

## Children's Lay Theories About Ingroups and Outgroups: Reconceptualizing Research on Prejudice

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*The consensus from the developmental literature examining children's intergroup attitudes has been that children as young as 3 years of age exhibit racial prejudice. We suggest, however, that as much of the developmental research has confounded ingroup positivity and outgroup negativity, it becomes difficult to determine whether young children are displaying ingroup bias or outgroup derogation. Furthermore, it appears that young children are not demonstrating hostility toward outgroups; studies that have separately assessed evaluations toward the ingroup and outgroup demonstrate that rather than evaluating the outgroup negatively, young children are demonstrating a positivity bias toward their ingroup. We propose, therefore, that young children are primarily utilizing a perceptually based lay theory that does not necessitate outgroup derogation. We argue, however, that children's lay theories are subject to social structural conditions and specific social transitions, and hence, can lead to the development of prejudice.*

One of the most depressing aspects of prejudice is the early age at which it rears its ugly head. (Giles & Hewstone, 1988, p. vii)

Giles and Hewstone's (1988) conclusion stemmed from decades of research showing that White children consistently assigned positive attributes to their ingroup, the White majority group, and negative attributes to outgroups (i.e., minority groups such as Black Americans). On the basis of these results, it has been argued that children as young as 3 years old are prejudiced (see Aboud, 1988; Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; Brown, 1995; Davey, 1983, for reviews). Indeed, in her review, Aboud (1988) suggested that, contrary to the recent reductions seen in adult prejudice, the prejudice seen in children has remained constant.

What lay theories must young children between the ages of 3 and 7 have about groups to show such biases? According to developmental researchers, as children learn about social groups and recognize that they are members of particular social groups, they become

aware of the differences between social groups. This knowledge leads to the emergence of a specific lay theory—an organized knowledge structure that directs behavior, judgments, and evaluations—about social groups (e.g., Anderson & Lindsay, 1998). According to the predominant view among developmental researchers, young children use race to categorize individuals and subsequently evaluate them, such that those who are similar to themselves are perceived as good (e.g., members of their racial group) and those who are different from themselves are perceived as bad (e.g., members of other racial groups). As stated succinctly by Aboud (1988), “Children notice how similar or dissimilar other people are to themselves. Dissimilar people are disliked” (p. 24; see also Aboud & Amato, 2001).

Inferring that young children possess the lay theory that “what is similar to me is good, and what is different from me is bad” is a logical conclusion, especially in light of the primacy of categorization and evaluation in development (see Bowlby, 1969/1982). These processes of categorization and evaluation are essential to infants and young children as they begin to navigate their physical and social world (see, e.g., Neisser, 1987). In fact, infants and young children constantly use these categories in classifying objects (physical and social) into those that are good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, and beneficial or harmful. For instance, young children perceive the behavior of self and others primarily in terms of good or bad (Alvarez, Ruble, & Bolger, 2000; Heyman, Dweck, & Cain, 1992; Ruble

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& Dweck, 1995). With respect to one particular social category, gender, young children evaluate their own gender more positively and, at 5 to 6 years of age, are quite rigid in their application of gender category norms (see Ruble & Martin, 1998, for a review). Thus, it would seem logical that in the domain of other social categories, such as race, children are engaging in a similar evaluative process, whereby individuals in the child's racial group are perceived as good and those not in the child's racial group are perceived as bad.

The notion that young children derive such evaluations from a lay theory of "what is similar to me is good, and what is different from me is bad" is held also by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Milner, 1984). In their original formulations of the theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that the basic process of social categorization was sufficient to create intergroup discrimination in favor of the ingroup and against the outgroup. Specifically, categorization of persons into ethnic groups becomes an evaluative process through self-identification (i.e., identification with one ethnic group and disidentification with another ethnic group; see Hogg & Abrams, 1988, for a review). Thus, subsequent to categorization, children evaluate their own group positively and outgroups negatively.

It is our belief, however, that it might be premature to conclude that young children utilize the lay theory of what is similar to them is good and what is different from them is bad in making evaluations of racial groups. Developmental researchers, in confounding attitudes toward ingroups and outgroups, have not incorporated recent propositions that positive ingroup bias is not the same as prejudice (Brewer, 1999, in press). Specifically, research within the social identity framework suggests that it is not the case that ingroup positivity is related to negative outgroup attitudes (Brewer, 1979).

As Brewer (1979) pointed out, much of the research examining intergroup behavior has confounded ingroup favoritism with outgroup derogation, making it difficult to assess whether there was enhancement of the ingroup or a devaluation of the outgroup. Brewer pointed out that many studies examining evaluative intergroup biases reported only difference scores (e.g., the number of points given to the ingroup minus the number given to the outgroup), making it impossible to tell whether the locus of the bias was the ingroup or the outgroup. For those studies that did report ingroup and outgroup ratings separately, the majority found that it was enhanced ingroup evaluations that led to the intergroup biases, as outgroup ratings remained constant. Thus, ingroup bias stemmed from evaluating one's ingroup positively without necessarily derogating the outgroup.

If indeed the ingroup and outgroup are viewed positively, only the ingroup more so, can this really be con-

sidered prejudice? An often essential component in definitions of prejudice is that there is an expression of negativity toward an individual as a result of his or her group membership (see Brown, 1995). Social identity research, however, has demonstrated that evaluative ratings of the ingroup often do not correlate with feelings of like or dislike for outgroups or with more negative behaviors toward outgroups (Brewer, 1979; Brown, 1984; Turner, 1981). Moreover, intergroup aggression and ingroup bias seem to be controlled by different variables (Struch & Schwartz, 1989). In fact, research (Mummendey et al., 1992) directly assessing negative behaviors toward group members found that rather than showing ingroup favoritism or outgroup derogation, participants either used fairness strategies that gave equal durations of an unpleasant noise to both groups or strategies that minimized the total duration of noise for both groups.

The lack of an empirical relation between ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation suggests that these two aspects of intergroup behavior may have different motivational origins (Brewer, 1999, in press; Brown, 1995). Indeed, Brewer (in press) recently discussed four distinguishable elements between ingroup identification and intergroup conflict. The first element is *social categorization*, whereby individuals organize social groups into discrete ingroup and outgroup categories. Second, people value their ingroup positively and maintain cooperative relationships with other ingroup members. This does not require any derogation of the outgroup. It is simply *ingroup positivity*. The third element involves competitive *intergroup comparisons*, wherein ingroup positivity is enhanced by social comparisons with outgroups, in which the ingroup is evaluated as better than or superior to the outgroups. Finally, *outgroup hostility* may occur if the relationship between the ingroup and outgroup becomes antagonistic.

Brewer (in press) described these four elements as a hierarchy and suggested that the principles of social categorization and ingroup positivity are most likely universal aspects of human social groups. Intergroup comparison and outgroup hostility, in contrast, "require additional social structural and motivational conditions that are not inherent in the processes of group formation itself" (Brewer, in press, p. 5). Such an argument is particularly problematic for developmental researchers who have traditionally operationalized prejudice as a form of ingroup bias. Thus, it is not clear that what has been measured in past developmental research should be considered prejudice. This does not, of course, imply that ingroup bias, per se, has no negative consequences for the outgroup. For example, it still could result in exclusion, differential distribution of resources, and so on. Our point is simply that ingroup bias and prej-

udice are distinguishable constructs with potentially different antecedents and consequences.

We propose, therefore, that the lay theories of children under the age of 7 do not necessarily incorporate outgroup derogation. Rather, their lay theories may simply reflect a perceptually based preference for the similar, for the familiar (i.e., what is familiar to me is good), or for certain colors. On the basis of Brewer's (in press) hierarchy of intergroup behavior, we further suggest that the developmental trajectory of intergroup attitudes will be influenced by both cognitive development and specific social structural and motivational conditions. In developing this argument, we begin by reviewing the empirical literature assessing children's intergroup attitudes.

### Racial Prejudice in Children

K. B. Clark and Clark (1947/1958) conducted some of the earliest research on the development of racial prejudice in children. In these studies, children were presented with dolls or puppets that were either White or Black and then asked, for example, to pick the doll with which they would like to play (e.g., Asher & Allen, 1969; Goodman, 1964). These studies found that White children from 3 to 8 years of age were much more likely to choose the White doll for positive items (e.g., good doll, nice color) and the Black doll for negative items (e.g., looks bad; see Aboud, 1988; Brand et al., 1974; Brown, 1995; J. E. Williams & Morland, 1976, for reviews). This methodology has inspired much criticism (see, e.g., Aboud, 1988; Lerner & Schroeder, 1975), but the most important critique for the purposes of this review is that the doll test is a forced-choice measure: Acceptance of one target (e.g., the White doll) forces the rejection of the other target (e.g., the Black doll). Such a measure confounds ingroup favoritism with outgroup derogation, making it impossible to tell where the bias occurs.

Two other traditional measures of children's prejudice are the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM/PRAM II; J. E. Williams, Best, & Boswell, 1975; J. E. Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson, & Graves, 1975) and the Katz and Zalk (1978) Projective Prejudice Test. Both the PRAM and the Katz and Zalk measure present children with positive and negative attributes and then ask them to decide whether the attributes are applicable to either a White or a Black person (e.g., "Here are two boys. One of them is an ugly boy. People do not like to look at him. Which is the ugly boy?"). Using this measure, studies have found that White children, as early as 3 years up until 6 or 7 years of age, expressed a pro-White bias (i.e., they chose the White character for most positive items and the Black character for most negative items). Children older than

7 years, however, tended to show less of a pro-White bias (see Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995; J. E. Williams & Morland, 1976, for reviews).

As with the K. B. Clark and Clark (1947/1958) doll tests, these measures still represent a forced choice and as such, confound ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (see Aboud, 1988). Consequently, the locus of bias remains unclear and it is questionable whether these measures are actually assessing prejudice (see also J. E. Williams & Morland, 1976). Recent studies, however, have continued to utilize the PRAM or close adaptations of it despite its forced-choice format and have found results consistent with past research (Aboud, 1999; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Glover & Smith, 1997; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; W. M. Williams & Katz, 1997). These studies found that as early as the age of 3, White children demonstrated an ingroup bias, which became more pronounced until 7 or 8 years of age (Corenblum & Annis, 1993; Glover & Smith, 1997; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). After 7 or 8 years of age, children seemed to become less biased (Doyle & Aboud, 1995).

As a means to separately assess positive and negative attitudes toward groups, Aboud and her colleagues developed the Multi-response Racial Attitude measure (MRA; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). In this measure, children distribute positive and negative attributes (taken from the PRAM) written on cards, among two or three boxes, each box belonging to a child from a different ethnic group. Children are told to place the card in the box or boxes of people who have that attribute (e.g., "Some children are mean. Who is mean? Is it the White child, the Black child, or both of them who is mean?").

Unfortunately, ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation are still confounded in this measure's design and often in its analysis. Although the MRA provides children with an option to choose both groups, instead of a forced choice between one group or the other, it still confounds the evaluation of the ingroup and the outgroup as children are not given an option to say that none of the groups have that attribute. It is possible that children could refuse to attribute a positive or negative word to any of the groups. However, because this is not discussed in any of the published reports as an explicit option offered to the children, it is unlikely that children choose to "disobey" the experimenter's instructions. This is particularly significant in regard to negative traits, as children usually prefer to distribute negative items to none of the groups (Davey, 1983). Hence, children who may prefer not to attribute negative qualities to any of the groups have only two options: They can say that all groups are negative, thereby forcing a negative attribution to the ingroup, or they can say that only the outgroups are negative, thereby preserving a positive evaluation of the ingroup. Thus, it is still unclear, when children choose

this latter option, whether they are exhibiting actual outgroup derogation.

This weakness is compounded by the fact that in analyzing the results of the MRA, researchers often create a relational bias score (i.e., the number of positive traits attributed to the ingroup plus the number of negative traits attributed to the outgroup; Aboud, 1999; Aboud & Doyle, 1996a; Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 1994) or counterbias score (i.e., the number of negative traits attributed to the ingroup plus the number of positive traits attributed to the outgroup; Aboud, 1999; Aboud & Doyle, 1996a, 1996b; Doyle & Aboud, 1995).

Not surprisingly, then, research employing the MRA or close adaptations of it has found results consistent with other forced-choice measures. White children as young as 4 years of age were much more likely to attribute positive words to the ingroup target (e.g., Whites, European Australians) and negative words to the outgroup targets (e.g., Blacks, Aboriginal Australians; Aboud, 1999; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988; Powlishta et al., 1994). As children became older (starting at approximately 7 to 8 years old), however, they exhibited less biased responding (Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Doyle et al., 1988; Powlishta et al., 1994) and increased attribution of positive and negative words to all groups (i.e., flexible responding; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Doyle et al., 1988; Powlishta et al., 1994).

It is important to note that those studies that employed the MRA and separately analyzed the positive and negative scores for the ingroup and outgroup found a similar pattern of results (Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Doyle et al., 1988). This is not surprising given the fact that the MRA requires children to attribute the positive and negative words to at least one of the groups. Because children are not explicitly given the option to say that none of the groups have a particular attribute, it is still unclear whether children are exhibiting simple ingroup favoritism or actual outgroup derogation when they attribute a negative quality to the outgroup.

A few studies have attempted to clarify the relation between ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation by utilizing measures that clearly assess ingroup and outgroup attitudes independently. In his study of 7- to 10-year-old English children, Davey (1983) utilized a "posting box" measure of racial attitudes similar to the MRA. In this measure, children were asked to distribute positive and negative stereotypic attributes to boxes belonging to White, West Indian (Black), and Asian (Indian and Pakistani) adults. Children were allowed to distribute attributes to more than one of the groups and they also were given the option to put the attributes in a box labeled *Nobody*. This study found

that White children exhibited ingroup favoritism in that they attributed more positive traits to their ingroup than to the outgroups. In addition, the White children attributed more negative traits to the outgroups than to their ingroup. Given the slightly older sample, this might reflect the emergence of outgroup derogation in middle childhood. Because the children attributed equal numbers of positive and negative traits to the outgroups and overwhelmingly preferred to attribute negative words to none of the groups, however, it is more likely that they were evaluating the outgroups in a more neutral manner.

Other studies have found results that are consistent with those of Davey (1983). For instance, Bennett and his colleagues (Bennett, Lyons, Sani, & Barrett, 1998) asked 6- to 15-year-old British children to attribute positive and negative traits to their own groups (e.g., English) and four outgroup nationalities (e.g., Spanish). They found that the children attributed significantly more positive traits to their own groups than to the other groups. There were no differences, however, in the number of negative traits attributed to the different groups. In addition, Rutland (1999) used a photo evaluation task in which British children (6–16 years old) rated how much they liked photos that were either labeled or not labeled as *British* or another nationality. He found that only children 10 years and older evaluated the picture labeled as *British* more positively. In addition, only the photo labeled as *German* evidenced outgroup derogation and this did not occur until the children were 12 years old. Although the youngest children in Rutland's study did not differentially evaluate the British photos from other nationalities, it is clear that what would be considered outgroup derogation was exhibited only by much older children.

Further evidence that young children show positivity toward the ingroup and neutrality toward the outgroup comes from a study of novel intergroup attitudes by Yee and Brown (1992). In their study, they assigned 3- to 9-year-old children to "fast" and "slow" egg-and-spoon relay race teams on the basis of an ambiguous performance. Across all ages, the children were more positive toward their own group (regardless of whether it was labeled as *fast* or *slow*) than the other group. Children were not negative toward the other group, however. They were simply less positive, or, in some cases, neutral.

In summary, much of the past research has relied on measures or statistical analyses that have confounded ingroup positivity and outgroup negativity. Thus, in these studies it is not possible to determine whether children's differential responses were the result of outgroup derogation rather than simple ingroup favoritism. The few studies that have employed measures that separately assessed evaluations toward the ingroup and outgroup demonstrated that even though

children were evaluating their ingroup positively, they were not evaluating the outgroup negatively. Evidence of outgroup derogation was seen only in older children (12-year-olds). Therefore, it can be concluded that children, rather than expressing prejudice, are most likely manifesting ingroup favoritism.

### The Young Child's Lay Theory

Our review of the empirical research suggests that the child's lay theory most likely does not include "what is different from me is bad," but is simply "what is similar to me is good." Even this "similarity is good" lay theory, however, is questionable as a basis for young children's judgments. First, when applying this lay theory, young children would have to focus on perceived similarities between self and others. However, young children emphasize differences rather than similarities between themselves and others when they focus on external attributes, such as race or ethnicity (Ramsey & Myers, 1990; see also Aboud, 1988). Second, application of this lay theory would require young children to perceive similarity in others, to some extent, as a function of race or ethnicity. It is not until 5 or 6 years of age, however, that children perceive more similarity among members of the same racial or ethnic group than among members of different racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Aboud, 1999; Aboud & Mitchell, 1977; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). Finally, if young children are employing a lay theory that "what is similar to me is good," it is not clear why studies assessing the intergroup attitudes of racial and ethnic minority children suggest that they do not regularly exhibit an ingroup bias until 7 or 8 years of age (see Aboud, 1988; Cross, 1985; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, for a review).

Are there alternative lay theories that might be more parsimonious in accounting for the data? The literature points to two other possible lay theories that young children might be employing when making their racial preferences. One possibility is a lay theory based on familiarity, "What is familiar to me is good" (Aboud, 1988, 1999; Allport, 1954; Bennett et al., 1998). Some researchers have taken this idea a step further by saying that what is unfamiliar to the child elicits fear and this fear develops into negativity (e.g., Aboud, 1988). However, we propose that this lay theory is more consistent with Allport's (1954) argument: "The familiar is *preferred*. What is alien is regarded as somehow inferior, less 'good,' but there is not necessarily hostility against it" (p. 42).

An important aspect of this lay theory is that the child's basis for familiarity is very much determined by the social context. Key exemplars, of course, would include the child's parents and teachers, but peers,

neighbors, and the community at large also would influence the extent to which children would perceive members of other ethnic groups as familiar. Given that most of the research on White children's attitudes has been conducted in primarily White communities, such a familiarity-based lay theory could explain the predominant preference for White stimuli by these children (see also Brand et al., 1974).

Furthermore, a familiarity-based lay theory could explain the mixed findings regarding racial and ethnic minority children's preferences. Minority children, by their sheer minority status, are likely to perceive majority group members (i.e., White) as familiar to some extent, either through their representation in the community or through the predominantly White media (see Graves, 1999, for a review). Such exposure could explain the variability in findings of Black children's preferences for White and Black stimuli (see Aboud, 1988; Cross, 1985; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, for a review). Specifically, a Black child growing up in a predominantly White area may perceive White stimuli as more familiar and thus, show a pro-White bias. In the same way, a pro-Black bias may be expected if the child is from a predominantly Black area (see Bagley & Young, 1988). For the most part, though, one would expect minority children to be somewhat familiar with members of their own group and the majority group, and therefore show more equivalent preferences for both. In fact, many studies examining young minority children's attitudes have found that they are unbiased (see Aboud, 1988, 1999; Cross, 1985; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, for a review).

Thus, much of the evidence that has been used to support a similarity-based lay theory in young children is consistent also with a lay theory based on a familiarity preference. Additional evidence, however, comes from research that has attempted to modify young children's attitudes. In these studies, children are made more familiar with people of other racial and ethnic groups by teaching the children to better differentiate between people perceptually (e.g., Hohn, 1973; Katz & Zalk, 1978) or by giving children extended "mere exposure" to photographs of children from other racial and ethnic groups (Cantor, 1972). These studies have found that when White children became more familiar with Black stimuli they became more positive in their attitudes toward Black people, suggesting that children may be employing a familiarity-based lay theory in their preferences toward Black and White stimuli.

The empirical evidence is consistent also with a second lay theory that "White is good." Observations from mass media and perhaps from personal experience with authority figures may lead young children to believe that White people are the more valued and powerful members of society (e.g., Spencer, 1988). Thus, racial

and ethnic minority children may be less likely to show an ingroup bias, because they experience a conflict between their own ethnic identity and its value in society (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

Research on young children's perceptions of gender also suggests that a similarity-based theory is insufficient to explain ingroup gender biases, and that perceived favorability may be relevant. As with ethnic ingroup-outgroup biases, children as young as 3 years old assign more positive than negative traits to their own sex, and these evaluative biases decline with age. Interestingly, however, there is an asymmetry like that found for ethnic and racial minority versus majority children, showing that girls show greater ingroup bias than boys. Although the exact reasons for this asymmetry are unclear, it is noteworthy that young children are more likely to attribute positive characteristics to girls than to boys (see Ruble & Martin, 1998, for a review). Moreover, in one study, both greater favorability toward girls (by both boys and girls) and greater ingroup biases by girls were found among 3- to 9-year-old children (Yee & Brown, 1994). Thus, young boys may face a conflict between their own gender identity and its perceived value in society, similar to the hypothesis advanced here for ethnic minority children.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we suggest, a bit more tentatively, that because young children are focused on physical correlates of race, their differential responding to Black and White stimuli also might be directly linked to an actual color preference, such as "white is the good color" (see also Allport, 1954; J. E. Williams & Morland, 1976). Such a tendency has been observed in adults (e.g., Frank & Gilovich, 1988; J. E. Williams & McMurty, 1970) and in children (e.g., Stabler & Johnson, 1972; J. E. Williams, Boswell, & Best, 1975). Given the pervasive socialization across cultures that white is associated with goodness and black associated with badness (see, e.g., Adams & Osgood, 1973; J. E. Williams & Morland, 1976), it is quite possible that young children might believe that "the white color is good." Furthermore, as both Black and White children would experience socialization that implies, if not explicitly states, that the good guy wears white and the bad guy wears black, a lay theory based on color preferences also could explain the variability in Black children's preferences for White and Black stimuli (see Alejandro-Wright, 1985; Cross, 1985, for a review).

This color preference lay theory would be particularly relevant in experimental research employing sim-

plistic stimuli that varied primarily in skin color (e.g., dolls, line drawings) as opposed to photographs of actual persons. In addition, this lay theory seems particularly relevant for young children (3- and 4-year-olds) who are just beginning to learn about racial categories. For instance, young children's use of this color preference lay theory might explain why antibias training experiments that employed color reinforcement, as opposed to other techniques (e.g., social learning), were very effective for 3- and 4-year-olds (Spencer & Horowitz, 1973), but were not effective for children over the age of 4 (Katz & Zalk, 1978).

In summary, we propose that there are several possible lay theories that young children might be utilizing, and it is feasible that young children are either relying on (a) a combination of these lay theories, (b) certain lay theories at particular cognitive stages (e.g., very young children using a color preference), or (c) certain lay theories in particular experimental and social contexts. Although these lay theories are fundamentally different, they are similar in that they make two basic assumptions. First, they assume that young children's cognitive abilities are quite limited, in that the children are egocentric, focused on external attributes, and reliant on preoperational reasoning. Second, these lay theories assume that young children are not necessarily demonstrating what might be considered outgroup negativity (i.e., prejudice).

### **Social Factors That Influence the Developmental Trajectory of Intergroup Attitudes**

Although young children do not seem to hold lay theories that automatically lead to outgroup derogation, prejudicial attitudes, or outgroup hostility, such attitudes may emerge given certain social-contextual factors present during development. As Brewer (in press) suggested, prejudice may be the result of specific social and structural circumstances rather than a natural result of group formation. Applied to young children, this argument would suggest that prejudice is not a natural outgrowth of children's cognitive development and social categorization. Rather, prejudice would emerge as an interaction of developmental changes and social-contextual factors, such as the explicit socialization of evaluations associated with particular groups or more implicit socialization that membership in particular groups has a meaningful function.

In some cases, explicit socialization practices could lead young children to develop a lay theory specifying that the ingroup is good (e.g., "White people are good") and that the outgroup is bad (e.g., "Black people are bad"). Such messages might be conveyed to young children by racist parents or in

<sup>1</sup>Such findings may seem at odds with the higher status and prestige accorded to men in most cultures, but there may be an important distinction between power and status being more associated with males and goodness (e.g., kindness) being more associated with females, even by adults (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991). Young children seem to be oriented more to distinguishing good from bad (Ruble & Dweck, 1995), and thus they may value females more.

mass media portrayals of conflict with other nationalities or ethnicities. For instance, in Rutland's (1999) study of British children, the only evidence of outgroup derogation occurred when older children evaluated Germans (see also Bennett et al., 1998). As Rutland pointed out, "Negative images of Germans possibly stem from the frequently unsympathetic representation of Germans as the 'enemy' in British war stories found in children's comic books, films, and television programmes" (p. 66).

Indeed, when examining ethnic attitudes in a country where clear ethnic friction results in explicit outgroup derogation (e.g., the Arab–Israeli conflict), it becomes evident that children can be socialized to view certain groups in a prejudicial manner at a very young age. For instance, Bar-Tal (1996) found that Israeli children as young as 2.5 years old rated a male photo more negatively when he was identified as an Arab than when the photo was not labeled. Thus, it is likely that young children exposed to frequent and overt negativity toward particular groups may develop a lay theory that reflects outgroup negativity as well as ingroup positivity.

In addition, children could form more prejudicial lay theories through implicit socialization that membership in particular groups has a functional value. Evidence for this possibility comes from Bigler and her colleagues (Bigler, 1995; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; see also Yee & Brown, 1992). These researchers have shown that making functional use of groups in the classroom leads to the formation of intergroup attitudes. Specifically, Bigler et al. (1997) found that regardless of whether two color groups (blue vs. yellow t-shirt groups) were assigned by a random drawing or a biological correlate (dark hair–blue group, light hair–yellow group), children (6 to 9 years old) rated the ingroup as more positive than the outgroup and the outgroup as more negative than the ingroup. However, this occurred only when the teacher incorporated physical and spatial dichotomies between the groups, as well as verbally categorized them, not when the children simply wore the blue or yellow t-shirts with no meaning attached to them. Similarly, Bigler (1995) found that children exhibited more occupational stereotyping of men and women in a classroom when gender was made functional by the teacher. These studies suggest that social conditions, such as the extent to which group membership influences children's experiences, affect the extent to which children make competitive intergroup comparisons. Hence, when society makes functional use of racial and ethnic groups, prejudice is a conceivable consequence.

In short, these studies suggest that the extent to which children exhibit ingroup positivity, competitive intergroup comparisons, and outgroup hostility is influenced by social structural and motivational condi-

tions, such as explicit and implicit socialization practices. It is our contention, then, that the developmental trajectory of intergroup attitudes is dependent not only on cognitive development, but also on the social structural and motivational conditions surrounding the developing child.

### **Developmental Transitions and the Emergence of Prejudice**

As suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and others, transitional periods in development offer a unique window into how the characteristics of the child and properties of the environment interact during development. Ruble's (1994) phase model of transitions suggests that social cognitive and social structural transitions launch cognitive motivational changes that may affect intergroup perceptions and behaviors. At these transitions, one's existing lay theories are no longer the best guides for effective behavior, so new lay theories need to be constructed. Transitions, therefore, change how individuals must deal with the world and motivate them to find out more about it. As such, the times at which children undergo particular social cognitive and social structural transitions may be particularly promising moments where the development of prejudice and the emergence of outgroup derogation can be studied.

Two types of social cognitive transitions seem particularly relevant to the development of prejudice. The first is racial constancy. Drawing from Kohlberg's (1966) analysis of gender constancy and subsequent revisions of this analysis (e.g., Stangor & Ruble, 1989), we would predict that children's growing understanding that they are a member of a racial group that is unchanging over time and across superficial transformations (i.e., attaining racial constancy) would motivate them to seek information about that group, become attached to it, and adopt the distinguishing features of that group. The results of a few prior studies of such relations have been promising, although mixed. Racial constancy has been related to ingroup preference (A. Clark, Hocevar, & Dembo, 1980), although, in some cases, only at some ages (Semaj, 1980), and to biased ingroup–outgroup attitudes in 6-year-old Black and White children, but not in younger children (W. M. Williams & Katz, 1997). Thus, the attainment of racial constancy appears to be an important element in children's choices and behaviors. Because different measures were used in the different studies, however, the exact nature of the relation was unclear.

In a more direct assessment of the hypothesized link between racial constancy and cognitive motivational orientations, Rhee and her colleagues (Rhee, Ruble, Jones, & Stangor, 2000) showed that phases in the development of racial constancy are associated with

changes in children's information seeking and preferences. In general, the results were consistent with predictions that children show an increasing ingroup bias as they approach constancy, peak at the time of acquisition, and then become more flexible a few years after the attainment of constancy. One of the most striking findings was the differential impact of racial constancy on race-related outcomes between the White children and the Black and Asian children. In general, for the White children there was the expected relation between the specific phases of this transition and race-related perceptions, information seeking, and preferences. For example, White children who were approaching racial constancy found racial categories more salient than did the children who simply labeled themselves as *White*. This parallels the finding in the gender literature that children approaching gender constancy show a greater likelihood of sorting pictures on the basis of sex (Coker, 1984).

In contrast, for the racial and ethnic minority children, ingroup biases were not evident until at least full constancy. These differences were interpreted in terms of the relative status that various groups hold in society. That is, racial and ethnic minority children may be less likely to show an ingroup orientation at early phases of constancy because they may experience a conflict between the positive attitudes they associate with their own group identity and an awareness of the dominant culture's devaluation of their group (e.g., Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). However, it is also possible that racial minority children demonstrate cognitive flexibility as they have the challenge of identifying with both their own ethnic group and the larger White society (see Alejandro-Wright, 1985; Cross, 1985). Thus, perhaps a full understanding of the invariability of racial identity may be required before this social cognitive transition leads racial and ethnic minority children to value and adopt ingroup characteristics and activities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that children's level of understanding of racial and ethnic constancy may influence the type of lay theory they hold about racial and ethnic groups. The exact nature of this relation, however, may vary depending on whether the child is in the racial and ethnic majority or minority in the population.

A second social cognitive transition that would be important for the development of prejudice concerns changes in person perception and social comparison. Between 7 and 9 years of age, children show a qualitatively different understanding of person traits, shifting from primarily physical and concrete (e.g., short hair) to internal and psychological (e.g., helpful; Rholes, Newman, & Ruble, 1990). Even when young children use psychological characteristics to describe others, these usually refer to global evaluations of a person's re-

cent behavior (e.g., he's mean), not as stable dispositions that cause or mediate behavior (Alvarez et al., 2000; Ruble & Dweck, 1995). At this same time, children begin to engage in a kind of social comparison that involves dispositional characteristics with long-lasting implications (e.g., abilities) rather than simple outcome comparisons (e.g., who ran faster; Ruble & Frey, 1991). Such developments would seem to represent critical social cognitive precursors for the progression into intergroup comparisons and outgroup hostility (i.e., the last two elements of Brewer's, in press, hierarchy of intergroup conflict), as they allow comparisons across groups on enduring stereotypic features that would provide the basis for prejudiced attitudes.

In addition to these two types of social cognitive transitions, social structural transitions are likely to be particularly significant influences on the development of lay theories about social groups. One such social structural transition would be a shift from a relatively homogeneous racial and ethnic setting to a more heterogeneous one. This transition per se may not change one's lay theories about social groups. In seeking to understand this new environment and one's standing in it, however, variations in the context of this environment will influence the lay theories drawn about the significance of one's social identity and one's relation to other groups. Moreover, one's level of cognitive development can interact with the context to affect the nature of these lay theories.

For example, young children who enter a heterogeneous elementary school with a rudimentary lay theory that familiarity is good may never have that theory challenged if the environment does not emphasize group differences or imply negative characteristics about members of some groups. Such children may begin by preferring to play with perceptually similar children but then widen their circles as children with other characteristics become familiar. In contrast, a lay theory involving intergroup comparisons (i.e., Brewer's, in press, third level) may emerge when children are older and actively engaging in social comparison. Moreover, if they are situated in an environment that emphasizes group boundaries, competition for resources, or evaluative differences between groups, their theories also may incorporate outgroup hostility (i.e., Brewer's, in press, fourth level).

Immigration from an ethnically homogeneous country to a more heterogeneous one such as the United States also could result in such a transitional process (see Fuligni, 1998). For example, when West Indian adolescents who have African backgrounds immigrate to the United States, others may identify them as American Blacks. However, these West Indian adolescents may choose to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes and evaluations of American Blacks by emphasizing their immigrant ethnic identity



(e.g., Jamaican, Haitian) and denigrating American Blacks (Waters, 1994). As such, the desire for a positive social identity within a more ethnically heterogeneous culture provides the motivational impetus for these adolescents to engage in competitive intergroup comparisons and outgroup hostility.

In summary, a transition analysis provides a window for examining the interaction between cognitive development and context in the emergence of lay theories. Cognitive developmental changes provide the motivation and capacity for particular kinds of lay theories, and context adds the substance to those theories. Indeed, it is only through this interplay of cognitive development and context that a prejudicial lay theory could emerge. It is our argument, then, that context aside, it is unlikely that young children (under the age of 7) have attained the sufficient cognitive capacities necessary to display what is normally defined as prejudice. That is, the aspects of a lay theory that would underlie prejudice—that individuals belong to distinct, immutable racial groups with particular interests and proclivities that endure over time—are not likely to be available to young children until they have realized certain cognitive developments, such as racial constancy, an understanding of stable traits, and the ability to engage in social comparisons. Therefore, until young children have acquired this level of cognitive development, around the age of 7, their lay theories about groups will be simplistic, perceptually based, and transitory. Hence, their preferences, ranging from what appear to be ingroup favoritism to prejudice, are fundamentally different from those of older children and adults (see also Aboud, 1988; Alejandro-Wright, 1985; Katz, 1976).

### Conclusion

To date, the existing body of literature does not provide compelling evidence for the grave concern expressed in the quote by Giles and Hewstone (1988) at the beginning of this article. Rather than prejudice, what appears to be rearing its head at an early age is most likely a positivity bias toward the child's ingroup (e.g., familiar others). Thus, young children's lay theories may incorporate, for example, a preference for the familiar, but not outgroup hostility. It is possible that future research that disentangles ingroup and outgroup evaluations will more convincingly demonstrate the existence of prejudice among children as young as 3 and 4 years of age, but we believe this to be unlikely except in certain socioenvironmental contexts. Instead, it seems more likely that until children develop an understanding of racial constancy and the existence of stable dispositions within individuals—after 7 years of age—they will not

be cognitively prepared to make the social comparisons necessary for truly prejudicial attitudes.

Even then, we believe, the emergence of prejudice and outgroup hostility requires contextual conditions that emphasize the distinctions and differential valuation of racial groups. Consequently, researchers should focus on the contextual conditions that lead to both the emergence and reduction of prejudicial attitudes. Moreover, developmental researchers need to examine the contextual conditions that influence the formation of young children's lay theories regarding social groups, as well as the developmental progression of these lay theories. Only when we have a better understanding of those conditions that foster prejudice and those that reduce it, as well as the particular lay theories that children are relying on, will we be able to create effective school and neighborhood programs to prevent and eliminate prejudice.

Even if young children are not displaying truly prejudicial attitudes, could their ingroup bias nonetheless have consequences for the development of prejudice in later years? Could young children's favoritism toward their own racial group result in behaviors that, although not intentionally prejudicial, have the effect of excluding and displacing children from other groups? It is conceivable that over time, such exclusion eventually could be justified by prejudicial views at later ages. It is possible also that individual differences in the degree of ingroup bias could be precursors to prejudicial views later in development. By theoretically and empirically distinguishing between ingroup bias and outgroup hostility, future research could better examine the possible role of ingroup bias in the manifestation of prejudice, both across time and development.

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