**	.01	.01
Best friendship x ethnicity	-.03		.03		-.11*	

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

An interaction effect was found between parent–adolescent relationships and ethnicity. Specifically, ethnic Dutch adolescents showed more commitment to their romantic relationships when experiencing low-quality relationships with their parents as compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents. Moreover, ethnic Dutch adolescents showed less commitment to their romantic relationships when experiencing high-quality relationships with parents as compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents. Regarding passion, an interaction effect of ethnicity was found with quality of relationship with best friend. Specifically, ethnic Dutch adolescents showed more passion in their romantic relationships when experiencing low-quality best friendships as compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents.

### Relationships with parents and best friend and relationship status

Additional analyses were conducted on the total sample to investigate whether quality of parent–adolescent relationships and quality of best friend relationships were related to current relationship status. We performed a logistic regression analysis, controlling for sex and age. Results showed that a lower quality of the parent–adolescent relationship was related to having a romantic relationship ( $OR = .65, p < .001, 95\% \text{ Confidence Interval (CI)} = .56-.77$ ). Higher quality of the best friendship was related to having a romantic relationship ( $OR = 1.81, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 1.50-2.20$ ). No significant moderator effect for ethnicity emerged.

## Discussion

This study is the first large-survey study conducted in the Netherlands to gain more insight into indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents' romantic relationship development. We found profound differences between ethnic and indigenous Dutch adolescents regarding commitment and passion in their romantic relationships. Specifically, ethnic Dutch adolescents showed more commitment

to their romantic relationships when experiencing low-quality relationships with their parents than indigenous Dutch adolescents. Regarding passion, ethnic Dutch adolescents showed more passion in their romantic relationships when experiencing low-quality best friendships as compared to indigenous Dutch adolescents.

In our study, nearly 20% of all adolescents sampled were currently in a romantic relationship, which is comparable to numbers from North America (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). In contrast with our expectations, however, we found that ethnic Dutch adolescents experienced more commitment in their romantic relationships when they reported low-quality parent–adolescent relationships. It may be that authoritarian parenting mediates this relationship, as authoritarian parenting techniques are more often employed by parents with collectivistic orientations and emphasize a high level of compliance to parental rules and directions (Chao, 1994). It has been shown that authoritarian parenting in an ethnic context is not necessarily related to lower levels of parental warmth and control (Rudy & Grusec, 2001). It might have detrimental effects, however, on the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship during adolescence when ethnic parents do not support the romantic relationships of adolescents, which might lead to conflicts between parents and adolescents. Although authoritarian parenting was not measured in the present study, ethnic parents were found to set age limits for dating more often. Specifically, indigenous Dutch adolescents were allowed to start dating at a younger age than ethnic Dutch adolescents. However, no differences appeared between indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents' current involvement in romantic relationships. The present study indicates that parents of ethnic Dutch adolescents tend to discourage their children from engaging in romantic relationships during adolescence by setting strict rules or prohibiting dating before a certain age (see also Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995; Raffaelli, 2005). It is possible that ethnic Dutch adolescents who participated in romantic relationships against their parents' wishes encountered difficulties in the parent–adolescent relationship, i.e. low quality of the parent–adolescent relationship.

In addition, we found that only for ethnic Dutch adolescents, low quality of best friendships was related to more passion in their

romantic relationships. It might be less common for ethnic Dutch adolescents to experience high levels of passion and sexuality. It has been shown that ethnic people place less emphasis on passion in romantic relationships compared to people with more individualistic orientations (Triandis, 1994). Indeed, our results indicated that passion and sexuality were delayed in ethnic Dutch adolescents, which might imply that it is not normative for them to experience a high level of passion within romantic relationships. Those ethnic adolescents who do experience a high level of passion might be the ones who have low-quality relationships with their best friends. Alternatively, ethnic Dutch adolescents might compensate for their low-quality friendships by having more passion and sexual feelings in their romantic relationships. However, we can only speculate about these explanations.

In line with the initial hypothesis, no support was found for ethnicity as a moderator for the relationship between quality of parent–adolescent relationships and best friend relationships. For both indigenous and ethnic Dutch youths, the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship was positively associated with romantic relationship intimacy. However, Furman and Wehner (1994) theorized that friendships would also contribute to adolescents' ability to express intimacy in romantic relationships. It could be that adolescent's cognitive-affective representations of intimate relationships based on friendships are not fully developed yet, as our sample consisted of young to middle adolescents.

Interestingly, even though ethnic Dutch adolescents were older than indigenous Dutch adolescents in this sample, they reported lower levels of passion and sexuality in their romantic relationships. Additionally, ethnic Dutch adolescents' passion was not related to other romantic relationship characteristics. For indigenous Dutch adolescents, on the other hand, we found that feelings of passion were related to more commitment and intimacy. These results indicate that levels of intimacy, commitment, and passion of romantic relationships can be defined differently for ethnic and indigenous Dutch adolescents. More specifically, our results suggest that passion is a less important romantic relationship characteristic for ethnic Dutch adolescents and passion is less embedded in a context of commitment and intimacy of romantic relationships.

Another interesting result emerged from the additional analyses. For both ethnic and indigenous Dutch adolescents, lower-quality parent–adolescent relationships and higher-quality best friendships were related to having a romantic relationship. During adolescence, friendships partly replace the family as the primary socializing agent and parents become less important, triggering a temporary decline in parent–adolescent relationship quality (Granic, Hollenstein, Dishion, & Patterson, 2003). Friends, on the other hand, become an important source of social support, and high-quality relationships with best friends might be related to a large social network (Bot, Engels, Knibbe, & Meeus, 2005). In turn, having many opposite-sex friends increases the chances of having a romantic relationship (Connolly & Johnson, 1996; Feiring, 1999). The present results might reflect an individuation process away from the parents and towards a context in which new behaviours, such as support and intimacy in peer relationships, can be practised (Overbeek et al., 2003).

### Limitations of the present study

Several limitations need to be kept in mind when interpreting the present findings. First, this study used a cross-sectional design in

which we were unable to identify whether quality of relationships with parents and best friends affected romantic relationship characteristics or vice versa. Second, although our initial sample was large and the percentage of ethnic and indigenous adolescents was similar to the national estimates of the Netherlands, the selected sample of indigenous and ethnic Dutch adolescents with romantic relationships was relatively small. This was primarily due to the relatively young age of the adolescents, which makes it necessary to replicate the present findings in an older and larger indigenous and ethnic Dutch sample. Moreover, as it was necessary in this study to combine adolescents from different 'ethnic Dutch' backgrounds, it would be insightful to study youths from different cultures as separate groups. Third, we asked adolescents whether their parents set an age limit for dating; however, no specific validated measures concerning authoritarian parenting were included. As we showed that ethnicity was a moderator between quality of parent–adolescent relationships and commitment, and between quality of best friendship and passion, the next step would be to identify the mechanism of how and why these differ for ethnic groups. Fourth, we did not measure adolescents' level of acculturation. Acculturation is a complex psychological process of adaptation to the dominant culture. It is plausible that a high variability of acculturation exists within the ethnic Dutch group. Due to integration, ethnic Dutch adolescents could be as individualistically oriented as their indigenous Dutch peers. As Dion and Dion (1996) have strongly emphasized, future studies should study collectivism and individualism at a psychological level instead of assuming it on a societal level.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study was one of the first in the Netherlands that showed in a large-survey study how quality of relationships with parents and friends relates to adolescents' feelings of the current romantic relationship, depending on the cultural background. Hence, while romantic relationship quality for indigenous Dutch youths is primarily related to the quality of relationships with parents and best friends, authoritarian parenting might be more relevant for ethnic Dutch adolescents.

### Notes

1. The present regression analyses have been performed with and without the category "elsewhere". Results were similar in both analyses.
2. The predictor variables were mean-centred to prevent multicollinearity between the variables.
3. Multi-level analyses (using MIWin) showed that the present results for intimacy, commitment, and passion were similar when controlling for clustering effects of schools. Intra-class correlations for the models were very low, ranging between .01 and .02.

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