

**What Friends Are For:
Personal Relationships with the Ethnic
Majority and Immigrant Integration**

Ashraf Rachid

**What Friends Are For:
Personal Relationships with the Ethnic
Majority and Immigrant Integration**

PhD Dissertation

Politica

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone
whom I am lucky enough to call my friend.

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Preface

This report summarises the theoretical framework, the central findings and contributions of my PhD dissertation: *What Friends Are For: Personal Relationships with the Ethnic Majority and Immigrant Integration*. The dissertation consists of this summary report and the three research papers listed below.

Paper A: Rachid, Ashraf. “With A Little Help From My Friends: How close personal relationships with ethnic majority members can support immigrant labour market integration” [working paper]

Paper B: Rachid, Ashraf. “Civicness and Social Influence: How close personal relationships with ethnic majority members promote immigrant civic integration” [working paper]

Paper C: Rachid, Ashraf. “Distinguishing Society From The System: How immigrants navigate social and symbolic boundaries through personal relationships with ethnic majority members” [working paper]

This summary report presents the overall theoretical framework of the dissertation and connects the individual articles to a coherent whole. For details on methods, measurement and specific theoretical arguments, I refer to the individual articles.

Introduction

Our personal relationships are important for how we feel and how we are doing, both privately and professionally. They are valuable channels for how we receive and perceive information, trends, and news. They provide us with resources to achieve what we desire. They are the helping hand or the shoulder to cry on when life is difficult. They shape us, one conversation at a time, and make us who we are. We are embedded in webs of these relationships that make up our personal networks and our communities. They are the invisible glue that ties networks and communities together.

Social scientists have studied the impact of personal relationships and networks for decades in various fields and contexts. These relationships have been shown to play an important role in individual outcomes as diverse as employment (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), political behaviour and opinions (Sinclair, 2012), housing (A. B. Andersson, 2021), health (Heizmann & Böhnke, 2019), and many other important aspects of human life. On the other hand, the absence of personal relationships – that is, loneliness and social isolation – have also been shown to have a negative impact on individual outcomes. For example, loneliness has been shown to increase the risk of dementia (Lara et al., 2019) and psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Sutin et al., 2020).

In this PhD dissertation, I use insights from this decade-long research on personal relationships and networks to study immigrant integration. More specifically, I study how having *personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority* can play a role in settling and adapting to a new life in the destination country. The dissertation is guided by the following overall research question: what role does personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority play in immigrant integration? I examine this research question by dividing it into two more specific sub-questions: 1) to which extent is personal relationships with ethnic majority members associated with labour market integration and civic integration? and 2) what meaning do immigrants ascribe to these relationships and the barriers and opportunities in forming them?

Personal relationships with co-ethnics, such as family members or ethno-cultural minority associations, and immigrants from other countries are indeed important for immigrant integration and their wellbeing in the destination country (Bhatti & Hansen, 2016; Damm, 2009; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Togeby, 2004). I argue in this dissertation, however, that relationships with the ethnic majority are important in other ways that have not received

enough scholarly attention. It is a central purpose of this dissertation to show the importance of these types of relationships for immigrant integration.

As I demonstrate in the dissertation, immigrants who have personal relationships with ethnic majority members have access to important resources and recognition that are hardly achievable through relationships with co-ethnics or immigrants from other countries (Hage, 1998; Skey, 2010). Precisely because of their ethnic majority status and the privileges that this status entails, they can open doors to mainstream society and offer support and protection against negative experiences (Simonsen, 2017c). This may even help immigrants to feel ownership and define themselves as belonging in the destination country.

A broader aim of the dissertation is to push the agenda that *connectivity matters* (Perry et al., 2018). Until recently, political science and the field of migration studies have been focused on how individual factors such as education, income, country of origin, and psychological dispositions matter for different individual outcomes. This dissertation is instead positioned with recent efforts to highlight that there is much to gain by not only looking at individual factors and atomised individuals (Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021; Campbell, 2013). By considering immigrants' personal relationships, we learn about the social contexts in which they are embedded and how differences in the content and number of these relationships give us a deeper understanding of individual differences (McCarty et al., 2019).

There is a growing literature that has gained increasing attention in the past few years by investigating the manyfold role of immigrants' social networks and how these roles impact settling and adapting to the destination country (Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021; Lubbers et al., 2007; Ryan, 2023; Vacca et al., 2018). This dissertation extends this newer literature and also applies insights and methods from the equally growing field of personal/egocentric network analysis (Hollstein, 2014; McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018).

*

In the following, I give an overview of the central argument of the dissertation. To explore the first research question (that is, to which extent personal relationships with ethnic majority members is associated with labour market and civic integration), I argue that we need to consider two distinct perspectives on how personal relationships matter for individual outcomes.

First, we consider an *instrumental perspective* that highlights how individuals can access resources (tangible and non-tangible) through their personal relationships. This perspective brings to our attention that individuals use their personal relationships to achieve goals important to them. I use this

goal-oriented perspective to examine the role of personal relationships with ethnic majority members in labour market integration. This perspective on personal relationships is most notably known from the social capital literature (Bourdieu, 2005; Portes, 2000; Ryan, 2011).

Secondly, we also need to consider a *symbolic perspective*. While the first perspective highlights access to resources and how relationships are used intentionally to achieve goals, this second perspective highlights how our relationships are important sources of social influence and socialisation (McCarty et al., 2019). By being in deep contact with our friends and close contacts, they may influence us over time in relation to our opinions, norms, and behaviour. We begin to adapt ways of being and seeing that align with, or borrows from, those most dear to us. I use this symbolic perspective to study immigrants' civic integration – that is, whether immigrants feel they belong in the destination country and the extent to which they support the institutions and norms of their new country.

I explore the second research question (that is, what meaning immigrants ascribe to their ethnic majority relationships and the barriers and opportunities in forming them) by conceptualising immigrants' experiences of barriers as *social and symbolic boundaries* (Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). This theoretical framework allows me to consider how political and societal forces on the macro-level are given meaning by immigrants when seeking contact with ethnic majority members, and how having personal relationships with the ethnic majority allows immigrants to interpret, navigate, and sometimes overcome social and symbolic boundaries.

To investigate these research question, I use observational survey data (both cross-sectional and panel data), official Danish register data, and in-depth qualitative interview data. Using both quantitative and qualitative data is important if we want to capture the two aspects of personal relationships. The former allows us to consider broader *patterns* in immigrants' personal relationships for many individuals – for example, whether those who have at least one relationship with the ethnic majority also tend to be in employment. On the other hand, personal relationships are also about *meaning*. We understand ourselves, our environments, and our life through the people close to us. The qualitative interviews allow me to examine how immigrants make sense of their relationships with the ethnic majority. As I elaborate later in the dissertation, I use the quantitative data to investigate the first research question and the qualitative data to investigate the second research question.

The dissertation is based on data collected among immigrants in Denmark. These are people born outside Denmark and who migrated to the country for various reasons, such as asylum for refugees, work permits or family reunification. While the data is collected in Denmark, the aim is to reflect on

the particularities of this context to generalise to other national contexts. While Denmark has relatively low ethnic segregation (Hassani, 2019), which may create more contact opportunities between immigrants and the ethnic majority, the country is also characterised by negative political rhetoric towards immigrants (Simonsen, 2019).

In the following, I first define the central concepts of the dissertation before situating the dissertation in relation to the existing scholarly literature. Based on this, I present the theoretical framework of the dissertation and elaborate on how the two sub-questions are examined empirically. Finally, I present my results and discuss their implications for the literature and society in general.

Defining personal relationships, the ethnic majority, and immigrants

Before moving on to situate the dissertation in the literature and present the theoretical framework, I start with some conceptual clarifications.

I define *personal relationships* as the connection between an individual and a member of this individual's personal network. Personal relationships can vary in type and role (Perry et al., 2018). For example, a personal relationship can be a friend, a colleague, a neighbour, or a peer in the same sports club or voluntary association. These types or roles of relationships can also vary in strength, for example with colleagues in contrast to close friends. In this dissertation I chose 'personal relationships' over 'friendships' for two reasons. First, I am interested in the various roles that these relationships can entail, such as neighbour or colleagues, and not only friends. Secondly, the term 'friendship' have different cultural meanings depending on country of origin, which can complicate measuring these types of relationships empirically in a reliable way (Perry et al., 2018).

When I occasionally use the concept 'personal network', I refer to the different personal relationships that an individual is connected to and how these people are connected to each other. This is what the social network analysis literature conceptualises as 'egocentric networks' (Perry et al., 2018) or 'personal networks' (McCarty et al., 2019), as I prefer in this dissertation. In the dissertation, I focus on individual personal relationships more than the entire network since immigrants' networks tend to be mixed between co-ethnics and ethnic majority members (de Miguel Luken & Tranmer, 2010; van Tubergen, 2015).

By *ethnic majority members*, I mean the dominant ethnic group that has 'native ancestry', has been in the destination country for many generations,

and whose culture and traditions are prevalent and unquestioned (Gordon, 1964; Simonsen, 2017a).¹

By *immigrants*, I mean people in their adulthood who were born outside of the destination country and migrated to it at a certain point in time. Immigrants are not a homogenous group: they are received differently by society depending on their country of origin or ethnicity (Portes & Zhou, 1993), they migrate for different reasons, they bring with them different experiences and resources, and they differ in their legal status and access to rights, such as citizenship. While I have described them as one group in this introduction, I examine and elaborate differences across immigrant groups throughout the dissertation. At the same time, there are also conditions that are similar for all immigrants because of the common condition of being born in another country and later migrating to the host country, such as establishing a new life in the destination country, learning customs, the language and norms and forming connections.

Overview

In the following, I first discuss the existing literature on immigrants' social networks, before presenting the theoretical framework of the dissertation. I then describe the research design of the project and present the central findings. I conclude by discussing the contributions, scope conditions and implications of the dissertation.

¹ The dominant position of the ethnic majority is not a natural order of things but is contingent and the result of historical power struggles (Hage, 1998: 61-67).

The existing literature

In the following, I first discuss the literature that has received the most attention in the existing literature on immigrants' social networks and relationships until recent years: ethnic communities. I then discuss two theoretical traditions from which I use insights to suggest an overall theoretical framework for understanding how personal relationships with ethnic majority members play a role in immigrant integration. Finally, I also discuss the limited literature on the barriers and opportunities that immigrants experience in establishing relationships with the ethnic majority.

Segmented assimilation theory and ethnic communities

A large part of the literature on how immigrants' social networks play a role in the adaptation and integration into the destination country have focused on ethnic communities. The focus of this literature has been less on personal relationships and more on how ethnic communities can play a positive role in adjusting to new societal settings in the destination country.

Alejandro Portes' (1993) seminal *segmented assimilation theory* has been particularly influential in this regard. Focusing on the US context, he argues that some immigrant groups lack opportunities to access American mainstream society because of social and ethnic segregation. Because of this denial of access to the mainstream, he shows that those immigrant groups who manage to build strong ethnic communities are better able to climb to the social ladder and prevent falling into social marginalisation. He shows how the common situation in the destination country sparks solidarity, creates networks and norms of reciprocity, and allows for the sharing of resources for the benefit of all community members (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993).

In addition to the segmented assimilation theory, work from political science and economics with a quantitative focus have studied how characteristics of ethnic enclaves, such as their size, are related to labour market integration and political participation (H. Andersson et al., 2022; Bhatti & Hansen, 2016; Damm, 2009). Other work related work has focused on the 'ethnic economy' (Wilson & Martin, 1982) and how immigrants mobilise around their ethnic identity to vote for ethnic minority candidates (Togeby, 1999).

Summing up, the segmented assimilation theory, and the other ethnic community studies, has convincingly drawn attention to how co-ethnics can build communities that are to the benefit of members of these communities: they create trust, solidarity, and the sharing of resources, which promotes

upward mobility and protects against influences from socially marginalised groups. However, as the segmented assimilation theory was developed to understand the US context, the original theory may not be suitable to describe European contexts where access to mainstream society is not as limited as in the US (However, see Ahrensberg, 2024).

What is missing in this literature is an approach better tailored to national contexts with less residential segregation and where access to the mainstream might be easier than in the US context. In this dissertation, I focus on social networks on the *personal level* instead of the *community level*. As Drouhot & Nee (2019) point out, European scholars have been at the forefront of shifting the focus from residential segregation and intermarriage in the US context to immigrants' personal networks and social capital, particularly in relation to the ethnic majority. This dissertation contributes to these efforts by investigating how relationships with the ethnic majority matter for immigrants in a European context with less residential segregation.

The role of ethnic majority members: contact and capital

In the existing literature, there are two dominant theoretical approaches to how ethnic majority members matter for immigrant integration: the social capital approach (Bourdieu, 2005; Portes, 2000; Putnam, 2007) and the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). In this dissertation, I use insights from both approaches to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the role of personal relationships with the ethnic majority in immigrant integration.

As Portes (1998: 2) notes, 'social capital has become one of the most popular exports from sociological theory into everyday language'. There are two different understandings of the concept (Portes, 2000). While the first perspective, associated with the work of Putnam, considers social capital as a 'public good', the other perspective, associated with the work of Bourdieu, considers social capital as a 'private good' (Portes, 2000; Weiler & Hinz, 2019). The first analyses social capital on a *collective level* and is usually associated with Robert Putnam's (2000, 2007) work. The fundamental insight of this approach is that well-connected communities and networks produces 'externalities', such as norms of reciprocity and social trust, that is of benefit to whole communities.² In other words, these 'collective resources' are to the

² It should be noted, however, that Alejandro Portes has criticised Robert Putnam's understanding of the concept and how it is measured in a series of articles (Portes, 1998, 2000; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). Accordingly, while Portes' segmented

benefit of everyone in these communities. Accordingly, this first understanding of the concept resembles the logic in the ethnic communities perspective presented above.

In migration studies, Robert Putnam's concepts of 'bonding social capital' and 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000, 2007) have been used extensively. Bonding social capital refers to the social capital that arises from relationships with people who are similar to each other in socially salient categories – in this case, ethnicity. This type of social capital is, according to Putnam, important for social and psychological support. Bridging social capital instead refers to the social capital that arises from relationships with people who are different from each other in socially salient categories. In migration studies, these are often defined as relationships with the ethnic majority (Nannestad et al., 2008; Ryan, 2011). Despite Putnam defining social capital on the collective level, the concepts have been applied to study individual-level outcomes such as income (Lancee, 2012) and political participation (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009).

The other understanding of the concept considers social capital as an *individual-level resource*. This understanding of social capital is usually associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2005). Within this perspective, the focus is on how different individuals have access to different amounts (and types) of resources through their personal relationships and networks (Bourdieu, 2005). For example, a well-connected and influential individual will have easier access to borrow money or help finding housing than an individual who has less relations. In other words, individuals differ in their amount of social capital, depending on the resources that they can access through their personal network. In the empirical literature on social capital, it is predominantly this individual-level social capital that has been used the most.

In this dissertation, I am interested in the personal relationships of immigrants, and hence, I find it more useful to draw on this individual-level understanding of social capital since it highlights each individual's relationships and not a community or a group of individuals. What I more specifically use from this individual-level understanding of social capital is the instrumental approach to personal relationships. Social capital is about accessing resources and asking for help to achieve particular goals, and this resource-based and instrumental logic is essential to understanding the importance of personal relationships. However, I argue that we also need an equally important approach to personal relationships than this resource-based and instrumental approach. This approach is borrowed from the intergroup contact theory.

assimilation theory highlights community-level resources, he positions himself closer to Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the concept.

The intergroup contact theory was developed to understand the conditions under which contact between members of different groups can reduce intergroup prejudice (Allport, 1954). In the original formulations, four basic conditions need to be met for intergroup contact to reduce intergroup prejudice: equal status between the involved groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support by the authorities, the law, or norms. While the empirical literature has tended to focus on how this contact affects ethnic majority members, there has been a growing body of research over the past decade that focuses on how contact with ethnic majority members instead affects ethnic minorities, particularly immigrants (Kruse, 2023; Simonsen, 2017c). This literature has also gone beyond the reduction of prejudice as the outcome to focus on various integration outcomes such as national belonging (Simonsen, 2017c), wellbeing, and naturalisation (Kruse, 2023).

Recent developments in the intergroup contact theory have highlighted that personal relationships, such as close friendships, or ‘affective ties’ to outgroup people are an important condition for intergroup contact to have positive effects (Pettigrew, 1998). However, empirical studies investigating how this deep contact in personal relationships with outgroup members (immigrants’ relationships with ethnic majority members in this case) affects individual outcomes remains understudied. In one of the studies of this dissertation, I contribute to this literature by examining how deep contact in close relationships with ethnic majority members is associated with immigrants’ civic integration.

While I draw on the social capital approach to highlight an instrumental approach to understanding personal relationships, I use the intergroup contact theory to highlight the *symbolic* side of personal relationships. Personal relationships are indeed important because they give us access to resources; however, there is also a side to relationships that is about identity, opinions, and norms. The intergroup contact theory brings to our attention that personal relationships are important mechanisms of social influence and socialisation (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018). The theory teaches us that by interacting with each other, spending time together, and building relationships together, members of different groups are influenced over time. Different social and psychological processes are at play here – for example, discovering that deep contact reduces anxiety towards outgroup members or learning that they have more in common with outgroup members. These various influential processes that happen in personal relationships and networks are described as ‘social influence’ in the social network literature (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018).

Forming relationships with members of the ethnic majority

The different literatures on who forms relationships with members of the ethnic majority have in common that they focus on individual or contextual factors that make it more likely for some immigrants than others to have ethnic majority relationships.

First, the already discussed intergroup contact theory consists of four basic conditions – also known as situational factors – that make intergroup contact have positive effects. Another part of the literature focuses on how personal characteristics of immigrants predict whether they have relationships with members of the ethnic majority. They find that socioeconomic resources, gender, and region of origin matters for who forms such relationships (de Miguel Luken & Tranmer, 2010; van Tubergen, 2015). Most of the personal characteristics found to be important in this literature are factors that plausibly affect *where* immigrants spend their time and, hence, the contact opportunities that they have with ethnic majority members (Blau, 1994; Larsen & Larsen, 2024).

The homophily literature would predict that immigrants tend to form relationships with co-ethnics rather than with members of the ethnic majority, and that those who form relationships with the ethnic majority tend to share other characteristics, such as age or educational level (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily is a social network concept that highlights that individuals tend to form relationships with others who are like themselves in socially salient categories such as gender, education, or ethnicity.

While these literatures have been particularly useful in quantitative studies, I use a different approach in this dissertation. I argue that there are two areas where the current literature has blind spots. First, these literatures have in common that they formalise more ‘objective’ conditions that make it more likely that immigrants establish relationships with the ethnic majority. Secondly, the described literature does not focus much on the societal barriers that may make contact and forming relationships difficult. The literature is instead more focused on the opportunities (contextual or individual factors) that make contact and relationships more likely.

Following Kindler’s (2021) lead, I argue in favour of focusing on the specific social context and the experience that immigrants have in these contexts. That is, instead of focusing on formalised conditions or the law-like formulation of homophily, it is an empirical question what conditions play a role in the context and, more importantly, the experienced barriers that make it less likely to develop relationships. I also analyse these barriers as social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Doing so brings to our attention how immigrants themselves experience and interpret the

boundaries and how these boundaries often have macro-political origins (Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b). I return to these concepts in the next section where I present the theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

In the following, I present the theoretical framework of the dissertation, informed by the literature discussed in the section above. I first present the two perspectives on how personal relationships with the ethnic majority plays a role in immigrant integration followed by the theoretical framework for understanding the opportunities and barriers in establishing these relationships.

The instrumental perspective on ethnic majority relationships

The instrumental perspective on how ethnic majority relationships play a role in immigrant integration highlights the importance of *access to resources* in achieving goals related to integration. As mentioned, this mirrors the social capital approach discussed above (Bourdieu, 2005; Portes, 2000). For example, when applying for a job or struggling to understand a letter from the public administration, immigrants may draw on their relationships with ethnic majority members. These friends or acquaintances may help them practice the native language, call the public administration on their behalf, or use their knowledge and status in other ways to help immigrants and provide different types of support. It may also be the other way around, with friends or colleagues offering their help or advice without being asked. No matter the direction, central to this approach to understanding personal relationships is that it highlights that those immigrants who have relationships with ethnic majority members can access important resources which can help them in entering the labour market or achieving other goals important to them in the destination country.

Two important resources that ethnic majority members tend to possess which immigrants can access through their personal relationships is ‘national capital’ (Hage, 1998; Skey, 2010) and the social capital of the ethnic majority members. The first highlights how ethnic majority members master the language, norms, and cultural know-how of the destination country precisely because of their privileged status as the ethnic majority and life-long exposure to this culture and language. By having relationships with members of the ethnic majority, immigrants may learn the destination country’s language more easily and become familiar with cultural traditions and norms faster. The second resource, social capital, highlights that ethnic majority members tend to know more people (and more resourceful people) in the host country than immigrants (van Tubergen, 2014). Hence, having relationships with ethnic majority members may work as a ‘bridging tie’ (Granovetter, 1973; Ryan, 2016)

to access resources and information from mainstream society, where ethnic majority members tend to be more embedded because of their ethnic majority status.

The symbolic perspective on ethnic majority relationships

While the instrumental approach focuses on the access to resources and how these resources can be utilised to achieve goals related to integration, this symbolic perspective highlights an *unintentional* aspect of personal relationships. It highlights that individuals are influenced over time through their personal relationships and network when they spend time together and interact. It happens as a byproduct of interaction and contact, and it may influence immigrants' norms, world views, values, or behaviour and thereby also their integration.

As mentioned above, this is the logic that is behind the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). The intergroup contact theory highlights different psychological processes that reduce intergroup prejudice over time. One such process is cognitive, and this shows that members of different groups learn that they have more in common with outgroup members than they initially thought, which, in turn, may reduce intergroup prejudice. Another process is emotional and indicates that individuals may feel positive emotions such as empathy through this deep contact. Yet another process is that individuals may experience processes of 'self-expansion' where they extend their conceptions of 'we' to include the outgroup (Simonsen, 2017c).

In the social network literature, social influence is an umbrella term to describe the various social processes that affect individuals in the same social network, causing them to eventually have similar opinions, norms, and behaviour (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018). I find this concept useful to describe the above processes that may happen unintentionally over time in deep contact between immigrants and ethnic majority members.

One final social process not described in the intergroup contact theory is interpersonal socialisation. This is a process through which members of the same social network internalise norms, values, or world views that dominate in these networks. Several studies have found that socialisation takes place in personal relationships (Bracegirdle et al., 2023; Mach et al., 2022; Oosterhoff et al., 2022) and not only in primary and secondary institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The two perspectives and types of immigrant integration outcomes

As the two perspectives highlight different logics of how personal relationships with the ethnic majority matter, this also has implications for which immigrant integration outcomes they are useful for understanding.

Since the instrumental perspective highlights the resources that can be accessed through personal relationships, it is suitable to examine integration outcomes where immigrants are in a ‘resource deficit’ and need extra resources to achieve the integration goal. In this dissertation, I use the perspective to understand how ethnic majority members may support immigrants’ *labour market integration*. Accessing the labour market in the destination country requires resources that many immigrants may have difficulties achieving in the first couple of years in the destination country, such as learning the language and entering the mainstream economy.

The symbolic perspective is suitable to study more intangible integration outcomes that are related to identity, such as national belonging (Simonsen, 2016; Skey, 2010) or outcomes related to norms and values. I use this perspective to study immigrants’ *civic integration* – that is, the extent to which immigrants feel included in the host society and that they belong there, as well as the extent to which they embrace the civic and democratic norms and institutions of the destination country (Goodman & Wright, 2015).

Boundaries and personal relationships with the ethnic majority

As mentioned above, I use the sociological concepts of social and symbolic boundaries to understand the barriers that immigrant experience when it comes to establishing relationships with the ethnic majority. These concepts bring to our attention how boundaries are *experienced* as different types of exclusion, and how these boundary-drawings often have a macro-political origin (Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b).

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions that individuals and groups make to distinguish themselves from other groups or individuals (Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). They are important to study since they categorise people into groups, and they define who social actors understand as ‘us’ and ‘them’. These symbolic boundaries are also important since they often form the basis for social boundaries. These are ‘objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities’ (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 168). In other words, social boundaries are materialised

inequalities based on social class or ethnicity such as ethnic segregation or unequal access to public services or the labour market.

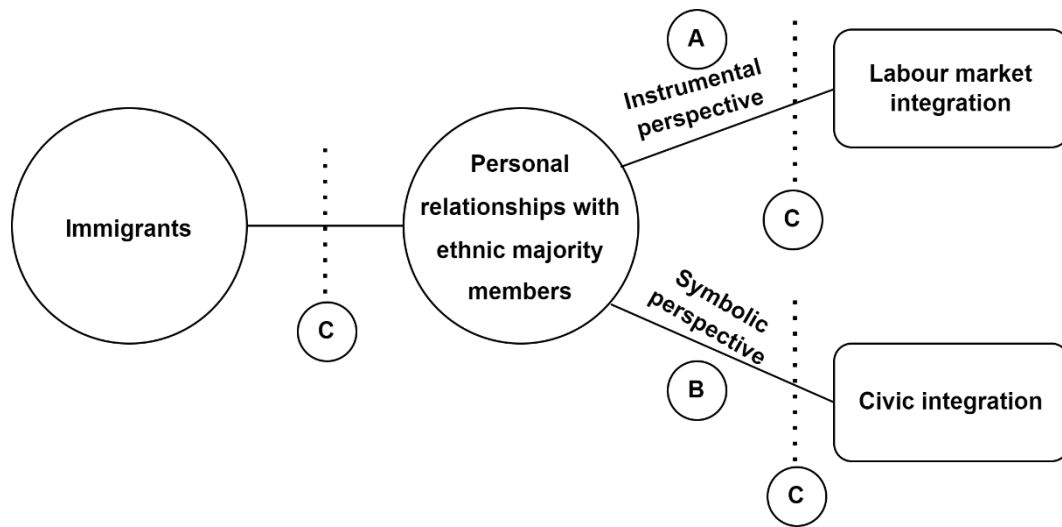
Immigrants may experience different types of symbolic boundaries that affect their willingness and motivation to engage in contact with members of the ethnic majority. They may have negative interaction experiences with ethnic majority members where they feel excluded or met with prejudice based on their ethnicity or status as an immigrant. Symbolic boundary drawing by politicians and the media where immigrants are portrayed as not belonging to the nation may also affect their willingness to engage in the host society (Simonsen, 2016). More indirectly, policies and regulations by the government may also send 'signals' to immigrants about whether or not they belong in the destination country. As the policy feedback literature argues, policies may have an effect by sending signals to citizens about their position in society (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Simonsen, 2020b).

Immigrants can also experience social boundaries in the sense that there can be more practical or material boundaries that make it difficult to establish relationships with the ethnic majority. For example, not speaking the native language or not having the cultural know-how about friend-making culture in the host country can make it difficult to engage in deep contact and form relationships.

The framework of social and symbolic boundaries can also be used to understand how personal relationships with the ethnic majority matter for those who manage to establish these relationships. First, applying the instrumental approach to what was described above, personal relationships can be used to navigate and overcome social boundaries. For example, through their ethnic majority relationships, immigrants can practice the native language, which can help them overcome social boundaries such as access to the labour market. Secondly, their personal relationships can help immigrants deal with symbolic boundaries from politicians and the media. While the political rhetoric may tell immigrants that they do not belong, their personal relationships with the ethnic majority may teach them that they can ignore this rhetoric and feel empowered to define their national belonging themselves. In other words, their personal relationships may, through social influence mechanisms, have a shielding effect against negative political rhetoric (Simonsen, 2017a).

Figure 1 gives an overview of the theoretical model and how the three articles of this dissertation focus on different aspects of this model.

Figure 1: Overview of the theoretical model and the role of the three articles



Note: The letters denote the three papers in this dissertation: Papers A, B, and C. The dotted lines are social and symbolic boundaries.

Research design

As described in the introduction, this dissertation is guided by the following two research questions: 1) to which extent is personal relationships with ethnic majority members associated with labour market integration and civic integration? and 2) what meaning do immigrants ascribe to these relationships and the barriers and opportunities in forming them?

To examine the first research question empirically, I use quantitative observational data. Since the research question focuses on *patterns* in personal relationships with the ethnic majority and how this is related to patterns in integration outcomes, a quantitative approach is most feasible. In contrast, the second research question focuses on how personal relationships with the majority are *given meaning* and how social and symbolic boundaries are *experienced*, which calls for a qualitative approach. As mentioned earlier, personal relationships and networks have two important aspects: the structure or patterns, and the meanings that are ascribed to relationships (Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021; Hollstein, 2014)

In the following, I start by describing the Danish case, before moving on to the research design used to examine the first research question and finally, the research design used to examine the second research question.

Denmark as a case

Immigrants in Denmark are heterogenous groups with various reasons for arriving in the country. Today, immigrants make up 12% of the Danish population, and 3% of the population are the children of immigrants. The ten largest origin countries (excluding the children of immigrants) are Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Germany, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia, and Great Britain. These countries of origin are representative of the different reasons for migration to Denmark: fleeing war, being reunified with family, and work.

It has been an explicit political goal for decades in Denmark to distribute immigrants across the country through spatial dispersal policies and other anti-segregation policies (Damm, 2009; Hassani, 2019). Because of these policies, there are no municipalities in Denmark today that have a high level of co-ethnic concentration (Hassani, 2019; Simonsen, 2020b). This creates good possibilities for immigrants to meet ethnic majority members compared to contexts, such as the US, where there is a higher degree of ethnic segregation. A recent study supports that there may be good contact opportunities in Denmark since 55% of ethnic majority members report having at least one immigrant friend (Larsen & Larsen, 2024).

On the other hand, there are also circumstances in Denmark that may make it difficult for immigrants to form personal relationships with the ethnic majority. First, discrimination against immigrants, particularly those with a Middle Eastern ethnic background, has been documented in various areas in Denmark such as on the job market (Dahl & Krog, 2018), in the school setting (Olsen et al., 2020), and with clients in employment agencies (Pedersen et al., 2018).

Secondly, Denmark has witnessed an increase in hostile political rhetoric towards immigrants, especially towards those who come from Muslim-majority countries (Ahrensberg et al., 2021; Simonsen, 2020b). Simonsen (2019) has shown that issues related to immigrants and integration are more salient in official political rhetoric in Denmark compared to other European countries. These national, symbolic boundary drawings have been about the extent to which immigrants are committed to ‘Danish’ norms and in relation to recurrent public debates about what personal qualities it takes to be a ‘true Dane’ (Simonsen, 2016).

Finally, this shift has also been visible at the policy level, where Denmark has moved to have some of the most restrictive requirements for achieving both permanent residency and citizenship (Midtbøen, 2015; Simonsen, 2020b, 2020a). As in many other European countries, Denmark has witnessed a shift to an era of civic integration where immigrants are expected to acquire ‘citizen-like’ or civic skills (Goodman & Wright, 2015; Jensen, 2016; Midtbøen, 2015). Increasingly, these legal statuses are given as ‘a prize at the end of the road’ (Mouritsen, 2013: 91), and immigrants are expected to identify with the nation and integrate into ‘a common core’ of norms and culture belonging to the ethnic majority (Bloemraad & Wright, 2014: 300-301).

These shifts in Danish political rhetoric and policies could give the impression that it is the Danish ethnic majority population that has shifted their opinions towards immigrants and driven the change in rhetoric and policies ‘bottom-up’.

However, Simonsen (2020a) shows that these opinions have been relatively stable over the past decades. This suggests that it is not public opinion that has driven the changes. Cross-national comparison shows the same picture: compared to other European countries, the Danish population is positioned in the middle when it comes to immigration-related issues (Simonsen, 2016, 2020a). This may suggest that ethnic majority members in Denmark, in general, are not hostile towards immigrants if they come in contact.

As I show in Paper C, immigrants may distinguish between the signals that they get from policies and political rhetoric on the one hand and their everyday experiences with ethnic majority members on the other. As mentioned earlier, Simonsen (2017c) has shown one such mechanism: those with deep and

meaningful contact with the ethnic majority use these personal relationships as shields against negative political rhetoric.

Labour market and civic integration through survey and register data

I examine the first research question of the dissertation, focusing on labour market integration and civic integration, in two separate papers. Both papers are based on survey data collected among immigrants who arrived in Denmark between May 2014 and May 2018. This survey was collected in two waves in 2021 and 2023. The data source for measuring the integration outcomes differs between the two papers, and the same is the case for whether one or two waves of the survey is used.

The survey is collected in collaboration with the research project ‘Outside Citizenship’ at Aarhus University, funded by Independent Research Fund Denmark. The sample is stratified in two groups: those who are from EU/EEA countries and immigrants from other regions of the world. Individuals originating from the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland) are not considered part of this population since they are assumed to resemble the ethnic majority population of Denmark. Those who are not from the EU/EEA are oversampled to account for this group typically having lower response rates than those from EU/EEA countries (Gundelach & Nørregård-Nielsen, 2007). The survey could be answered on the internet (CAWI), and those who did not answer the survey at first were called for a telephone interview (CATI) instead. The survey was available in the following languages to increase the response rate, particularly among the less resourceful: Danish, English, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Turkish, and Somali.

The survey was collected with two main goals: examining the integration outcomes and wellbeing of new immigrants in Denmark who do not have citizenship and examining the personal network of those newly arrived immigrants. I developed the latter part of the survey based on the personal/egocentric network literature (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018). This included a name generator, which is the instrument I use in these two papers to measure personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority, and which I describe below.

Despite our efforts to reach the less integrated by sending out invitations to the survey through eBoks³, through providing telephone interviews as an option, and providing the option to answer the survey in other languages,

³ A digital mailbox where residents in Denmark receive information from the public authorities.

there are indications that it is the more integrated that answered the survey. For example, the sample have high average levels of labour market integration and civic integration outcomes, such as civic duty. Statistics Denmark, who collected the survey data and are known to have high data quality, ensured that the sample is representative in relation to sociodemographic characteristics such as gender and education. However, this representativity appears to not extend to the immigrant integration outcomes examined here. This possible (and not surprising) sample selection bias towards the more integrated does not, however, make the results less interesting, since the analyses can be considered conservative estimates. In other words, finding support for the hypotheses even for the more integrated may indicate that the findings also apply to the less integrated.

Measuring personal relationships with the ethnic majority

A name generator is the most common way to measure social networks in the field of personal/egocentric network analysis (Perry et al., 2018) and the broader field of social network analysis (Borgatti et al., 2018). This survey instrument is designed to ease the cognitive burdens of the respondents and make them recall members of their personal network in a more systematic way (McCarty et al., 2019). There are two steps when measuring personal networks through name generators. First, respondents are asked to mention the names (or initials) of the persons in their personal network. Afterwards, they are asked questions about each of the mentioned persons. In doing so, we gain detailed information about the personal network because we learn about the attributes of each person that the respondent mentions.

The name generator developed for the survey is the following:

Whom from outside your nearest family do you feel especially close to here in Denmark? For example, it can be friends, neighbours, cousins, or colleagues. It cannot be your parents, siblings, or partner.

We would like you to write down their first name or initials below. You can mention up to five names.

The limitation of five names is in part due to economic and time concerns. For each additional person that they mention, they are asked several questions. However, since we are measuring the *closest* relationships, the limitation of up to five is reasonable since studies show that most people have up to five close relationships outside of the nearest family (Perry et al., 2018). In name generators, it is important to be specific about what types of relationships are

important to delimit the type of persons that they mention and to be specific about the type of persons that they should mention. This is to ensure that the respondents understand the question in the same way, resulting in elicited networks and relationships that are comparable.

In this case, I limit their personal network to the destination country (Denmark) since I am interested in their current situation and what role their local personal relationships play in their labour market and civic integration. In addition, I am interested in the relationships outside of the immediate family since it is those relationships that can typically open or close the door to mainstream society. More importantly, in this dissertation, I am interested in the relationships to the ethnic majority, which would, per definition, not be family members.

After eliciting the names of the close relationships, the survey asks about the attributes of each person. The attributes examined in this survey are the country of birth and the education of each mentioned person.⁴ If a mentioned person is born in the host country, the survey instrument further asks about where the parents of this person are born. Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish between ethnic majority members and the children of immigrants (the latter are born in the host country, but their parents are born in another country). This is how relationships with ethnic majority members are measured in these two first papers based on quantitative data. In some model specifications, it is quantified as a binary variable: whether each respondent has at least one personal relationship with an ethnic majority member or not. In other applications, it is the number of personal relationships with ethnic majority members, that is up to five relationships.

As mentioned, the survey was collected in two waves: in the summer of 2021 and the summer of 2023. In the first wave, the response rate was 40% (N=1821) of the total sample of 4,670 individuals.⁵ This response rate is relatively high when collecting survey data among immigrants in Denmark (Gundelach & Nørregård-Nielsen, 2007). The response rate of the second wave was 38% of those who answered the first round, which was 749 respondents. The country of origin of the respondents who answered both rounds of the data collection was from the following world regions: 33% from the Middle East (many from Syria and Iran), 15% from South Asia (mostly from India and

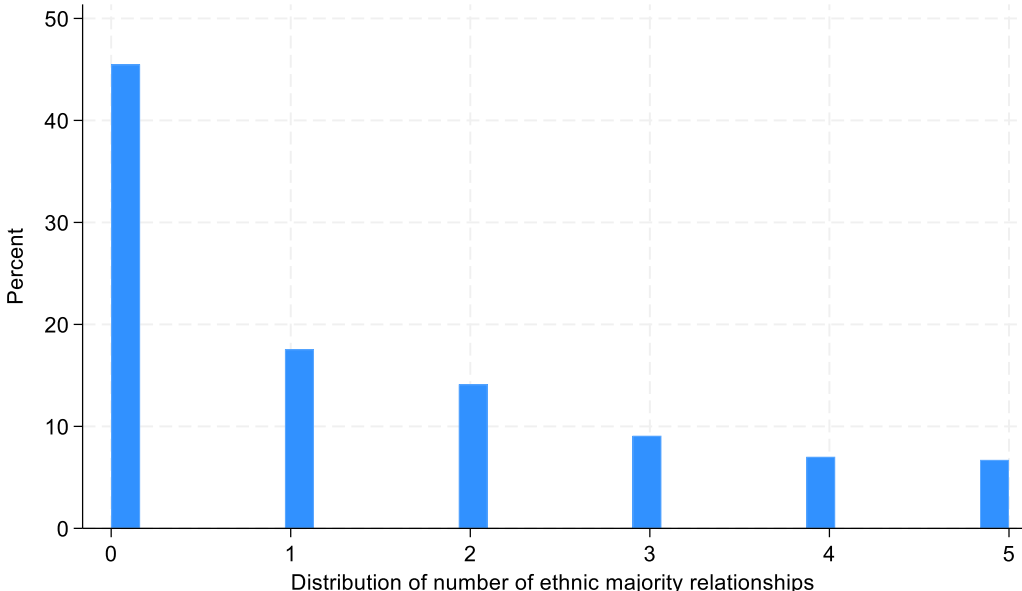
⁴ The education of each person mentioned proved to be hard to use in analyses since a large proportion had missing values. It appears to be difficult to recall the educational level of personal relationships.

⁵ In Paper A, where I only use the first wave of the survey, it is N=1310 since it is this number that answered the network items in the survey and because I excluded students and the retired from the sample.

Nepal), and 12% from Eastern Europe (many from Ukraine and Romania). The last 40% of the sample is more diverse in terms of region of origin. These proportions are almost identical to the sample of the first wave, which is a varied sample reflecting the main origin countries as discussed earlier.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the number of close relationships with the ethnic majority in wave 1 for those included in the analysis of labour market integration (students and retirees are excluded). It shows that just under half of the respondents (45.5%) do not have any ethnic majority relationships but that most of the respondents have at least one. However, the higher the number of such relationships, the fewer respondents have them.

Figure 2: Distribution of number of relationships with members of the ethnic majority (wave 1)

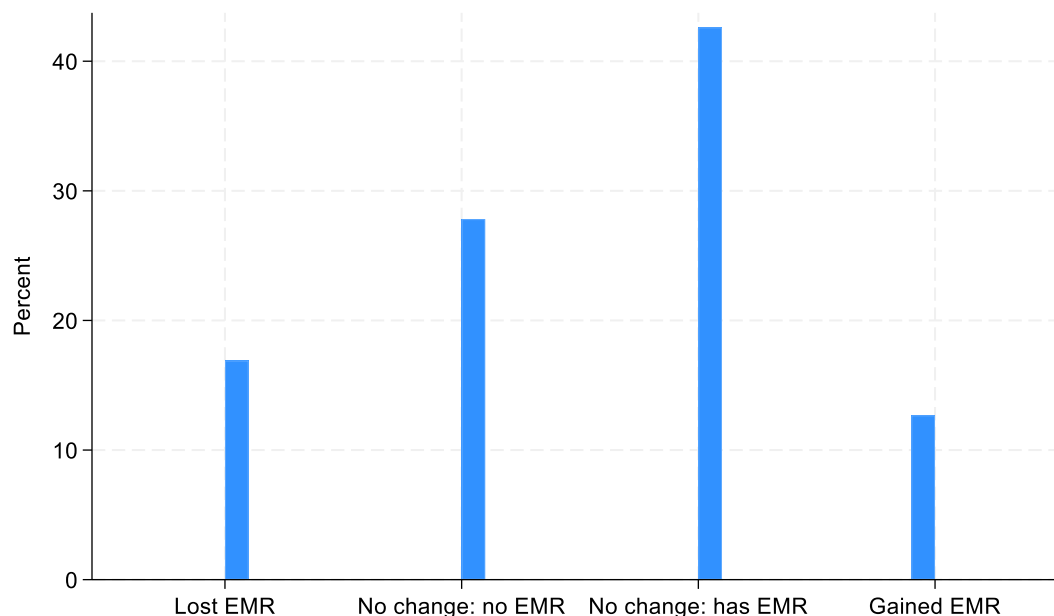


Note: Data from wave 1 of the survey. 45.5% of newly arrived immigrants do not have any ethnic majority members as their closest relationships. This is the case for 54.5% of them. M: 1.34; s.d.: 1.6. N=1310.

Figure 3 shows the change in having close personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority between the two waves, which is relevant for Paper B. It shows that most of the respondents who answered both waves experienced no change between the two waves in 2021 and 2023 (both those with and without ethnic majority relationships). A total of 16.9% lost all their ethnic majority relationships between the waves, while 12.6% gained one or more ethnic majority relationships. Since the first wave of the survey was collected in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and the second wave in 2023 when all the restrictions were gone, these changes may have been influenced by these societal circumstances. The losses of relationships may be higher because

lockdowns made it hard to spend time together and nurture personal relationships. Similarly, the gain of relationships may be smaller than in a situation without a COVID-19 pandemic since there would have been more contact opportunities between these newly arrived immigrants and ethnic majority members.

Figure 3: Changes between waves in close ethnic majority relationships (EMR)



Note: The figure shows the change in close ethnic majority relationships (EMR) between wave 1 in 2021 and wave 2 in 2023. ‘Lost EMR’ = lost all close ethnic majority relationships between the two waves (16.9%). ‘No change: no EMR’ = no changes between the waves; respondents did not have any close ethnic majority relationships in wave 1 or wave 2 (27.82%). ‘No change: has EMR’ = no changes between the waves; respondents had close ethnic majority relationships both in waves 1 and 2 (42.61%). ‘Gained EMR’ = while respondents did not have any close ethnic majority relationships in wave 1, they gained at least one in wave 2 (12.68%). N=568.

Labour market integration: correlational study combining survey data and Danish register data

As mentioned before, I measure the outcomes of the two papers using different data sources and waves of the survey. In Paper A, I examine the role of ethnic majority relationships in supporting labour market integration. The theoretical basis of this paper is the instrumental approach presented above. Empirically, I use the first wave of the survey to measure the relationships, and I use official Danish register data to measure labour market integration. I examine *three aspects of labour market integration* in this correlational

study: whether they are employed or not, whether they are on public benefits or not, and their annual income.⁶

This official administrative data is known to be highly reliable, and it is a key advantage to this study on labour market integration since self-reported measures of employment and income are prone to social desirability bias (Angel et al., 2019). All individuals with a residence permit in Denmark have a unique personal identification number (CPR) that is used across all areas of the public administration. This allows researchers to identify individuals through administrative records on, for example, health, residence/citizenship status, crime, and in this case, individual labour market statistics. If the CPR number is known for each respondent of a survey (as is the case in this survey), they can be connected to this register data through Statistics Denmark, the official statistical bureau of Denmark. This research design is unique since it is one of the first studies to link self-reported personal relationships with objective measures of labour market integration from administrative records. Prior studies have mainly relied on, e.g., neighbourhood composition measured with register data.

However, there are also methodological limitations to this research design. It is based on cross-sectional data since I use the first wave of the survey from 2021 and link this to register data also from 2021. Since register data from the year of the second wave is not available before the end of 2024, it is not possible to link the second wave of the survey to register data.

Because of this cross-sectional nature of the data, it is not possible to have a causal interpretation of the results. By only having data at one point in time and hence a ‘snapshot’ of relationships and labour market integration, we cannot use time to rule out unobserved time-invariant variables and time effects (Stock & Watson, 2020). As an example of the latter, the data is from 2021 when the COVID-19 crisis was dominant in Denmark. The lockdowns may have impacted the tendency to meet ethnic majority members as well as the possibility of getting a job or annual income.

Secondly, reverse causality is plausible: it is reasonable that immigrants who manage to get a job also meet ethnic majority members through this job and form personal relationships there. Similarly, it is also possible that immigrants with higher incomes have a greater chance of meeting ethnic majority members as they have more contact opportunities because they share socio-economic status (Blau, 1994; McPherson et al., 2001).

⁶ There is one labour market outcome (employment) on both survey waves. However, this measure is not used, since almost all those who answered both survey waves (N=568) were in employment.

However, as I have argued in the instrumental approach section above, there is good reason to expect that the ‘causal arrow’ also goes from having personal relationships with the ethnic majority to labour market integration because of the resources that immigrants may access through these relationships. I do not, however, make any causal claims in this study, and I leave it up to future research to investigate how personal relationships with the majority is causally related to labour market integration.

Civic integration: studying personal relationships with the ethnic majority with panel survey data

In Paper B, I measure civic integration using items from the survey, which enables me to use the panel data structure of both waves. In the paper, I argue that we need to distinguish between *two dimensions of civic integration* when measuring it on the individual level: the extent to which immigrants feel included or that they belong in the destination country, and the extent to which they embrace the civic and democratic norms of the destination country. The theoretical basis underlying this second paper is the symbolic perspective presented above.

The panel data structure of this research design poses advantages compared to the cross-sectional structure of Paper A. Examining the role of personal relationships with the ethnic majority in civic integration over time makes it possible to rule out two types of unobserved and potentially confounding variables (Stock & Watson, 2020). First, it rules out time-invariant variables. For example, it may be possible that personality traits, such as extraversion, may affect the tendency to form personal relationships with the ethnic majority and influence the tendencies to identify with the host country and embrace norms. Secondly, it rules out unobserved time-variant variables that affect all individuals such as the abovementioned COVID-19 crisis.

While this research design takes into account some of the methodological issues of Paper B, panel data designs do have limitations given that they are also observational and that variation is not randomly assigned as a result. Hence, one of the challenges to causality in this study is that it is not randomly assigned or an exogenous shock that has assigned some immigrants with ethnic majority relationships and not others.

Accordingly, the research design does not rule out unobserved variables that *both* vary over time and across individuals (Stock & Watson, 2020). An example in this case could be the introduction of a new law that affects some immigrants and not others in ways that influence the tendency to form personal relationships as well as the tendency to embrace the norms and institutions of the host country. This type of policy could materially influence how

immigrants spend their time (for example, new requirements for how much they are supposed to work) and symbolically send them negative signals about not belonging, which may make them feel excluded and alienated from mainstream society.

However, the contribution of Paper B is not a perfect causal design but instead that it comes closer than existing studies that have mainly investigated related research questions with predominantly cross-sectional designs and the methodological issues that these entail.

Relationships with ethnic majority members through qualitative interviews⁷

I examine the second research question of the dissertation by analysing qualitative in-depth interviews with immigrants in Denmark. This is the purpose of Paper C where I use the theoretical framework of social and symbolic boundaries discussed above. The interviews, which were also collected in collaboration with the Outside Citizenship project, were conducted between July 2021 and April 2022. My role in the data collection was to develop the questions related to the interviewees' personal relationships and networks, and I conducted one interview in Arabic. While a total of 49 interviews were collected, I excluded 11 of these in my analyses since this group came to Denmark because of having a Danish partner. While this could be interesting to study since they have a particular access to mainstream society, it is outside the scope of this dissertation. The average length of the interviews were about one hour.

The main purpose of collecting the interviews for the Outside Citizenship project was to investigate how it affects immigrants to experience that citizenship is out of reach for them. As such, the main criterion for recruitment was that potential interviewees did not have citizenship and that they were far from achieving it. The interviewees were at least 18 years old at the time of the interviews. Since it is known that immigrants are a hard-to-reach group for recruitment for interviews, we used two strategies to reach potential interviewees: targeted sampling and snowball sampling. Using the first strategy, we contacted volunteer organisations that focus on providing support for refugees and immigrants as well as cultural associations focusing on ethnic minorities. We also recruited through various Facebook groups that focus on particular ethnic minorities such as 'Afghans in Denmark' or groups with more political purposes such as 'Family reunification in Denmark'.

⁷ This section is based on the methods-section of Paper C.

Because of the main purpose of collecting the interviews and the recruitment strategies, most of the interviews were dominated by political themes such as citizenship policies in Denmark, politicians, and the public administration and government. In spite of this and despite the recruitment methods, the group of interviewees were diverse in terms of country of origin, years in Denmark, educational level, gender, and type of residence permit in Denmark. While being diverse on these characteristics, it should be noted that the interview participants are likely to be more politically aware and politically interested than the average immigrant in Denmark.

Most of the interviewees were between 20 and 40 years old, and they were from 25 countries from various regions of the world: Europe, other Western countries, and non-Western countries, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa. There were many Syrian refugees among the interviewees. Only nine interviewees had permanent residency at the time of the interview. They arrived in Denmark between 1998 and 2021, with two-thirds arriving within the last ten years. Twenty-nine of the interviewees identified as women, while 20 of them identified as men. They varied in their educational background, ranging from elementary school to having a PhD degree.

Two-thirds of the interviews were conducted by one interviewer, while the rest were conducted by two interviewers. In the latter case, there was a main interviewer while the other took notes and had an overview of the interview guide and would ask supplementary questions. The interviews were carried out in one of three different languages: Danish, English, or Arabic. Additionally, we used a translator for five of the interviews. These translators usually knew the interviewees beforehand, so they were not professionals. It was our clear impression that there was much information lost in these interviews with the translators since the translations were usually short, and this affected the dynamic conversation-like character that was present in the interviews without translators.

On the other hand, using translators enabled us to interview people who would otherwise not have their voices heard. It was the less resourceful of the interviewees who needed a translator. This is also the case with the interviews conducted in Arabic by research team members (including myself): conducting the interviews in this language allowed the less resourceful, particularly Syrian refugees who have not been in Denmark for many years, to participate in the interview study.

In qualitative interviews, the positionality and power positions between the interviewer(s) and the interviewees matter since they shape the nature of the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The knowledge produced during interviews are partly a product of the positionality of the participants and how they are situated in relation to each other. In this study, the ethnic

background of the interviewers is important to reflect on. Most of the interviews (18 interviews) were carried out by one or two members of the Danish ethnic majority. A risk could be that the participants would hold back opinions or not feel comfortable talking about political issues. This was, however, not the case. If anything, it made the interviewees be more explicit and elaborate more on their opinions, which they might not have done if interviewed by an ethnic minority member, as Simonsen (2017b) also experiences when interviewing children of immigrants in Denmark.

Ten of the interviews were carried out by one ethnic minority member, and an additional ten were carried out by a mixed team of one ethnic majority member and one ethnic minority member. In general, I have not identified any patterns that differentiates the interviews in content when comparing across the different ethnic backgrounds of the interviewees. This may be because the interviewers succeeded in creating a comfortable environment (the interviewees chose the location of the interview) and assured the interviewees that the interviews were anonymised and that they were solely interested in their opinions.

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed by student assistants, and then coded by me in the software program NVivo. As suggested by Deterding & Waters (2021), I used the *flexible coding* procedure where the whole body of interviews is first read and then coded thematically based on broad themes related to the research question – for example, a broad theme for their experiences interacting with ethnic majority members, one for everything related to their personal network, and a theme for their views on politicians, the government, and the public administration. After this, I conducted a focused coding where I coded one theme from the first phase of the coding at a time. At this point, I also introduced codes from the literature – for example, operationalising ‘social capital’ and ‘symbolic boundaries’ into specific codes – and included descriptions on how to specifically look for these social phenomena in the interviews.

Table 1 gives an overview of the focus of each study of the dissertation and the data sources and methods used. While Paper A and Paper B examine how patterns in personal relationships with the ethnic majority is associated with immigrant integration outcomes, Paper C instead adds a ‘subjective’ layer by examining how these personal relationships are experienced as meaningful and as interpretive lenses to understand the social and symbolic boundaries of destination country.

Table 1: Overview of data sources and methods in the articles

Paper	Focus of the study	Data sources	Methods
A	Close personal relationships with ethnic majority members and immigrant labour market integration	Cross-sectional study: Survey data, wave 1 (2021) Register data on employment and income (2021) N=1310	OLS regressions /linear probability models (LPM)
B	Close personal relationships with ethnic majority members and immigrant civic integration	Survey panel data, waves 1 and 2 (2021 and 2023) N=568	Regression with two-way fixed effects (individual fixed effects and time fixed effects)
C	Social and symbolic boundaries in forming personal relationships with ethnic majority members, and how these relationships are given meaning and used to navigate these boundaries	38 in-depth qualitative interviews	Flexible coding (Deterding & Waters, 2021) in NVivo

Central findings

In the following, I present the central findings of the three studies of the dissertation, which are organised around the two sub-questions to the overall research question. I start by presenting the findings on how personal relationships with the ethnic majority play a role in labour market and civic integration before focusing on the experienced social and symbolic boundaries in forming relationships with the ethnic majority.

Labour market integration and ethnic majority relationships⁸

I examine three aspects of *labour market integration*: whether immigrants are in employment, whether they are on public benefits, and their annual income. As mentioned before, this study is purely correlational: it is not possible to make causal claims given the data structure and research design. I treat employment and public benefits as binary variables, and I use linear probability models (LPM) to estimate the regression coefficients. Annual income is logarithmically transformed to account for the right-skewed distribution of the variable, which is common for individual-level data on income. I measure *close personal relationships with ethnic majority members* both as a binary variable of having at least one relationship with an ethnic majority member (1) or not (0) and as the number of such relationships (0 to 5).

Close personal relationships with the majority and labour market integration

In Table 2, I test the simple hypothesis whether having at least one personal relationship with ethnic majority members is associated with being in employment, being off public benefits, and a difference in annual income. In these statistical models, I control for age, gender, educational level, year of arrival in Denmark, category of residence permit in Denmark, and whether the respondent is from the MENAPT countries.⁹

⁸ This section presenting the results for labour market integration is based on the results-section of Paper A.

⁹ MENAPT is an abbreviation of Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan, and Turkey. The MENAPT countries are Syria, Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, Qatar, Sudan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Yemen, Mauritania, Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey (Udlændinge- og integrationsministeriet, 2020).

In Model 1, we see a positive and statistically significant association between having at least one ethnic majority relationship and employment. This means that those who have such personal relationships also tend to have a 6.9% higher chance of being in employment. As mentioned, it is not possible to rule out reverse causality (that those who are in employment meet ethnic majority relationships). We see the same pattern, however, in the opposite direction in Model 2, with the public benefits outcome: those who have ethnic majority relationships tend to have an 8.6% lower chance of being on public benefits compared to those who do not have any such relationship.

Having at least one ethnic majority relationship is also associated with annual income. Those who have such relationships also tend to have a 28.1% higher income than those who do not have such relationships. As with the two other outcomes, the association is statistically significant. This association is also robust to a model specification where annual income is not logarithmically transformed.

Table 2: Close personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority and labour market integration

	Probability: Employment (1)	Probability: On public benefits (2)	Annual income (3)
Ethnic majority relationships			
None	Reference	Reference	Reference
At least one	0.0695*** (0.0191)	-0.0859*** (0.0168)	0.281*** (0.0681)
Intercept	1.158*** (0.0703)	-0.138* (0.0608)	5.835*** (0.246)
<i>N</i>	1203	1203	1116
<i>R</i> ²	0.162	0.258	0.176

Note: OLS regressions. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models 1 and 2 are LPM. All controls: age, gender, education, year of arrival in Denmark, category of residence permit, and being from the MENAPT countries. ‘Annual income’ expressed as percentage change in annual income as a function of change in independent variable (natural logarithmic transformation of annual income).

In sum, having close personal relationships with the ethnic majority appears to be associated with labour market integration even when controlling for potential confounders. This evidence is, however, only correlational, and as I have argued, there are chances of reverse causality.

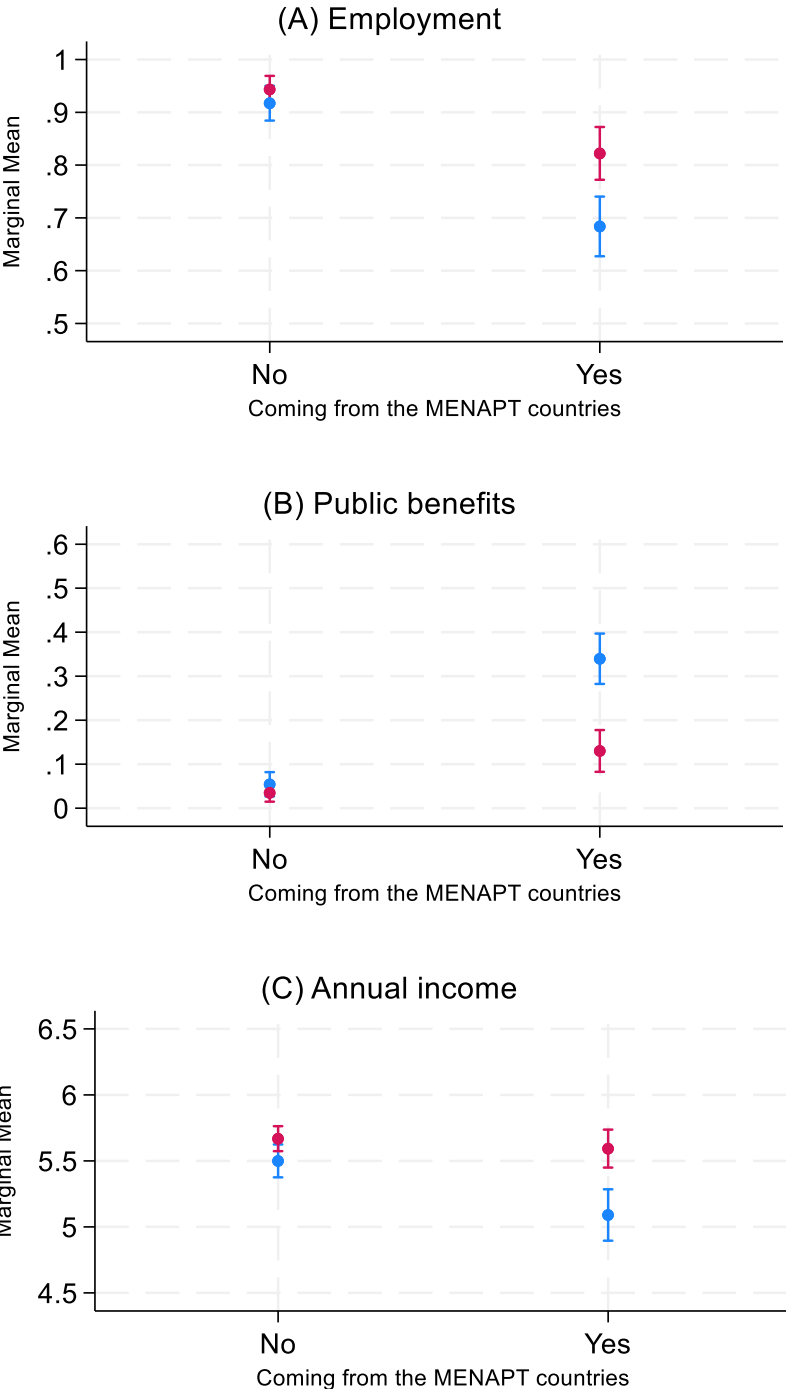
Does coming from the MENAPT countries moderate the correlation?

Are these personal relationships with the ethnic majority just as important for all immigrants? I argue that immigrants from marginalised groups benefit more from having relationships with the ethnic majority than non-marginalised groups. In the Danish context, people from Muslim-majority countries have been the target of particularly hostile political rhetoric, and the evidence mentioned before suggests that people with Middle Eastern-sounding names are discriminated against on the labour market and in school settings. Accordingly, I expect that immigrants coming from the MENAPT countries benefit more from relationships with the ethnic majority than those who come from other countries and regions of the world. In practice, I interact the dummy of having at least one relationship with the ethnic majority with a dummy on whether they are from the MENAPT countries, controlling for the potential confounders mentioned above, except for the MENAPT variable. These statistical models are graphically displayed in Figure 4.

We see that for employment in Panel A, there is no statistically significant correlation between having ethnic majority relationships and employment for those who are *not* from the MENAPT countries. The difference between having ethnic majority relationships and not having such relationships is statistically insignificant for this group. However, when looking at those who *are* from the MENAPT countries, there is a statistically significant difference between those who have ethnic majority relationships and those who do not have such relationships. Coming from the MENAPT countries (compared to coming from other countries) increases the correlation between having ethnic majority relationships and employment by 11.2%. This interaction between (not) having ethnic majority members and (not) coming from the MENAPT countries is statistically significant.

Substantially, these result means that for those who are *not* from the MENAPT countries, this group does not tend to have a higher chance of being in employment if they have ethnic majority relationships than if they do not have such relationships. For the group that *is* from the MENAPT countries, there is a difference in the probability of being in employment depending on whether they have at least one ethnic majority relationship or not. The result suggests that those who are from the MENAPT countries and have close personal relationships with the ethnic majority also tend to be in employment more than those who do not have such relationships. The results also show that the difference between those coming from the MENAPT and those who have not from the MENAPT is statistically significant.

Figure 4: Marginal means of ethnic majority relationships and labour market integration: moderated by MENAPT



- No ethnic majority relationships
- At least one ethnic majority relationship

Note: The X-axes show the binary moderator: coming from the non-MENAPT countries or from the MENAPT countries. The Y-axes show the marginal means of having at least one ethnic majority relationship for the three labour market outcomes. Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Again, we see the same pattern but in the opposite direction for the public benefits outcome in Panel B. There is no statistically significant difference between having ethnic majority relationships or not among the non-MENAPT immigrants, while this is the case for the MENAPT immigrants. This means that among MENAPT immigrants, there is a correlation between having ethnic majority relationships and *not* being on public benefits. Comparing MENAPT immigrants who do not have ethnic majority relationships with those who do, the difference in the probability of being on public benefits is reduced by approximately 21%. The interaction between (not) having ethnic majority members and (not) coming from the MENAPT countries is also here statistically significant.

The pattern is different for annual income in Panel C, where there is a statistically significant difference both for the non-MENAPT group and the MENAPT group. The difference in annual income for the non-MENAPT group between those who have such relationships and those without any of these relationships is 16.8%. Without logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable, this equals DKK 59,000 (\approx USD 8,700). This means that those with ethnic majority relationships also tend to have a higher annual income compared to those without such relationships even for the non-MENAPT group. This is an interesting finding, indicating that while the non-MENAPT immigrants have an advantage in entering the labour market (thus not receiving public benefits), this advantage may not extend to yearly earnings. One possible explanation for this is that ethnic majority relationships may help them negotiate a better salary or provide them with information about what they can expect to earn. It is, however, not possible to test this.

The statistically significant difference in having ethnic majority relationships (or not having these relationships) for the MENAPT group is larger than for the other group. Here, the difference is 50.2%. Using a non-logarithmic dependent variable, this equals DKK 80,000 (\approx USD 11,900) or more than 1.7 times the average monthly income in Denmark. This is a substantially large difference.

Looking horizontally across the three outcomes reveals an interesting pattern. It shows that those in the MENAPT group who have ethnic majority relationships almost have the same probability of being in employment, being off public benefits, and an annual income close to the non-MENAPT group. With this correlational study and the available data, it is not possible to establish causality. However, the pattern might indicate that having these close personal relationships with the ethnic majority almost bridges the employment and income gaps between the groups – in other words, that the structural

disadvantages, or social boundaries, that MENAPT immigrants face in Denmark are almost cancelled out by having ethnic majority relationships.

What does the correlation look like?

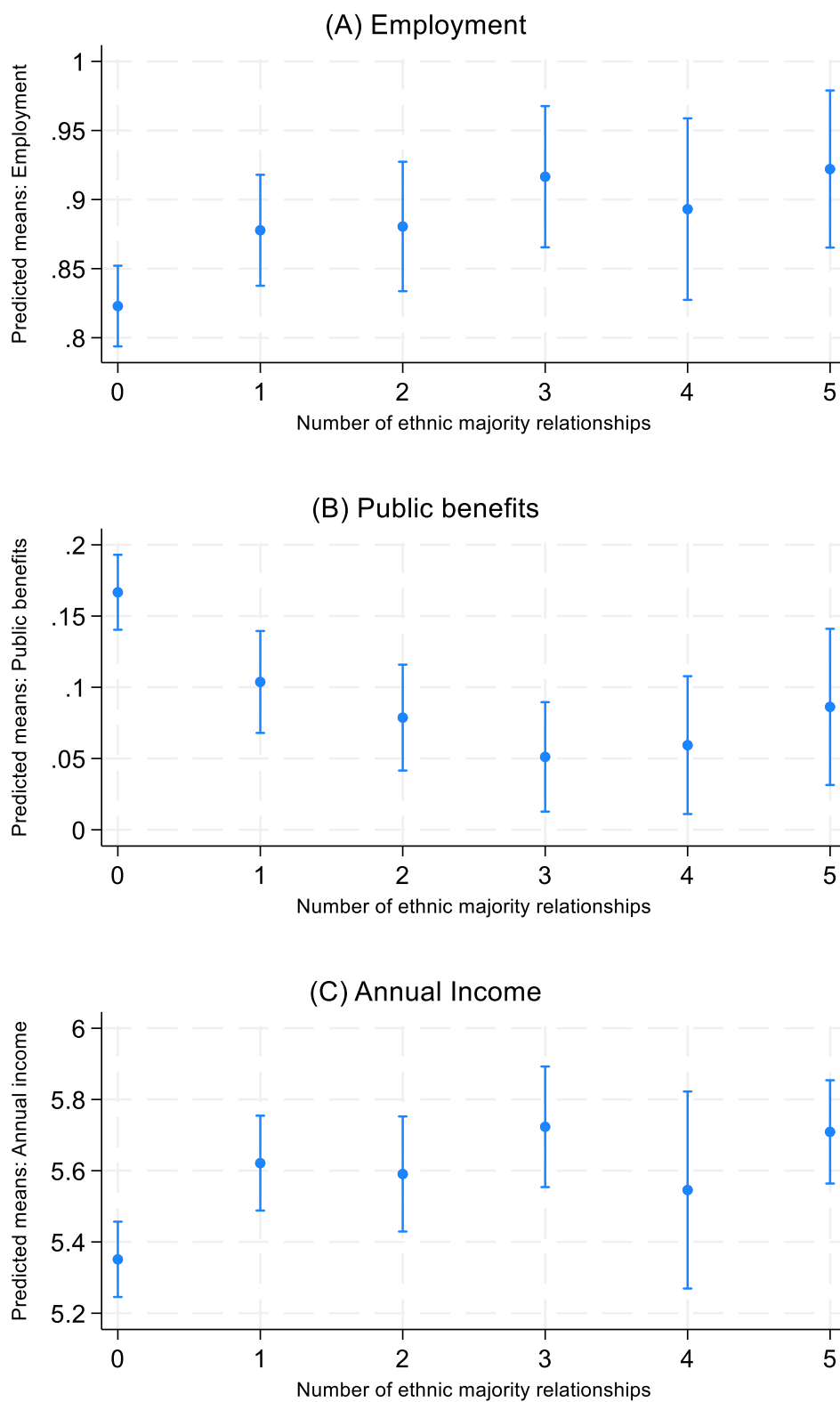
In this final section on labour market integration, I examine the nature of the correlation between the number of relationships with the ethnic majority and the labour market outcomes. It could be the case that the more of these types of relationship, the higher the tendency to be in employment and the higher the outcome – in other words, a linear correlation. The other possibility is decreasing marginal returns in the sense that there is a strong correlation between having one ethnic majority member but that the strength of this correlation does not increase with the number of ethnic majority relationships. The predicted means of the three outcomes of labour market integration across the number of close relationships with the ethnic majority is visualised in Figure 5, still controlling for the same potential confounders as described above.

In Panel A, we see that there is a difference in the probability of being in employment across the number of ethnic majority relationships. For example, those who have no ethnic majority relationships have an 82.2% chance of being in employment, and those who have one such relationship have an 87.7% chance. However, when looking across the number of ethnic majority relationships, there is no consistent increase in the probability of being in employment. Rather, it seems that there is a noticeable difference between having *none* and having *one* of such relationships. In other words, it appears that the correlation between having ethnic majority relationships and employment is one of decreasing returns. This is not a causal claim but a description of the nature of the correlation between these two variables.

Panels B and C reveal the same pattern: there is a large and statistically significant difference between not having an ethnic majority and having one such relationship. But this difference does not grow consistently higher with the increasing numbers of ethnic majority members. For public benefits, those without ethnic majority relationships have a 16.6% chance of being on public benefits, while those with one such relationship has a 10.4% chance.

In summary, it appears that the correlation between having personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority and labour market integration is driven by the differences between having one and not having one such relationship. While we cannot establish the direction of causality, it may suggest a certain redundancy in having many close relationships with the ethnic majority. Having one friend can be very helpful for practicing the language and getting help applying for jobs, but having more friends who can help with the same things does not make a substantial difference.

Figure 5: Predicted means of labour market integration across number of close relationships with members of the ethnic majority



Note: Number of ethnic majority members on the X-axes. Predicted values of the three outcomes on the Y-axes. Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Summing up and methodological considerations

I find correlational evidence that having at least one personal relationship with the ethnic majority goes hand in hand with higher chances of being in employment, being off public benefits, and higher annual income. I also find evidence that having at least one such relationship particularly matters for those who come from the MENAPT countries: for this group, there is a difference in chances of employment and public benefits depending on whether they have ethnic majority relationships or not. Finally, I find that there are decreasing marginal returns in having ethnic majority relationships, meaning that the correlation between these relationships and labour market integration is primarily driven by the difference between not having any such relationship and having one.

As stated above, this is a correlational study where it is not possible to establish causality. In addition, when considering the high employment levels and the high levels of annual income, it indicates that there is possible sample-selection bias in the sense that it is the more integrated immigrants who have answered the survey, despite our efforts to reduce this by providing the possibility to answer the survey in various languages. Accordingly, the sample may not be fully representative of the overall population of immigrants who came to Denmark between 2014 and 2018. On the other hand, since I find statistically significant results even for this sample of better integrated immigrants, it may be a conservative estimate, meaning that they may also apply to the less integrated immigrants.

Despite the methodological limitations, I have shown that there is a strong correlation between having ethnic majority relationships and labour market integration. In addition, the results of the MENAPT-analysis and the analysis of the number of relationships point to the direction of causality argued here, since the direction of causality from labour market to ethnic majority relationships would not be plausible.

Civic integration and ethnic majority relationships¹⁰

As discussed above, I argue that we need to distinguish between two dimensions of civic integration on the individual level: 1) feeling included or having a sense of belonging in the host country, and 2) embracing the civic and democratic norms and institutions of the host country. Using the panel data

¹⁰ This section presenting the results for civic integration is based on the results-section of Paper B.

described above, I estimate the statistical models using two-way fixed effects (individual and time fixed effects). Some respondents who participated in both waves did not answer the personal network questions in both waves, and these are excluded from the analysis since I am interested in estimating *the change* in the network between the waves, which is not possible for this group of respondents. The sample size is N=568.

Close personal relationships are measured dichotomously as in the labour market study. However, in this panel data design, each respondent has two variables: one for each of the waves. Figure 1 displayed above is created using these variables to display the changes between 2021 and 2023. This is the main independent variable in the study.

While the two-way fixed-effects models rule out potential confounders that are time invariant and time effects, they do not rule out variables that vary across both individuals and time. I therefore control for the following variables in all models: whether they are students/employed/retired, their current type of residence permit, and the self-reported share of immigrants in their neighbourhood.

Close personal relationships and feeling included in the host country

I examine two different outcomes for the first dimension of civic integration: their level of *national attachment* and their *perceived discrimination* against their ethnic group in Denmark. The latter is used as an indicator of the feeling or experience of exclusion and, hence, the converse of feeling included (Bloemraad & Wright, 2014).

Table 3 displays the results for this first dimension of civic integration. We here see that when comparing those who do not have ethnic majority relationships with those who do have such relationships, the latter tend to have a higher sense of national attachment. The difference is 4.2%, which is a substantial difference. The same pattern is visible in the opposite direction for perceived discrimination. Here, we see that those who have ethnic majority relationships tend to perceive less discrimination against their ethnic group. These results include individual and time fixed effects and the abovementioned control variables.

Table 3: Close ethnic majority relationships and feeling included in society

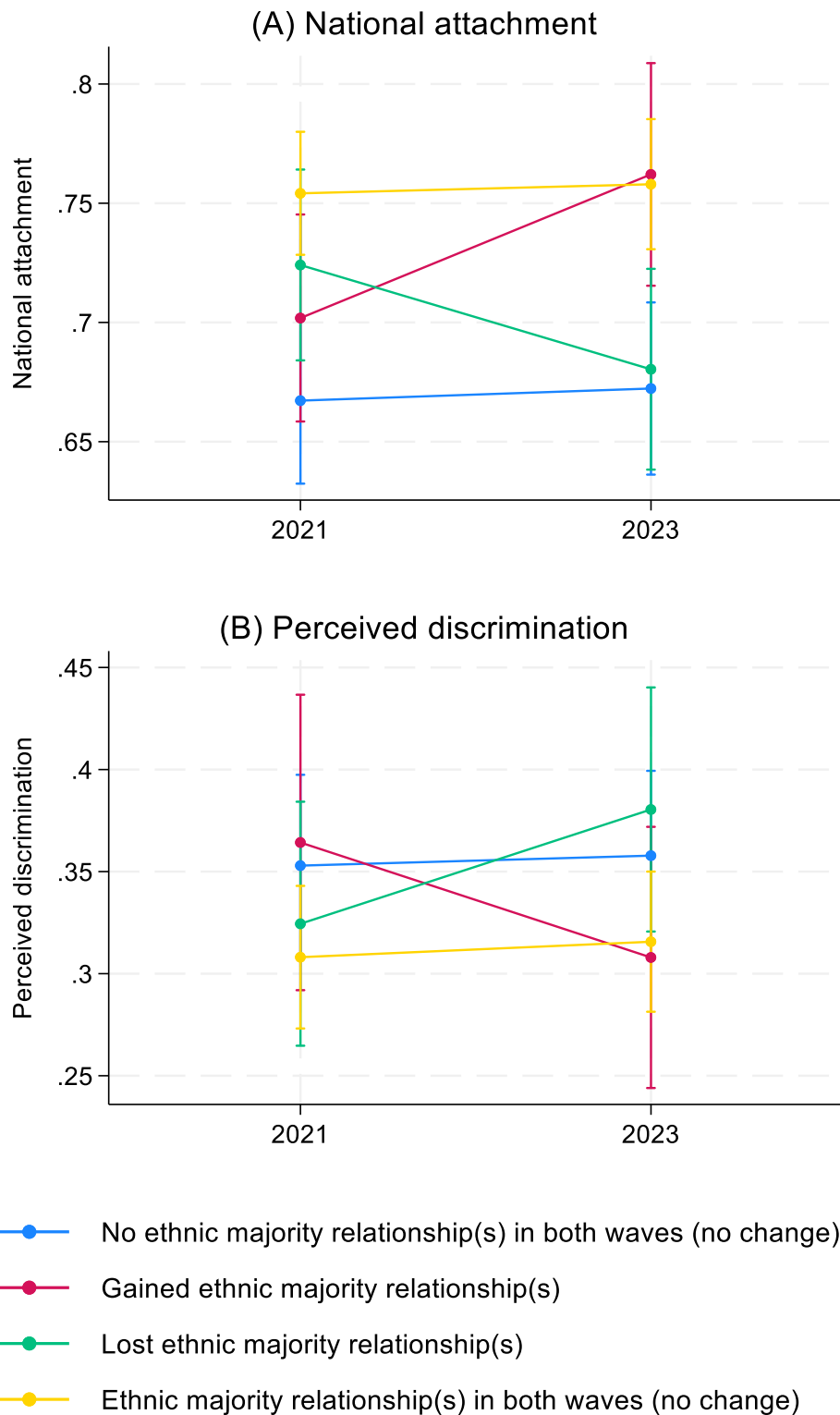
	National attachment (1)	Perceived discrimination (2)
Ethnic majority relationships		
None	Reference	Reference
At least one	0.042** (0.014)	-0.053* (0.022)
Time fixed effects (ref. = 2021)	0.015 (0.008)	0.007 (0.013)
Intercept	0.710*** (0.038)	0.399*** (0.049)
Units	566	566
Observations	1083	1108
R^2	0.083	0.035

Note: Individual and time fixed-effects regression models. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at respondent level. Controls in all models: employed/student/retired, current residence permit, and self-reported share of immigrants in the neighbourhood. R^2 is for within-respondent variation.

In sum, I find evidence that having close personal relationships with ethnic majority members is associated with feeling included in the destination country. Although unable to test the mechanism, using the symbolic perspective, I theorise that this may be due to the social influence that happens over time in personal relationships with the ethnic majority.

In Figure 6 below, I decompose the effects into four groups, making up four different situations that may happen to immigrants' personal relationships with the ethnic majority over the two-year period between the two waves: 1) they may have at least one personal relationship in the first wave and lose all their ethnic majority relationships in the second wave; 2) they may have no ethnic majority relationships in both waves, meaning that no change has happened; 3) they may have at least one personal relationship in both waves, also meaning that no change happened; and 4) they may change from having no ethnic majority members in their network in wave 1 to having at least one in wave 2. Decomposing the effect allows us to (visually) explore how the groups develop over time in relation to the two outcomes.

Figure 6: Changes over time in personal relationships with the ethnic majority and feeling of inclusion in the destination country



Note: Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals. Controls: employed/student/retired, current residence permit, and self-reported share of immigrants in the neighbourhood.

An interesting comparison when decomposing the effect is to compare those who did not have any ethnic majority relationships in wave 1 and did not gain any in wave 2 (group 2 above) with those who also did not have any ethnic majority relationships in wave 1 but gained at least one in wave 2 (group 4 above). The former would make a good counterfactual to the latter. Before moving on to this comparison, I start by considering both groups where no change happened: groups 2 and 3.

Considering the groups where no change happened in Panel A, we see that the level of national attachment is almost unchanged between 2021 and 2023. To be sure, those with ethnic majority relationships in both waves have higher levels of national attachment, but as with those who never gained any ethnic majority relationships, there is not much change between the waves. This may suggest that for those who had such relationships in both waves, the social influence may already have happened through these relationships, and it does not change more over the two-year period studied here. Those who never had ethnic majority relationships have the lowest level of national attachment, and this is still the case two years later.

Comparing the group that never had and never gained ethnic majority relationships with the group that went from not having such relationships to gaining at least one, we see a steep increase in the latter. This increase is high enough to reach the level of national attachment of those who had ethnic majority relationships in both waves. This difference between the two groups is statistically significant, also when including the abovementioned potential confounders in the statistical models. Taken together, these results suggest that gaining ethnic majority relationships is associated with an increase in national attachment over time. However, it is not possible to establish causality since there may be unobserved and time-variant confounders that make the group who gained ethnic majority relationships different from the group who never gained such relationships.

We can see the same pattern mirrored in Panel B for perceived discrimination. However, since higher levels here means *more* perceived discrimination, the patterns are in opposite directions. First, we see little development over time for the groups without change between the waves. And when using the same counterfactual as above, we see that those who gain ethnic majority relationships between the waves reduce their perceived discrimination to match those who had ethnic majority relationships in both waves. However, one thing differs between the two outcomes: the difference between the counterfactual and those who gained ethnic majority relationships is not robust to including control variables. This may be due to the small sample size, particularly when decomposing the effects to the four groups.

An interesting finding is how national attachment is reduced (and perceived discrimination increased) for those who *lose* all their ethnic majority relationships between the two waves. This result suggests a *sensibility* in immigrants' sense of belonging and inclusion in the destination country depending on their close relationships with the ethnic majority, even in the short two-year period studied here. Gaining these relationships has an effective impact on sense of belonging and inclusion. But at the same time, losing these relationships appears to reduce the level of belonging just as effectively. It may suggest that belonging and feeling included is a process where immigrants are continuously confirmed and recognised as belonging in the destination country, and that losing these relationships to the ethnic majority may have a damaging impact on this dimension of civic integration. In this sense, there is also a vulnerability in having ethnic majority relationships since losing them can have negative impact. This finding mirrors a similar pattern that I found in the qualitative study to which I return later in the dissertation.

Close personal relationships and embracing civic and democratic norms and institutions of the host country

While the first dimension of civic integration focuses on immigrants' 'inward orientation' – how they feel and their sense of belonging – the second dimension is directed 'outward' towards the political system and public institutions of the destination country. Table 4 shows the results for this second dimension of civic integration.

As the table shows, none of the five outcomes are statistically significant. The effect sizes for all outcomes are relatively small, and the *p*-values are far from reaching significance at the 0.05 level or even at the 0.10 level (they vary between 0.30 and 0.65). This suggests that while close relationships with the ethnic majority are important for immigrants' feelings of inclusion and belonging in the destination country, the impact of the relationships does not extend to the civic and political outcomes – at least not in the two-year period examined in this study.¹¹

¹¹ Decomposing the effects to the four groups as I have done above does not change the results: all group differences are statistically insignificant, with and without control variables.

Table 4: Embracing civic and democratic norms and institutions of the host country

	Civic duty (1)	External political efficacy (2)	Institutional trust (3)	Political interest (4)	Motivation for citizenship (5)
Ethnic majority relationships					
None	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
At least one	-0.009 (0.022)	0.025 (0.026)	0.008 (0.02)	-0.015 (0.023)	0.012 (0.018)
Time fixed effects (ref. = 2021)	-0.015 (0.012)	0.015 (0.014)	0.010 (0.010)	-0.055*** (0.013)	0.024* (0.012)
Intercept	0.848*** (0.050)	0.749*** (0.055)	0.641*** (0.047)	0.537*** (0.047)	0.826*** (0.04)
Units	566	566	566	566	532
Observations	1074	1074	1075	1078	928
R ²	0.026	0.030	0.043	0.105	0.061

Note: Individual and time fixed-effects regression models. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at respondent level. Controls in all models: employed/student/retired, current residence permit, and self-reported share of immigrants in the neighbourhood. Full regression tables are available in the Appendix. R² is for within-respondent variation.

Summing up and methodological considerations

Using the symbolic theoretical perspective, in this study, I have examined the extent to which having personal relationships with the ethnic majority promotes civic integration. The results show that these types of relationships are important for one of the two dimensions of civic integration. While they play an important role in making immigrants feel included in society, this does not extend to their ‘orientation’ towards the political system and the norms and institutions of the destination country.

The results may indicate that while immigrants’ feelings of belonging are sensitive even in the short span of two years, political and civic outcomes are more entrenched since they are consequences of many years of political socialisation. Given that the population of interest here is newly arrived immigrants, the political socialisation from their country of origin may still be fresh in their memory and have not been replaced by political and civic experiences in the host country (Quaranta, 2024; Röder & Mühlau, 2012; Superti & Gidron, 2022).

However, there are also methodological limitations of the study. The sample may not be fully representative of the whole population of immigrants who arrived in Denmark between 2014 and 2018, since it appears that it is the better integrated immigrants who answered the survey. On the other hand, the sample makes it a conservative estimate, meaning that if finding significant results for this group, there would likely also be significant results for the less integrated. In other words, the finding of significant results for the first dimension of civic integration even for this sample of more well-integrated immigrants is strong evidence.

Finally, while the panel data design and the two-way fixed-effects statistical models can rule out some unobserved confounders, there are still potentially some time-variant confounders. For example, those who gain ethnic majority relationships between the two waves may be systematically different from those who do not gain such relationships on unobserved and time-varying characteristics. For instance, changing jobs or moving to a new town may create differences in contact opportunities with the ethnic majority and simultaneously impact immigrants’ civic integration because of the positive or negative experiences that these life changes entail.

Barriers and opportunities and the meaning of ethnic majority relationships¹²

In the following, I present the qualitative findings related to establishing relationships with the ethnic majority before moving on to focus on what meaning is ascribed to having ethnic majority relationships for immigrants who have such relationships. Before these two main themes, I start by presenting a distinction that became clear when analysing the interviews.

Society and The System

An interesting finding during the coding and analysis of the interviews is that the interviewees spontaneously made a distinction that has analytical value for this study since it nuances our understanding of how social and symbolic boundaries in the destination country are experienced by immigrants. Most interviewees distinguish between the symbolic and social boundaries that they *personally experience in everyday life and civil society* and the social and symbolic boundaries that *they experience are coming from the political system, the media, and the public administration*.

This distinction has analytical value since it points to social and symbolic boundaries being experienced on different levels, both at the civil society level and on the macro-political level. That is, some social and symbolic boundaries are experienced in everyday life and in specific interactions, while some social and symbolic boundaries are experienced as coming from 'above', as discussed in relation to ethnic boundaries above (Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b).

I conceptualise this latter macro-political level as *The System*, which is derived from the way that the interviewees talk about politicians, the government, the municipality, other public agencies, and for some of them, also the media. To capture the everyday and civic society level, I use the term *Society* to denote these personal experiences. Compared to the other concept, they rarely describe these experiences as society; however, it is an umbrella term for the various ways in which they describe this level.

Barriers in establishing relationships with ethnic majority members

Starting with experienced social boundaries on the Society level, the most dominant of these is not speaking the native language of the destination country well. Many interviewees experience that it is hard to be a part of informal

¹² This section presenting the results for the barriers, opportunities and meaning ascribed to ethnic majority relationships is based on the results-section of Paper C.

conversations because in Denmark, where most people speak English, ethnic majority members tend to switch to Danish as soon as the conversations become more informal. This can be difficult for some immigrants. Anna, a young woman from Ukraine, expresses it the following way:

Even though almost everyone in Denmark speaks English ... I could feel a bit, not excluded, but not quite part of the conversation [...] I could also feel that to make friends with Danes – there was also at my study, it was like, the international students are together, and the Danish students are together. And if you knew their [Danish students'] language, I felt that it was a little easier to get closer to them (Anna, female, 23 years, from Ukraine).

Not speaking the native language comes with a feeling of not being part of the social situation. Not having the skills and resources to participate in the informal conversations – and thus have deep contact with ethnic majority members – comes with a feeling of being left out, and it becomes difficult to make friends with ethnic majority members because of this social boundary.

Another salient social boundary on the Society level is an experience of differences in friend-making cultures between the country of origin and the destination country. For example, Cathryn, a woman in her 30s from Portugal, describes how it is common in her country of origin to invite even acquaintances to 'tag along' and join activities and social events that close friends have planned. In contrast, Danish friend-making culture is experienced as less accessible and that Danes may seem 'reserved' or 'closed' in comparison. This comparison with the country of origin also manifests itself in a different way. Khader and Abbas, two men in their 30s from Syria, express how they are used to a more dynamic social life in their country of origin, where people meet more regularly and are out 'on the streets' all hours of the day in contrast to where they live in Denmark.

In sum, two social boundaries on the Society level are prevalent among the interviewees when it comes to establishing relationships with the ethnic majority: the lack of capacity in speaking the native language well, and the experienced differences in the friend-making culture that is difficult for them to navigate. These two social boundaries are obstacles that make it difficult for many of the interviewees to engage in deep contact and form relationships with the ethnic majority.

The interviewees also experience boundaries as coming from 'above' from The System. One social boundary is related to the introduction of laws and requirements regulating the access to permanent residency and citizenship in Denmark. As described earlier, Denmark has introduced regulations that have made it increasingly harder to achieve permanent residency and citizenship.

Almost all interviewees have experienced challenges in meeting these requirements.

The rules and requirements are experienced as what Herd & Moynihan (2018) conceptualise as ‘administrative burdens’, which is the experience of the implementation of policies as onerous, implying subsequent material and psychological costs for individuals seeking public services. The psychological costs are often described in the interviews, and these costs seem to have consequences for meeting and forming relationships with the ethnic majority. For example, Mariam, a woman from Iran in her late-40s, got severe stress after not being able to live up to the requirements for her residence permit. She relates this to having less energy and resources to socialise with new people. This example demonstrates how rules regulating access to permanent residency and citizenship impose psychological costs on the interviewees, taking away their energy and resources to socialise and establish relationships with the ethnic majority. In this sense, the rules impose a resource-related social boundary on immigrants that make it more difficult to engage and socialise with ethnic majority members.

In addition to these experiences of a social boundary, they also experience symbolic boundaries from The System. As mentioned before, policies not only have material consequences but also send symbolic signals to citizens about their position in society and whether they belong (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Simonsen, 2020b). In this case, the ongoing tightening of rules for achieving citizenship are interpreted as signals to them that The System does not want them to stay in Denmark. Some of the rules have been introduced without any notice, hurting some of the interviewees severely: just as they were about to fulfil the requirements, the rules changed. This has resulted in hard emotional consequences for several of the interviewees. Ahmad, a man in his late 30s from Afghanistan, says that he went from being motivated to learn Danish and meet and engage with ethnic majority members to completely losing his motivation to engage in society when the rules suddenly changed:

My friends, classmates said, ‘Hey, you should learn Danish fluently because you want to participate in the society. You want to meet people’. I was like, ‘no, [I] don't want that because if a country does not accept me, or the people does not accept me. Why? Why should I even try?’ (Ahmad, male, late 30s, from Afghanistan).

This is an example of a more general pattern where the rules for achieving permanent residency and citizenship hurt the interviewees and discourage them from engaging in society. This discouragement comes with a feeling of being outside the symbolic boundary of the nation (Simonsen, 2016).

This macro-political symbolic boundary from The System is sometimes experienced more directly through political rhetoric (Simonsen, 2019; Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b), contributing to a feeling of exclusion from the nation, as with the signals from the citizenship policies. For example, two interviewees experience this rhetoric as if it ‘trickles down’ from the level of political rhetoric to affect specific social interactions between them and strangers with an ethnic majority background (Sønderskov & Thomsen, 2015). Abbas and Ahmad both report how they have experienced negative interactions in situations with ethnic majority members, and they both link this to the way that politicians speak about immigrants.

The social and symbolic boundaries described in this first part of the analysis focusing on barriers are summarised in Table 5. A difference between these two types of boundaries is that for social boundaries, the interviewees *are lacking in skill, knowledge, or resources* to overcome the boundary and engage in deep contact with ethnic majority members. For symbolic boundaries, the interviewees *are (emotionally) discouraged* to engage in contact because they feel excluded or because they do not feel recognised as equal citizens.

Table 5: Boundaries in establishing relationships with ethnic majority

	Society	The System
Social boundaries	Speaking the native language Difference in friend-making and socialising culture between country of origin and host country	Administrative burdens → little energy/resources to socialise
Symbolic boundaries	Trickle-down from political rhetoric*	Exclusionary signals from citizenship policies Political rhetoric

Note: * This symbolic boundary has its origin from The System but is experienced in Society in everyday interactions because they ‘trickle down’ from The System.

Opportunities in establishing relationships with the ethnic majority

Despite these social and symbolic boundaries complicating and making it difficult to establish relationships with the ethnic majority, most of the interviewees have one such relationship. They point to different social contexts where social and symbolic boundaries are less salient (Kindler, 2021), making it more likely to have deep contact with ethnic majority members.

The most dominant among these social contexts is through initiatives organised by volunteer organisations such as the Danish Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council. These two organisations have initiatives aimed at

assisting immigrants with adjusting to life in Denmark by matching them with a volunteer who is typically an ethnic majority member. Other initiatives are aimed at giving immigrants an opportunity to practice Danish in less formal settings than language schools. Many of the interviewees highlight that they met one or more of their ethnic majority relationships through these volunteer organisations in Society.

Another common social context is more ‘forced contact’ by being in the same workplace, dorms, or Danish folk high schools (*højskoler*)¹³. In these situations, it is likely that they can meet ethnic majority members. Amara, a woman in her 30s from Turkey, describes how she met some of her ethnic majority friends through a dorm:

I made long-term Danish friends when I was at the dorm as well. Even though I think everybody kind of says, ‘okay, maybe it's harder to make friends’. I think that depends on when you're here as well. I thought that being in the dorm with them, being put into that place so you had to talk to each other, was an amazing opportunity. (Amara, female, early 30s, from Turkey)

In these situations of forced contact and volunteer activities, it seems that the described boundaries are less salient. One explanation for this could be that the otherwise different friend-making culture of the ethnic majority is less prevalent in meetings based on activities where contact with strangers is difficult to avoid. Secondly, the ethnic majority members who select into these activities or institutions, particularly the volunteers in the mentioned organisations, are more aware of the language barriers and are motivated to help immigrants learn the language. Accordingly, the two dominant barriers described above are less prevalent in these contexts in Society.

A few interviewees also mention that social workers have been important to them. In these cases, the social workers have ‘gone the extra mile’ to help them, which they remember and appreciate. However, it is difficult to sense whether they see these social workers as part of The System or as exceptions to it.

What having relationships with the ethnic majority means to immigrants: social boundaries

We now move from the boundaries that immigrants experience in establishing ethnic majority relationships to instead focus on those who have such

¹³ Danish folk high schools are an exam-free boarding school for adults and young people, with an emphasis on popular education in the form of lectures and discussions in humanities subjects such as history, philosophy, and religion combined with the teaching of specialised subjects such as art, weaving, and music.

relationships. I start by focusing on how ethnic majority relationships are used to navigate and overcome social boundaries from Society and The System. In relation to these social boundaries, the interviewees describe how they use these relationships instrumentally, as described in the theory section of this dissertation.¹⁴

First, having ethnic majority relationships helps immigrants deal with the two social boundaries from Society described above: the language barrier and the friend-making barrier. By having these relationships, they get help practicing the native language informally, and they learn about tacit cultural knowledge of the destination country. Many of the interviewees attend (or have attended) language school, but they miss being able to speak the language informally and learn the culture in a more organic way, which is possible if they have these relationships.

Secondly, ethnic majority relationships also help them deal with the social boundaries experienced as coming from The System. One example here is to help them navigate the public administration. This can be asking their ethnic majority relationship to explain letters from the public administration to them or calling the municipality or others on their behalf. Khader, a man in his early 30s from Syria, gives an example of this type of help:

That was my friend from [previous workplace], he also works in customer service. So he can write, better than me. It's in that official way [...] I told him that I have this proof and I have this problem. So he just takes the laptop, and then he started writing to them, to the Immigration Service (Khader, male, early 30s, from Syria).

In this example, the ethnic majority member helped him write in an 'official way' that Khader is unable to, helping him with these administrative burdens that he experiences.

A pattern found during the analyses is that those who are from geographically proximate countries tend to rely less on accessing resources through their relationships to overcome social boundaries. This may suggest that those coming from these countries tend to have the resources and capital themselves to adjust to the host country, while those from more distant countries, geographically, are more in need of help when settling in the host country, as also argued in Paper A on labour market integration.

Relatedly and supporting the argument in Paper A, several of the interviewees express how they have asked their Danish friends to read their CVs and job applications to make sure that these fit the Danish way of doing things.

¹⁴Since other studies have focused on how immigrants access resources to overcome social boundaries (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009; Lancee, 2010; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Tegegne, 2018), I only address this part briefly here.

In addition, they also learn about work culture in Denmark through these relationships.

What having relationships with the ethnic majority means to immigrants: symbolic boundaries

We now move from the social boundaries to how ethnic majority relationships matter for the symbolic boundaries. While social boundaries highlighted the instrumental side of the relationships, these boundaries highlight the symbolic perspective on personal relationships. An interesting finding for the interviewees who have ethnic majority relationships is how they *distinguish between what The System does and how ethnic majority members and Society are*. Those who do not have ethnic majority relationships do not make this distinction.

On the one hand, those who have ethnic majority relationships are hurt, and sometimes angry, about how politicians and the media speak about immigrants. They are, for example, frustrated about the introduction of increasingly tougher requirements for achieving citizenship and permanent residency. But on the other hand, they have positive and meaningful relationships with the ethnic majority, and often also positive experiences with strangers of ethnic majority origin. This enables them to distinguish The System from Society, making easier to reject the national boundary drawings of The System and define oneself as belonging in Denmark or consider Denmark one's home. Most interviewees who have personal relationships with the ethnic majority distinguish between The System and Society. Armin, a man in his late 30s from Bosnia, describes it the following way:

Well, when I'm with my friends, when I'm with people in the city that I don't know, that I meet in a bar. [...] There's no one questioning it. You're just part of it. But when I think about the political part of it, I don't feel at home. You're told that you're not part of it, and you don't belong here. [...] As soon as I try to read the news, or get an email about it or something, I don't feel at home. I don't feel welcome (Armin, male, 37 years, from ex-Yugoslavia/Bosnia).

Having meaningful relationships with the ethnic majority seems to provide immigrants with an interpretative lens that allows them to distinguish between what The System does and their personal experiences with ethnic majority members. This is an interesting finding that contributes to understanding how immigrants make sense of and navigate symbolic boundaries in the destination country.

Another way through which relationships with the ethnic majority serve as an interpretative lens in dealing with The System is through the defence shield mechanism also identified by Simonsen (2017c). As mentioned before,

the interviewees struggle with living up to the requirements for residency in Denmark. While this can be stressful and impose administrative burdens on the interviewees, they find support in their relationships with the ethnic majority as shields. John (male, early 30s, from Canada) provides an example of this:

It was my first boss who gave me my work residence permit, who also said many times that ‘you are Danish’. [...] I got [a letter] from Immigration Service back then that I have no connection to Denmark. And he [his boss] was just like, ‘No no no no, you have lots of connection to Denmark, you do things like that, you're involved in things like that!’ So he was the one who emphasized all the things I've done to be part of Danish society (John, male, early 30s, from Canada).

While John was hurt by getting the rejection letter from the Immigration Service since it stated that he did not have enough of a connection to Denmark, his ethnic majority relationship helped him ignore this signal and emphasised how he has done much to integrate and that he does not have to let that rejection define him.

Summing up, I identify two different ways through which relationships with the ethnic majority serve as interpretative lenses to navigate and deal with symbolic boundaries. First, they make immigrants distinguish between what The System does and what Society is. Secondly, meaningful relationships with the ethnic majority can work as defence shields (Simonsen, 2017c) against exclusionary signals and political rhetoric from The System. Table 6 summarises the findings from this second part of this study.

Table 6: The meaning ascribed to ethnic majority relationships

	Society	The System
Social boundaries	Learning informal Danish Learning Danish culture and traditions	Help and resources to overcome administrative burdens imposed by The System
Symbolic boundaries	Distinguishing Society from The System	Shielding from exclusionary signals and political rhetoric

In Table 6, the distinction between Society and The System is placed under Society since it is the symbolic boundaries in Society that are broken down, while the symbolic boundaries on the level of The System still exists. The shielding interpretive frame is placed under The System for the same reasons: no perceptions of symbolic boundaries are changes. Rather, ethnic majority members here simply shield immigrants from the rhetoric and signals. It is a mere defence and does not change the perceptions of boundaries.

Summing up and methodological considerations

In this last study, I have shown that immigrants experience both social and symbolic boundaries on two levels when wanting to establish relationships with the ethnic majority: on the Society level and The System level. They face language and cultural barriers that make it difficult on the Society level, whereas they face negative rhetoric and signals from The System that discourage them from seeking contact with the ethnic majority and affect their energy to socialise and meet new people. On the other hand, civic society and forced contact situations create social contexts where the salience of these boundaries seems to become less important.

While these social and symbolic boundaries make it difficult to establish these relationships, there is much to gain for those who manage to do so. They help immigrants navigate and overcome the social boundaries in Society mentioned above, and they help to deal with the administrative burdens imposed by The System. In other words, this highlights the instrumental perspective of personal relationships.

Importantly, the relationships with the ethnic majority also provide immigrants with interpretive frames to navigate the symbolic boundaries from The System. It helps them to distinguish between what The System does and their personal experiences of recognition in Society. These relationships also serve as shields, protecting immigrants from the negative and exclusionary signalling of policies and political rhetoric.

As mentioned briefly in the Research Design-chapter, most of the interviews were dominated by themes of politics, immigration policies and citizenship. This suggests that those who chose to participate in the interviews are likely to be more politically aware and, in many cases, more affected of the rhetoric and the immigration laws. For some immigrants, these themes may be less present, particularly if they have not been much affected by the immigration laws. This has implications for the generalisability of the findings. The findings presented here may best apply to immigrants without citizenship or permanent residency and are more aware of the political level, possibly because they have been directly affected by the immigration laws.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the following, I summarise the main findings before going on to discuss the contributions, limitations, and implications of this dissertation. To recap, the overall research question guiding the dissertation is: what role does personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority play in immigrant integration? I have examined this research question by dividing it into two more specific sub-questions: 1) to which extent is personal relationships with ethnic majority members associated with labour market integration and civic integration? and 2) what meaning do immigrants ascribe to these relationships and the barriers and opportunities in forming them? I start off by presenting the findings related to these two sub-questions before relating them to the overall research question.

Summarising the central findings of the dissertation

This dissertation has shown that having personal relationships with the ethnic majority play an important role in immigrants' integration and navigation in the destination country. These relationships play an instrumental and symbolic role, empowering immigrants to navigate, interpret, and overcome social and symbolic boundaries in the destination country.

For labour market integration, personal relationships with the ethnic majority play an important *instrumental* role by providing resources and help and by opening doors to mainstream society. Having at least one ethnic majority relationship is correlated with a higher probability of being in employment and being off public benefits. In addition, it is also associated with higher annual income. This suggests that these relationships provide resources and open doors to the labour market. However, the relationships do not matter equally for all immigrants. Immigrants who come from the MENAPT countries, who face more discrimination and structural disadvantages, appear to benefit more from these relationships than immigrants coming from elsewhere. This suggests that these relationships provide important resources that help immigrants from the MENAPT countries in overcoming social boundaries related to the labour market. Finally, it appears that it is particularly the difference between not having any ethnic majority relationships and having one such relationship that drives the correlations and hence, that more than one does not have much more additive value.

For civic integration, gaining personal relationships with the ethnic majority plays an important *symbolic* role in promoting feelings of inclusion and

belonging in the destination country. Gaining at least one such relationship is associated with higher levels of national attachment and lower levels of perceived discrimination. Nevertheless, in the two-year period examined, I do not find that these relationships promote more political and civic outcomes such as institutional trust, civic duty, and external political efficacy. This suggests that close relationships with the ethnic majority is important for the internal sense of belonging, but that in the two years examined, they do not influence the orientation 'outwards' to the political system. Interestingly, however, I find that feeling included and belonging in the host country is highly sensitive to relationships with the ethnic majority. Gaining them increases this feeling of inclusion, whereas losing such relationships is also associated with a decrease in this feeling. As with the findings of Paper C, this may indicate that having close relationships with the ethnic majority plays a significant role as long as the relationship continuously recognises and confirms that they belong in the host country.

In the meaning-oriented and qualitative study, Paper C, I also find evidence that ethnic majority relationships are important for navigating and overcoming a variety of social and symbolic boundaries and not only for the labour market and for civic integration. Most importantly, relationships with the ethnic majority play an important symbolic role by providing immigrants with different interpretative frames that can be used when confronted with negative political rhetoric or exclusionary signalling from policies. Here, the relationships are used shields against this rhetoric or to distinguish The System from their personal experiences in everyday life and civil society. This suggests that relationships with the ethnic majority play an important role in navigating and adjusting to the political climate of the destination country.

While the dissertation provides evidence of the important role of these personal relationships with the ethnic majority, the qualitative study also shows that it is difficult for many immigrants to establish these relationships. They experience practical social boundaries in everyday life such as not speaking the native language well enough, and differences in friend-making culture complicate establishing new relationships in the destination country. In addition, the negative political rhetoric is sometimes experienced as 'trickling down' to create negative contact experiences with ethnic majority members. This, along with symbolic boundary drawings from The System, can alienate some immigrants and discourage them from seeking contact with the ethnic majority. At the same time, it is not impossible to establish these relationships, and civil society organisations in particular play an important role in creating meaningful contact opportunities where immigrants may meet ethnic majority members.

Addressing the overall research question of the dissertation, personal relationships play an important role in immigrant integration. This role can be divided into an instrumental role and a symbolic role. Through these personal relationships, immigrants access important resources which is associated with labour market integration. Immigrants are, however, also socially influenced through these relationships, affecting their feelings of belonging in the destination country. In sum, the personal relationships with the ethnic majority play an important role in dealing with social and symbolic boundaries related to the labour market and national boundary drawings. It is, however, not easy to establish these relationships. Immigrants subjectively experience other social and symbolic boundaries that create obstacles towards building these meaningful relationships. For those who succeed, however, the relationships help them make sense, navigating and sometimes overcoming these boundaries.

Contributions of the dissertation

The dissertation mainly contributes to three academic literatures: the literature on immigrant integration, the more methodological field of personal network analysis (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018), and the sociological literature on social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wimmer, 2008b).

Starting with the field of immigrant integration, the dissertation contributes by highlighting and showing the underappreciated but important role of the ethnic majority in promoting immigrant integration. The existing literature has extensively examined the role of co-ethnics, without much attention paid to the ethnic majority. However, the conclusion to draw from this dissertation is not that ethnic majority relationships are empirically or normatively 'better' for immigrant integration. The conclusion is also not that immigrants should replace their co-ethnic relationships with relationships to the ethnic majority. Rather, the aim has instead been to show the added value of ethnic majority relationships and that they play an important role in *some* integration outcomes and not others. As Kruse (2023) shows with interethnic contact, relationships with the ethnic majority may have positive effects for some outcomes but be less important or even have negative effects with other outcomes.

The quantitative personal network literature mostly focuses on how the *structure* (who knows whom in a person's network) and the *composition* (the share of immigrants in a person's network) can predict different outcomes. Instead, I have highlighted in this dissertation that in some cases, and for some outcomes, it may be the simple difference between *not* having particular

relationships and having *one or more* that has the biggest impact. Having at least one relationship of a particular type (depending on the context studied) may open the door to mainstream society or other spheres of society important to the individuals studied.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the literature on social and symbolic boundaries by showing the important role of personal relationships in navigating, interpreting, and sometimes overcoming these types of boundaries. The findings point to these personal relationships being important to how individuals interpret the very meaning of boundaries. When studying experiences of boundaries, personal relationships seem to be an important mechanism for how individuals make sense of these boundaries. Another contribution to this literature is showing how immigrants seem to experience two levels of boundaries: on the everyday and civil society level, and on the macro-political level described by Simonsen (2016) and Wimmer (2008a).

Scope conditions

The data used in this dissertation is from Denmark, a case with relatively low levels of ethnic segregation, enabling having a civil society with contact opportunities with ethnic majority members. While there are local residential areas with relatively high shares of immigrants, shifting Danish governments have succeeded in reducing these shares through policies such as the ‘Ghetto Plan’ in 2018 (Hassani, 2019; Regeringen, 2018). In national contexts with high levels of ethnic segregation and tougher social boundaries that are hard to overcome, the findings of this dissertation may not be applicable.

For other national contexts with relatively low levels of ethnic segregation, Denmark, however, may be a ‘least likely case’ for immigrants establishing relationships with the ethnic majority. As shown, many of the experienced symbolic boundaries are from the political rhetoric and the exclusionary signalling of policies. As such, in national contexts with less political hostility towards immigrants, establishing relationships with the ethnic majority may be easier.

On the other hand, Denmark may also be a ‘most likely case’ exactly because of the symbolic boundaries in the country. In other words, to the extent that immigrants establish relationships with the ethnic majority in Denmark, they may be more important for immigrants’ navigation and integration in Denmark than other contexts, since they can reduce the impact of negative political rhetoric and the immigration laws. While in contexts with less sharp boundaries, immigrants may not to the same extent ‘need’ these relationships and can rely more on co-ethnic relationships.

With the recent developments the past few years in other European countries such as Sweden and Germany, Denmark may no longer be a considered

a unique case to study social and symbolic boundaries for immigrants. With these countries moving closer to the political rhetoric and policy-positions of Denmark, the findings of this dissertation may increasingly become relevant to understanding the role of relationships with the ethnic majority in these national contexts without Denmark being a ‘unique’ case.

As discussed throughout the dissertation, there are methodological limitations that make it difficult to establish causality in the two observational studies. For the qualitative study, the findings may mostly apply to politically aware immigrants on temporary residence permits who are affected by immigration laws. Notwithstanding these limitations, this dissertation has provided strong evidence on the important role that ethnic majority relationships play in immigrant integration. While this dissertation has taken the first steps, future studies may add to the findings by addressing the methodological limitations of the study, which is discussed in the next section.

Future research

With the methodological limitations of this dissertation, future studies may try to come close to causality. One way forward could be to follow immigrants over a longer period with multiple waves of data collection and then be able to test the parallel trends assumption, which is not possible in a two-wave survey.

It is, however, difficult to establish causality when studying personal relationships. Personal relationships such as friendships are, by definition, self-selection (since we choose our friendships as compared to many family relations) and cannot therefore be assigned randomly. I get back to this in the final section. One part of the literature have conducted ‘network interventions’ where individuals (or households) in a large social network are randomly assigned to a treatment, with researchers observing how it ‘spills over’ to other members of this social network (Jaschke et al., 2022; Larson & Lewis, 2024; Soehl & Van Haren, 2023; Valente, 2012). However, in these studies, the treatment is not assigning a personal relationship. Rather, the treatment is carried out through information, teaching a course, etc.

Another possibility could be a qualitative longitudinal study following immigrants who recently arrived in the destination country and over time examine how their personal network develops, and whether these developments are related to their experiences and perceptions of the political system, their national attachment and other boundary-related outcomes that change over time.

Another avenue for future research could be to examine the same research questions in other contexts. I have already mentioned that Denmark is a context where it is contested whether immigrants (and even the children of

immigrants) belong to the nation. It could be interesting with comparative studies that investigate whether differing political climates affect immigrants' tendency to form relationships with the ethnic majority. Relatedly, it could also be interesting to study relationships with the ethnic majority in more ethnically segregated countries. Who in these contexts form relationships with the ethnic majority, and to what extent are these relationships able to help immigrants navigate and overcome rigid and institutionalised social boundaries in these contexts?

Political and practical implications

The findings of this dissertation may put practitioners and public officials in a dilemma. On the one hand, this dissertation has argued and shown how relationships with the ethnic majority can promote immigrant integration and help them deal with diverse obstacles that they meet in the destination country. On the other hand, and as mentioned above, most personal relationships are a matter of choice and personal preference. While some family relationships are biologically given, friendships are, per definition, a matter of choice (Holst, 2015). Where does this dilemma leave us? Since it is neither ethical nor practically possible to force immigrants to become friends with ethnic majority members, is there a way forward?

One way forward would be to focus on contact opportunities and create good environments for positive and deep contact between the ethnic majority and immigrants. Public institutions where a wide variety of people meet each other are decisive. For example, in school settings, it could be possible to more actively try to build bridges between immigrants and the ethnic majority.

Another possibility would be to support the already existing voluntary organisations that match immigrants with ethnic majority members. The qualitative study in this dissertation, as well as evaluations of these initiatives by the volunteer organisations themselves (DRC & RC, 2023), show great benefits for immigrants in terms of learning the language, employment, navigating society, and well-being. One way to support these initiatives could be through the government or municipalities supporting these initiatives financially or by recommending them to newly arrived immigrants.

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Summary

Our personal relationships are important for how we feel and how we are doing, both privately and professionally. They provide us with resources to achieve what we desire. They shape us, one conversation at a time, and make us who we are. Social scientists have studied the impact of personal relationships and networks for decades in various fields and contexts. These relationships have been shown to play an important role in many aspects of human life, such as employment, mental health and political behaviour.

In this PhD dissertation, I use insights from this research on personal relationships and networks to study immigrant integration. More specifically, I study how having personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority can play a role in settling and adapting to a new life in the host country. The dissertation is guided by the following research question: what role does personal relationships with members of the ethnic majority play in immigrant integration?

I examine this question by investigating the extent to which having personal relationships with the ethnic majority is associated with labour market integration and civic integration. Additionally, I examine the meaning that immigrants ascribe to these relationships and the barriers and opportunities that they experience in forming them.

In the context of labour market integration, I argue that immigrants access important resources through their ethnic majority relationships (such as getting to practice the local language), which may promote their chances of finding a job. The results show strong correlations between having at least one close relationship with the ethnic majority and being in employment, not receiving public benefits and having higher annual income. The results also show that this importance of ethnic majority relationships depends on the region of origin.

For civic integration, I argue that deep contact in close relationships with the ethnic majority promote feelings of inclusion in society, and that it promotes political integration outcomes, such as civic duty and trust in public institutions. I find that personal relationships with the ethnic majority promote feelings of being included in society, but that this social influence does not extend to the political outcomes in the two-year period examined. This suggests that while having personal relationships with the ethnic majority plays a role for the 'inward' feeling of belonging, it may not extend to the 'outwards' orientation towards the political system.

While these two above studies highlight the importance of having relationships with the ethnic majority for integration, immigrants also experience that

it is difficult to establish these relationships. They experience language and cultural barriers that make it difficult to establish relationships with ethnic majority members. Importantly, they also describe how political rhetoric and increasingly restrictive citizenship rules have discouraged them from seeking contact with the ethnic majority.

However, it has positive consequences for those who overcome the barriers and establish relationships with the ethnic majority. Immigrants with such relationships can use these to make sense of the political rhetoric and these immigration laws. They, for example, tend to distinguish between their personal experiences and meaningful relationships on the one hand, and how the government and political system behave on the other hand. This enables them to ignore political rhetoric and define their national belonging on their own terms.

The dissertation contributes to the field of immigrant integration by highlighting and demonstrating the underappreciated but important role of the ethnic majority in promoting immigrant integration. The existing literature has extensively examined the role of co-ethnics, without much attention paid to the ethnic majority. Instead, this dissertation highlights that immigrants who have personal relationships with ethnic majority members have access to important resources and recognition that are hardly achievable through relationships with co-ethnics or immigrants from other countries.

Dansk resumé

Vores personlige relationer er vigtige for, hvordan vi har det, og hvordan vi klarer os, både privat og professionelt. De giver os ressourcer til at opnå vores ønsker, og de former os, én samtale ad gangen, og gør os til dem, vi er. Samfundsforskere har studeret betydningen af personlige relationer og netværk i årtier inden for forskellige fagområder. Disse relationer har vist sig at spille en vigtig rolle i mange aspekter af menneskelivet, f.eks. beskæftigelse, mental sundhed og politisk adfærd.

I denne ph.d.-afhandling bruger jeg indsigter fra denne forskning i personlige relationer og netværk til at studere indvandreres integration. Mere specifikt undersøger jeg, hvordan det at have personlige relationer med etniske majoritetsmedlemmer kan spille en rolle i forhold til at falde til og tilpasse sig et nyt liv i værtslandet. Afhandlingen koncentrerer sig om følgende forskningsspørgsmål: Hvilken rolle spiller personlige relationer med etniske majoritetsmedlemmer i indvandreres integration?

Jeg afdækker dette spørgsmål ved at undersøge, i hvilket omfang personlige relationer til den etniske majoritet er forbundet med arbejdsmarkedsintegration og medborgerlig integration. Derudover undersøger jeg den mening, som indvandrere tillægger disse relationer, samt hvilke barrierer og muligheder, de oplever med at danne denne type relationer.

I forbindelse med arbejdsmarkedsintegration argumenterer jeg for, at indvandrere får adgang til vigtige ressourcer gennem deres relationer til den etniske majoritet (f.eks. mulighed for at øve sig i majoritetssproget), hvilket kan øge deres chancer for at finde et job. Afhandlingen finder stærke sammenhænge mellem det at have mindst én tæt relation til den etniske majoritet og det at være i beskæftigelse, ikke være på offentlig forsørgelse og have en højere årsindkomst. Analyserne viser også, at betydningen af majoritetsrelationerne afhænger af indvandreres oprindelsesland.

Hvad angår medborgerlig integration, argumenterer jeg for, at dyb kontakt i nære relationer med den etniske majoritet fremmer følelsen af inklusion i samfundet, samt elementer af politisk integration, såsom tillid til offentlige institutioner og interesse i politik. Jeg finder, at personlige relationer med etniske majoritetsmedlemmer fremmer følelsen af at være inkluderet i samfundet, men finder ikke tegn på, at den sociale indflydelse fra relationerne strækker sig til politisk integration i den undersøgte toårige periode. Det tyder på, at personlige relationer til det etniske flertal spiller en rolle for den 'indadvendte' følelse af at høre til, mens dette måske ikke er tilfældet for den »udadvendte« orientering mod det politiske system.

Mens de to ovennævnte undersøgelser fremhæver betydningen af at have relationer til den etniske majoritet, så oplever mange indvandrere også, at det er svært at etablere disse relationer. De oplever sproglige og kulturelle barrierer, som gør det vanskeligt at etablere relationer med etniske majoritetsmedlemmer. Herudover beskriver de, hvordan den politiske retorik og løbende stramninger af regler om permanent ophold og statsborgerskab har mindsket deres motivation til at opsøge kontakt med den etniske majoritet.

Det har dog positive konsekvenser for dem, der overvinder barriererne og etablerer relationer med den etniske majoritet. Indvandrere med sådanne relationer kan bruge dem til at fortolke den politiske retorik og statsborgerskabsstramningerne. De skelner, for eksempel, mellem deres personlige erfaringer og meningsfulde relationer på den ene side, og hvordan regeringen og det politiske system opfører sig på den anden side. Det gør dem i stand til at ignorere den politiske retorik og definere deres nationale tilhørsforhold på deres egne præmisser.

Ph.d.-afhandlingen bidrager til integrationsforskningen ved at fremhæve og demonstrere den ofte oversete, men vigtige rolle, som den etniske majoritet spiller i at fremme indvandreres integration. Den eksisterende litteratur har i vid udstrækning undersøgt den rolle, som co-etniske relationer spiller, uden at der er blevet lagt særlig stor vægt på den etniske majoritet. Denne afhandling viser netop, at indvandrere, der har personlige relationer til medlemmer af den etniske majoritet, har adgang til vigtige ressourcer og anerkendelse, som svært kan opnås gennem relationer til andre indvandrere.