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# A New Social-Cognitive Developmental Perspective on Prejudice: The Interplay Between Morality and Group Identity

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## Abstract

We argue that prejudice should be investigated in the context of social-cognitive development and the interplay between morality and group identity. Our new perspective examines how children consider group identity (and group norms) along with their developing moral beliefs about fairness and justice. This is achieved by developing an integrated framework drawing on developmental and social psychological theories of prejudice. This synthesis results in a perspective that provides a more contextualized analysis of prejudice development than that previously offered by developmental theories. We describe research that supports our view that social norms, intergroup contact, and perceived outgroup threat affect the relative weight children place on moral and group-based criteria during the development of prejudice.

## Keywords

social-cognitive, morality, group identity, prejudice

Psychological science has studied prejudice since the 1920s and 1930s (see Brown, 1995; Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). On the positive side, psychological research on adults has shown that explicit racial prejudice has declined in the last decades of the 20th century (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998); moreover, there is extensive evidence for the pervasive lifelong valuing of equality of persons and moral principles among humans (see Killen & Smetana, 2006). On the negative side, explicit prejudice against other groups still remains high in the 21st century (e.g., Muslims in the U.S. and Europe), and implicit biases against members of outgroups remain pervasive in most regions of the world (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995)

What about children? Do they show prejudice, and, if so, why? Prior research has demonstrated that, on the one hand, children display ethnic bias and prejudice in interethnic contexts (e.g., McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005), and on the other hand, evaluate racial and ethnic exclusion from groups as unfair—that is, morally wrong (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). In this article, we will address this apparent contradiction by proposing a new social-cognitive developmental perspective on children's prejudice. This proposes that the dynamic between developing morality and group identity

reflects the crux of prejudice as it emerges in childhood, and that group membership becomes an important source of influence on children's ability and motivation to enact their emerging beliefs about fairness, inclusion, and equality.

Our intention is to map out a new social-cognitive developmental perspective on prejudice that will provide a framework for future research. In the first section of this article, we introduce our domain-specific social-cognitive developmental approach, which shares a contextual foundation many contemporary theories in developmental science, and we demonstrate how it differs from a domain-general cognitive developmental model. Following this theoretical critique, we outline our integrative social-cognitive developmental perspective on prejudice, which addresses the relationships between morality and group identity. We contend that prejudice development involves a close interplay between the emergence of moral reasoning, concerns about group functioning, and the motivation

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to become fully integrated into a social group. Children have to weigh their concerns about group identity (i.e., preserving group norms) with their developing moral beliefs about fairness and justice.

For example, all-boy private schools are often asked to include girls, but some boys balk at the idea and cite the need to preserve the group and maintain “group order,” as the idea is seen as disruptive and unconventional. In contrast, other boys challenge the underlying set of stereotypes behind the argument and advocate gender-integrated schools based on the moral principles of fairness and equality. In this article, we are concerned with whether (and when) children consider both their group identity (i.e., the need to be valued by the group) and morality (i.e., the need to act according to moral principles) when affirming or rejecting prejudiced attitudes.

Our perspective uniquely draws from two compatible theories within developmental and social psychology: social domain theory (Turiel, 1998) and social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), respectively. Therefore, the next sections of this article briefly describe each theory and their related research, including recent research on social reasoning from a social domain viewpoint (Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006) and developmental subjective group dynamics from a social identity perspective (Abrams & Rutland, 2008). Next, we review recent research on how children simultaneously consider both morality and group identity when evaluating intergroup exclusion. Finally, we describe research that has examined the factors that we propose are related to the relative weight children place on morality and group identity in the formation of their attitudes toward groups and individuals within groups, and we provide three new areas for future research.

## **Developmental Perspectives on Prejudice: Domain-General and Domain-Specific Approaches**

### **Domain-General Approach**

Developmental research from the 1970s onward has often examined prejudice from a domain-general cognitive developmental perspective. This approach theorizes that children’s limited cognitive abilities—in the form of an inability to weigh multiple classifications simultaneously, such as those involved in the logical classification of objects—at least in part account for prejudice and stereotyping amongst children (Aboud, 2008; Bigler & Liben, 2006). The argument goes that as children became capable of weighing two or more categories simultaneously (e.g., concrete operations in Piaget’s theory by age 7 or 8), children understand that multiple categories could be assigned to the same person (e.g., French, nice, friendly, likes books, shy) and, therefore, focus on a single category (e.g., French or “foreign”) declines, with age making prejudice less likely. For example, instead of viewing another child merely as “foreign,” that child may be viewed as a person who has brown hair, is quite tall, good at sport, and friendly.

Recently researchers have pointed to limitations of the cognitive developmental perspective on prejudice (Nesdale, 2008; Rutland, 2004). First, research shows that other forms of prejudice do not decline with age; rather, they are more dependent on the social experience and social attributions of intentions (e.g., McGlothlin & Killen, 2005, 2006). McGlothlin and colleagues used ambiguous situations to determine whether children used race to attribute intentions when evaluating familiar, everyday peer encounters. They showed that 6–9 year old European American children attributed more negative intentions to a Black child than to a White child in potential “pushing” and “stealing” ambiguous peer encounters on the playground. They also rated a Black child’s next action and friendship potential more negatively than that of a White child. Although these findings initially appeared to reflect a pervasive racial bias, there was an important qualification. This bias was only revealed by European-American children in racially non-mixed schools; European-American children of the same age in the same school district and enrolled in ethnically mixed schools did not attribute more positive intentions to their ingroup than to the outgroup; in fact, race was not used to attribute negative intentions.

Moreover, research shows that both implicit and explicit prejudice continues after childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. Using the Implicit Associations Test (IAT), researchers have shown that European-American adults hold implicit racial biases of which they are not aware (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). These adults more quickly associate negative words with outgroup (Black) faces than with ingroup (White) faces. Recent developmental studies have also examined implicit bias in childhood using IAT type methodologies (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). For example Rutland, Cameron, Milne, and McGeorge (2005) used a child-friendly pictorial-based IAT and found implicit racial and national biases were present amongst White British children aged 6 to 16 years. This child version of the IAT measured the relative strength of association between concepts (e.g., “White British” or “Black British” faces) and attributes (e.g., “happy” or “sad” cartoon faces). Implicit bias was measured by whether children showed faster reaction times for stereotypical (e.g., “White British” and “happy”) than counterstereotypical (e.g., “Black British” and “happy”) associations. Moreover, implicit racial biases remain in older children even though they show the usual pattern of reduced explicit racial bias.

Further, somewhat contrary to the cognitive-developmental perspective, research has shown that explicit prejudice and stereotypes persist in both adolescence and adulthood. For example, European-American adolescents enrolled in ethnically homogeneous schools were more likely to use explicit stereotypes to explain racial discomfort in peer encounters than were European-American adolescents enrolled in ethnically heterogeneous schools (Killen, Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, in press). In addition, extensive research has demonstrated the existence of racial and gender stereotyping in adulthood (see for examples, Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Dovidio et al., 2005; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001).

Fourth, the domain-general cognitive-developmental perspective contends that prejudice development follows a general age-related pattern (i.e., it emerges in the preschool years, peaks around 7–8 years of age, and then declines). Up until the late 1980s, such a focus on domain-general age trends, characterized as “stages of development,” was also proposed in other areas of developmental science, such as morality (Kohlberg, 1984), social perspective-taking (Selman, 1980), and logical reasoning (Piaget, 1952). The notion was that children use one global scheme to evaluate a range of situations in many different contexts (e.g., if they have a “selfish, punishment-avoidant” orientation, then this type of thinking pervades their way of evaluating problems across a number of tasks). However, in recent years, a focus on global stages as a framework for understanding children’s cognitive and social-cognitive development has greatly diminished with the increase of evidence supporting domain specificity in children’s knowledge and development.

### **Domain-Specific Approach**

In general, domain-specific models of cognition have replaced domain-general theories as the most parsimonious interpretation of children’s developing cognitive abilities (see Keil, 2006). Beginning in the late 1980s, empirical studies in the area of social-cognitive development research have provided a basis for characterizing development in terms of social domains, as reflected in research on social and moral development (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). From an early age (3–4 years of age), social-cognitive domain approaches demonstrate that children’s judgments reflect distinctive reasoning process that simultaneously reflect considerations about the self (i.e., psychological domain, including autonomy; personal prerogatives), the group (societal domain, reflecting customs, traditions, regulations designed to promote the smooth functioning of groups), and morality (i.e., moral domain, reflecting principles of fairness, equality, rights and others’ welfare). These domains exist in parallel in early development. This means that young children are capable of using different forms of reasoning (not just one form) at the same time, such as weighing moral considerations, group norms, and personal goals.

How children’s behavior reflects multiple considerations simultaneously (e.g., an issue of fairness and convention) or the way they use different forms of reasoning (e.g., moral and psychological) to evaluate situations and to act on their judgments is a focus of the research paradigm. This research model, then, focuses on the different reasons children use for evaluating issues in a range of social situations and the contextual parameters that make an issue reflect psychological, societal, or moral considerations. This model, which has been applied to understanding a range of children’s and adolescent’s social concepts, provides the basis for the integrative approach put forward in this article.

In the next section, we will discuss how a domain-specific approach drawing upon theories within developmental and

social psychology provides the basis for a new perspective on the development of prejudice.

### **An Integrative Social-Cognitive Developmental Perspective on Prejudice**

Our social reasoning developmental (SRD) perspective addresses the apparent contradiction between the early onset of both prejudice and morality in childhood by showing that children simultaneously develop the ability to think about the social world using different types of judgments, while considering notions of group identity, social-conventional norms, and morality. This complex social reasoning then forms the basis for their evaluations of groups and peers within groups. The SRD perspective originates from an integration of traditions within both developmental psychology and social domain theory (Turiel, 1983) and social psychology and SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In synthesizing these theories into a perspective, we argue that the interplay between morality and group identity is central to the emergence of prejudice in childhood and that both elements need to be considered in conjunction within future research.

Psychologists have long considered the relationship between morality and group processes (i.e., norms, conventions). Kohlberg (1971) and Piaget (1932) both defined morality as distinct from group phenomena such as cultural norms and customs in the development of their domain-general stage models of morality. Moreover, morality is defined as principles or norms that are independent and autonomous from group conventions given the generalizable nature of justice, fairness, and equality, for example. These models, such as Kohlberg’s (1971) conceived principled morality as postconventional (i.e., independent from culture and developmentally later than social-conventional reasoning). In contrast, others have argued that the source of all morality lies in the group (culture or subculture). For example, moral judgments have been defined as “evaluations (good or bad) of the actions or character of a person that are made with respect of a set of virtues held to be obligatory by a culture or subculture” (Haidt, 2001, p. 817).

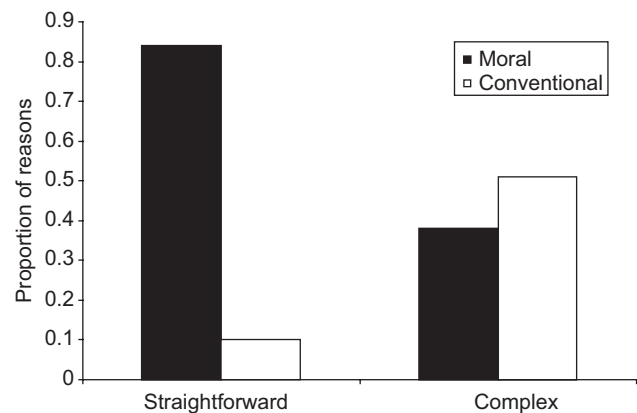
Our perspective does not take a morally relativistic position or define morality as what the culture deems is right or wrong (consistent with over 100 empirical studies; see Smetana, 2006). Instead we contend that children’s decision making is influenced simultaneously by both morality (principles distinct from cultural norms) and group processes (norms and identity), as these two processes are intertwined in development. Research described below clearly shows that, starting in middle childhood, children infer group loyalty norms and use both moral and social-conventional forms of reasoning when differentiating within and between social groups. We draw on social psychological theories to investigate social reasoning involving group identity (and group loyalty) and social developmental theories to assess social reasoning concerned with morality and social conventions. How these factors contribute to the emergence of prejudice and discrimination in childhood is a main goal of our new research paradigm.

Ours is not the first model to integrate theories from developmental and social psychology. For example, Bigler and Liben's (2006, 2007) developmental intergroup theory is grounded in the cognitive-developmental theory described above and SIT. What makes our approach different is that we draw on social-cognitive domain theory, rather than the domain-general cognitive-developmental theory; social-cognitive domain theory makes fundamentally different assumptions about development, cognition, and the acquisition of social concepts than does cognitive-developmental theory, as discussed above. In line with SIT, we also argue that knowing that you belong to a social group is related to the expression of prejudice and that relationships between social groups within any context are important in making certain social group memberships salient.

In concert with social domain theory, social identity theorists hold that judgments at different levels of categorization are interconnected and that social perception follows a general principle of maximizing the meaningful fit of information to the task and situation at hand (see Abrams & Hogg, 1999). Our integrated model is one that reflects compatibility at the meta-theoretical level. We assert that integration between SIT and social domain theory is appropriate and fruitful given that these theories are complementary. In the following sections, we describe both social domain and social identity theories of children's prejudice to demonstrate how these two approaches are compatible and together help provide a new integrative perspective on prejudice development.

## Social Domain Theory and Children's Prejudice

Social domain theory has informed research on prejudice in childhood by demonstrating the forms of social reasoning that children use when evaluating situations that reflect social exclusion: the moral, social conventional, and the psychological (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983). For example, exclusion may be viewed as wrong and unfair (moral), or as legitimate to make the group work well (conventional), or as legitimate due to personal prerogatives and choice (psychological). Research using the social domain approach has shown that exclusion (i.e., blatant prejudice) based solely on gender and race, which involves the use of negative stereotypes, is viewed as wrong and unfair by the vast majority of children and adolescents interviewed and surveyed. At the other end of the spectrum, there are forms of exclusion that are tolerated by children—for example, exclusion based on qualifications (e.g., excluding a slow runner from a track team) or exclusion based on agreed group criteria (e.g., excluding somebody from a music club who cannot play music). What we are interested in are the types of exclusion that are multifaceted and at times ambiguous, involving both group identity and issues of fairness, due to the potential use of factors that result in prejudicial and biased outcomes. These forms of exclusion often involve subtle forms of ingroup favoritism, prejudice, and stereotyping.



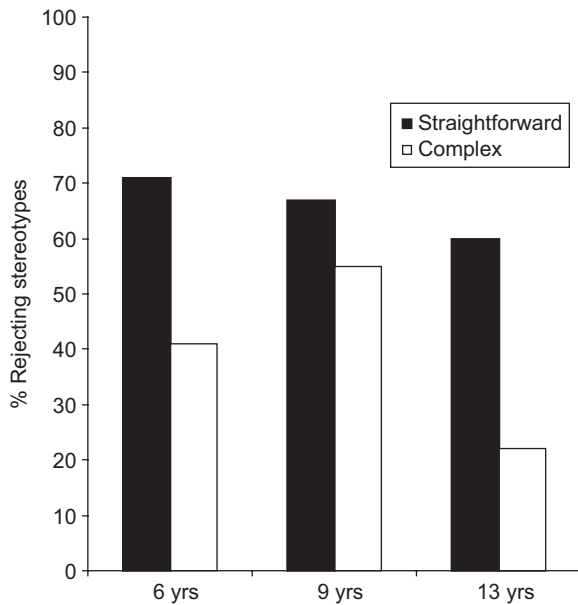
**Figure 1.** Proportion of moral and conventional reasons used by children (4.5 years) in straightforward and complex gender exclusion contexts.

In a series of studies, Killen and colleagues (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2008; Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001) assessed children's evaluations of peer exclusion in everyday contexts, such as activities (doll playing, truck playing) and peer clubs (baseball, ballet), as well as common peer encounters (lunch time, afterschool clubs, birthday parties, dating).

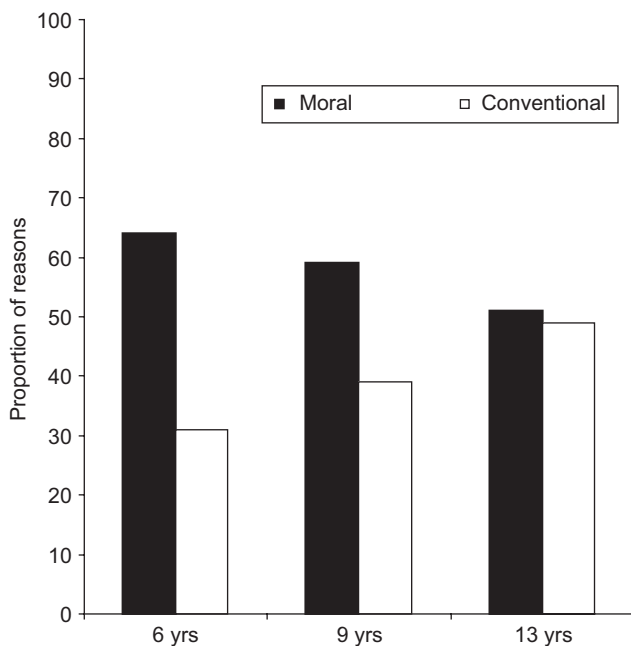
These studies demonstrated that, from a young age, children in straightforward situations give priority to moral reasoning instead of group membership by emphasizing moral reasoning (e.g., fairness) when judging exclusion based on group membership, such as gender or race ("It's unfair to not let the girl play with trucks; she can play with them, too, and she probably has them at home"). Yet, by investigating whether complexity or ambiguity reveals prejudice or bias, studies from this approach found that young children often resorted to stereotypic judgments or conventions to justify exclusion (see Fig. 1; Killen et al., 2001). For example, when deciding whom to include in a club when there is only room for one more to join (and two peers from different groups want to join), children often justified inclusion on the basis of group functioning and/or stereotypic expectations ("It's okay to not let the girl join because girls don't like trucks and they might cry"; Killen et al., 2001), confirming and extending previous findings with adults, in which stereotypes have been shown to be invoked more often in situations involving ambiguity or complexity than in straightforward contexts (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2006).

In a study with older children between 6 and 13 years of age (Killen & Stangor, 2001), age-related changes indicated that, in a straightforward context, the majority of children rejected decisions to exclude on the basis of gender or race (see Fig. 2), and used moral reasons (see Fig. 3). For example, the children typically said, "It's unfair not to let the girl in the baseball club; many girls play baseball and can be really good." In contrast, when asked to make decisions about exclusion in complex situations in which the threat to group functioning was increased, older children rejected the stereotype less (see Fig. 2) and justified exclusion using social





**Figure 2.** Proportion of children (6, 9, and 13 years of age) rejecting stereotypes when choosing a peer to join a club in straightforward contexts, and complex contexts.



**Figure 3.** Proportion of children (6, 9, and 13 years) using moral or social-conventional reasons for rejecting stereotypes when choosing a peer to join a club.

conventional reasons (see Fig. 3). For example, older children typically said “The group won’t work well with someone different in it; they will feel strange if a boy joins the team and he just won’t fit in.” Moreover, various studies have shown that identification with the excluder is related to the types of reasons used to justify exclusion: Boys may view exclusion of a girl

from a boys’ group as legitimate based on group conventions and identity (Killen et al., 2002), and ethnic minority students in the United States. are more likely to evaluate interracial exclusion by ethnic majority students (e.g., not having lunch with a friend of a different race) as more wrong than would the ethnic majority students themselves, and they would use moral reasoning to explain their judgments.

The form of reasoning used by children varies depending on the contextual parameters (Horn, 2008; Killen, 2007). Research using the social domain model has demonstrated that contextual variables (other than “straightforward” or “complex” dimensions) contribute to the use of different forms of reasoning. Children and adolescents evaluate intergroup exclusion differently and use different forms of reasoning as a function of the source of influence (parents or peers), the level of intimacy (friendship, dating, marriage), individuating information (qualifications for joining a group), and status of the groups, whether the context is private or public (friendship, peer clubs, societal institutions).

For example, with age, children reject parental statements condoning intergroup exclusion (Killen et al., 2002), view intergroup exclusion as more of a matter of personal choice than morality in intimate contexts (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Killen, Henning, Kelly, Crystal, & Ruck, 2007; Killen, Stangor, Horn, & Sechrist, 2004), and are less likely to use stereotypes when individuating information is available. Further, with age, adolescents use moral reasoning to reject parental norms when exclusion is condoned by parents, whereas they will use social conventional reasoning to assert that exclusion is legitimate when it is condoned by peers, especially when exclusion is important to preserve group functioning (Horn, 2008).

This body of research, then, has demonstrated the range of contextual variables that contribute to the manifestation of prejudiced attitudes, by illustrating how these attitudes develop past early childhood and by demonstrating the forms of judgments and reasons that children and adolescents use to justify intergroup exclusion are dependent upon the extent to which they identify with a group (e.g., boys or peer group). A key finding from this recent research using a social domain approach is that group identity becomes a powerful and salient dimension when evaluating the legitimacy of exclusion in group contexts.

### SIT and Children’s Prejudice

To understand better how group identity might impact children’s prejudiced judgments, developmental psychologists have drawn from theories in social psychology. In particular the focus has been on SIT, which argues that group memberships form an integral part of the self-concept. They are foundational for becoming a person and necessary for psychological well-being and the effective functioning of society. Likewise, social domain theory argues that conventions and traditions are perpetuated from one generation to the next for the purpose of establishing and

recreating strong group identities that ensure successful adaptation and attachment to others.

It is important to note that SIT contends that self-evaluation in a particular context partly depends on which specific group identity is salient. Identification with different groups and categories can vary over time and situation because it is highly responsive to changes in the social context (see Rutland & Cinnirella, 2000). Nonetheless, SIT contends that individuals are typically motivated to sustain a positive social identity given its importance to the self. This is achieved by establishing that ingroups are positive and distinctive relative to comparison groups or to outgroups who are judged negatively. The “self-esteem hypothesis” assumes this prejudice is motivated either to gain or to restore self-esteem. This idea has not been without critics, and an additional motivation—establishing coherence and meaning for the self—has also emerged as a strong contender (Abrams & Hogg, 2001). The overall point, however, is that the development of group identity requires children to interpret and give meaning to their context, and this often, though not always, involves the construction of differentiation between social categories (i.e., intergroup bias).

SIT contends that group identities often generate intergroup biases as well as a motivation to maintain group norms and group functioning (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003; Verkuyten, 2002). Recent research drawing on SIT suggests that with age, children show advanced understanding of how groups function (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009) and begin to experience group pressures to conform to stereotypical expectations and norms (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005a; Rutland, 2004; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). This process, especially in competitive intergroup contexts, often results in the emergence of negative attitudes to outgroups or at least preference for the ingroup over the outgroup.

Research supporting SIT has shown that prejudice tends to be elevated to the extent that children and adults identify (i.e., both in terms of self-categorization and feeling an emotional attachment) with their ingroup. For example, recent developmental studies have shown that increased ingroup identification amongst children is related to stronger intergroup biases (Bennett, Lyons, Sani, & Barrett, 1998; Pfeifer et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2001) and to the exclusion of peers within groups (Abrams et al., 2003). For example, Pfeifer and colleagues (2007) found intergroup bias was strongest amongst ethnic minority children who identified more with their ethnic than their national (i.e., American) ingroup. In contrast, research has shown that the development of a common inclusive social identity (e.g., school or family) rather than a singular exclusive social identity (e.g., Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006) and development of a secure (i.e., well developed and assured) ethnic identity (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) reduce intergroup bias among children and adolescents.

## Developmental Subjective Group Dynamics

Overall, research drawing on SIT shows that group identification is related to the development of children’s

attitudes to their ingroup and other groups. An extension of SIT that considers not just intergroup attitudes but also children’s judgment of individuals within groups (i.e., intragroup attitudes) is the *developmental subjective group dynamics model* (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Abrams et al., 2003; Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007; Abrams et al., 2009), which holds that children develop a dynamic relationship between their judgments about peers within groups (i.e., intragroup attitudes) and about groups as a whole (i.e., intergroup attitudes).

As children’s social-cognitive ability develops and they experience belonging to more social groups, they are more likely to integrate their preferences for different groups, with their evaluations of peers within groups based on particular characteristics or behaviors (Abrams & Rutland, 2008). For example, a group of children identifying with a sports team may begin to change their attitudes about a member of the ingroup “team” who acts like or prefers members of a rival team (the outgroup). This change in children’s social cognition means they can often both exclude a peer because they are from a different social group (i.e., intergroup bias) and exclude a peer from within their group (i.e., intragroup bias) who deviates from the group’s social-conventional norms, such as increased liking of an outgroup member.

Research following this developmental intergroup approach has investigated intergroup and intragroup attitudes alongside the construction of an experimental paradigm to examine how children evaluate ingroup and outgroup peers who either showed normative (loyal) behavior or deviant (disloyal) behavior. In experiments children were first asked to rate how they felt toward the ingroup as a whole and the outgroup as a whole (i.e., intergroup attitude). Then the children heard descriptions of normative and deviant peers who were either in the same or different group. Normative peers made two positive statements about the group, whereas deviant peers made one positive statement about the group, but also one positive statement about the other group.

Studies in intergroup contexts that used national groups (Abrams et al., 2003), summer school groups (Abrams et al., 2007), and minimal or “arbitrary” groups (Abrams, Rutland, Ferrell, & Pelletier, 2008) have all shown that, when evaluating individuals from different groups, children simultaneously prefer those from other social groups and those within their peer group that do not threaten the social conventional norm central to their group (i.e., loyalty). In addition, studies have shown that children’s understanding of how other group members will respond to deviance and their own evaluations of peers are more strongly linked among older children that are more motivated to support their ingroup (i.e., show high intergroup bias or identify more strongly within their ingroup; e.g., Abrams et al., 2008). These findings indicate that both intragroup and intergroup attitudes are related to the children’s sense of social identity and their desire to differentiate between groups. In some cases, the desire to maintain social identity results in prejudice, bias, and discrimination. This is because the outcome of preserving the ingroup is rejecting the outgroup. This desire to

preserve the ingroup, however, does not necessarily result in outgroup negativity (Brewer, 1999). An integrative social reasoning domain model provides a way to differentiate these different outcomes.

Thus, social domain and social identity approaches are complementary viewpoints on how prejudice emerges in childhood and on the changes that take place from childhood to adulthood. Social domain theory provides a way to investigate moral reasoning about fairness and equality as well as social conventional reasoning about groups, which reflect how individuals interpret, categorize, and attribute meaning to social situations, events, and relationships. SIT addresses the processes that make one group identity more salient than another and how intragroup and intergroup dynamics contribute to prejudice and bias. Both theories provide ways to investigate how individuals conceptualize groups and when group identity is given priority (and why) in contrast to when moral principles (e.g., fairness or equality) are given priority, particularly in intergroup contexts involving prejudiced attitudes and behavior. In the next section, we describe recent research showing that children simultaneously consider group identity and morality when developing their judgments of groups and individuals within groups.

## Research on Morality and Group Identity

The dynamic relationship between morality and group identity was examined directly in a recent developmental study on age-related increases in children's judgments of peers within groups. This study showed that older children excluded peers who challenged their own group norms (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Abrams et al., 2008). However, in contrast with previous research based on the developmental subjective group dynamics model, the study considered how deviance from an individual that threatens the group may arise not in the social-conventional domain, but in the moral domain. The focus was on how children weigh their concerns about group identity (i.e., maintaining the group norms) with moral beliefs about fairness and justice. Which aspect of the situation do children consider most important, the favorability of peers who preserve the group norms (i.e., the individual who supports their group) or their knowledge about the basis for exclusion (i.e., whether the act is unfair)?

Abrams and colleagues (2008) conducted this study using the paradigm familiar to developmental subjective group dynamics research but with the addition of a moral norm variation (drawn from the social-cognitive domain model). They investigated how children judged peers in minimal groups whose behavior was loyal or disloyal (Study 1) and morally acceptable or unacceptable (Study 2). Consistent with the previous research (Abrams et al., 2007), Abrams et al. found that, in Study 1, children used their understanding of loyalty norms as a basis for their own evaluations of peers. In addition, higher commitment to the ingroup increased children's use of group based criteria for judging peers. Study 2 is most relevant here as it analyzed how children employ both moral and

group-based criteria when evaluating ingroup and outgroup peers that deviate according to moral principles.

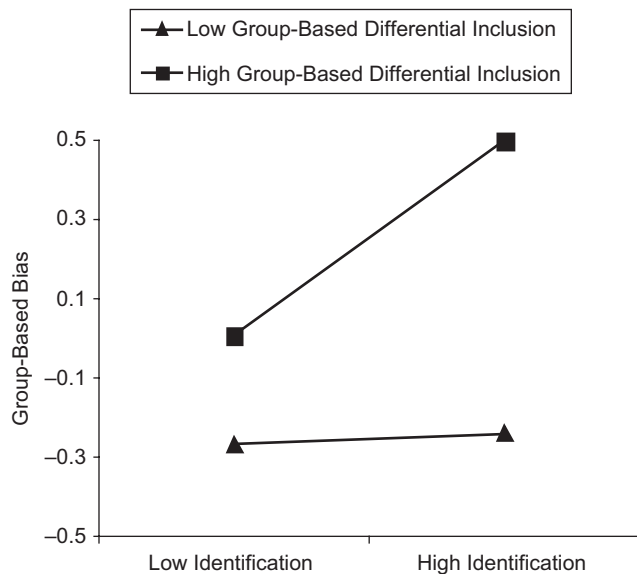
In Study 2, 5–7 year-old (i.e., younger) and 10–11 year-old (i.e., older) children were asked to judge peers from a minimal ingroup and outgroup who either adhered to (i.e., normative) or transgressed (i.e., deviant) moral principles. They were also asked how others from their ingroup and the outgroup would judge these peers. Abrams and colleagues used fairness as the moral principle. For example, an unfair peer was described as someone who “doesn't take turns and pushes people to get ahead in the queue” or was someone who “is very selfish with toys and games.” It was found that older children had a better understanding of whether groups would exclude or include different peers (i.e., differential inclusion) and were willing to exclude peers themselves on the basis of the peer's group membership (i.e., group based bias). At the same time, however, older children also invoked principles of morality (e.g., behaving according to the fairness principle) when making exclusion decisions. Thus, children favored ingroup members over outgroup members but also favored peers from either group who behaved according to a moral principle over morally deviant individuals from each group.

In addition, when considering group-based judgments, the results from Study 2 also showed that children's understanding of how other group members will respond to deviance (i.e., differential inclusion) and their own evaluations of peers (i.e., group-based evaluations or bias) were more strongly linked the more the children identified with the their ingroup. As shown in Figure 4, analysis of simple slopes showed that the relationship between inclusion and bias was only marginally significant when identification was low but is larger and highly significant when identification was high. In contrast, with moral-based judgments, children who believed their peers would more strongly favor fair over unfair members made similar judgments themselves. Most important, their judgments were not affected by how strongly they identified with the group or their beliefs about how peers judge ingroup and outgroup members. The more strongly children identified with the ingroup, the more closely related were their judgments of group-based (but not moral-based) inclusion and their own group-based (but not moral-based) differential bias toward members. These findings suggest that children's identity is only relevant to the group-based domain of differentiation within groups.

Thus, it does not appear that children's responses to ingroup and outgroup peers require a tradeoff between favoring peers because of their group membership or favoring them because of their morality. Instead, Abrams and colleagues (2008) showed that when moral breaches are objectively uncorrelated with group membership, children use both morality and group memberships as independent bases of judgment. This study supports our perspective by showing that morality and group-based judgments are not opposites. Rather, children employ both when engaging in peer rejection (see also Killen, Rutland, & Jampol, 2008).

Other recent studies have investigated how children coordinate moral concerns of fairness with group identity. For example, in a study on exclusion from social cliques, Horn





**Figure 4.** Simple slopes showing the relationship between differential inclusion and group-based evaluations as a function of identification with the ingroup (Abrams et al., 2008; Study 2). Simple slopes are depicted for values of group identification and differential inclusion that are 1 SD above (high) and below (low) their respective means.

(2006) showed that both social identity and group status influence adolescents' judgments about inclusion and exclusion of adolescent cliques. This study found that adolescents who identified themselves as members of high-status groups (cheerleaders, jocks) exhibited more ingroup bias in their exclusion decisions, were more likely to use conventional rather than moral reasoning in justifying their judgments, and were more likely to invoke stereotypes than were adolescents who identified as members of low-status groups.

Further, Horn (2003) has shown that the majority of adolescents viewed exclusion from a valued resource, such as a scholarship, as morally wrong (e.g., it would be wrong to deny a "jock" the chance of an academic scholarship). In contrast, their stereotypes about groups did significantly influence their evaluation of exclusion from group participation (e.g., it is all right to exclude a "gothic" from joining the cheerleaders). Here, the adolescents were more likely to condone acts of exclusion when individuals did not fit the stereotypic expectations of the group and, therefore, challenged the functioning of the group. These findings show that adolescents are more likely to use stereotypes to condone exclusion when group-based criteria are relevant (i.e., need to maintain group norms for effective group functioning).

In addition, Verkuyten and Slooter (2008) demonstrated the coexistence of different forms of reasoning regarding intergroup exclusion between Dutch and Muslim adolescents. They conducted an experimental questionnaire study with Muslim minority and non-Muslim majority Dutch adolescents finding that their reasoning about civic liberties and tolerance of others was dependent on their group membership. For example,

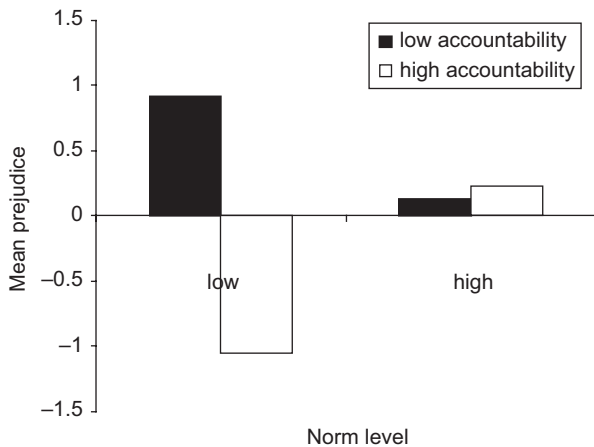
Muslims were less tolerant of free speech by others when it involved offending God and religion. In contrast, non-Muslims were less tolerant of minority rights (e.g., the idea of separate religious schools, the wearing of a headscarf, and the right to burn the national flag in demonstrations). These findings suggest that in the "hot" context of Muslim and non-Muslim relations in Europe an adolescent's group membership influence their social reasoning about moral issues and level of tolerance toward others.

The research we have described above supports our perspective by showing that children can simultaneously consider group identity, social-conventional norms, and morality when forming their evaluations of groups and peers within groups. Our perspective also contends there are specific variables that affect the relative weight children place on moral and group-based criteria in different intergroup contexts. First, we contend that social norms promoting exclusion facilitate the use of social-conventional group-based reasoning over morality and, therefore, lead to differentiation within and between groups. Second, our perspective argues that high levels of intergroup contact promote the use of moral-based rather than group-based conventional reasoning when children develop their attitudes toward other social groups. Finally, our perspective also suggests that a perceived outgroup threat encourages children to base their exclusion judgments more on group membership factors than on morality. Studies on social norms, intergroup contact, and perceived outgroup threat have provided promising findings that support our perspective and will be briefly described below.

### Social Norms and Self-Presentation

First, research suggests that social norms that promote exclusion also encourage group-based reasoning over morality and contribute to children showing prejudice when evaluating groups and peers within groups. Social norms prescribe cultural expectations regarding attitudes, values, and behavior, which have been well delineated by social domain theory (Smetana, 2006), as described above. Social conventional expectations derive from specific peer groups or more widespread societal conventions, traditions, and customs (Turiel, 1983). As children become aware of conventional expectations, they make explicit decisions regarding the extent to which they accept or reject these norms. In some contexts, children strategically present the self as acting in accordance with these norms, so giving a positive impression of themselves to relevant and significant others (Abrams & Brown, 1989; FitzRoy & Rutland, in press; Rutland, 2004; Rutland et al., 2007; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005).

Research on children, adolescents, and adults suggests that the development of differentiation between individuals within groups and between social groups involves an increase in sensitivity to anticipated public audiences (Lambert, Payne, Jacoby, Shaffer, & Chasteen, 2003) and the normative aspects of the intergroup context (Abrams et al., 2007; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). Specifically, recent



**Figure 5.** Mean racial prejudice under high or low public accountability at different levels of social norm awareness (Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005; Study 1).

research with children suggests that increasing accountability to their peer group, in the sense that their actions are visible and thus can be criticized and may have to be defended, makes social norms salient and promotes self-presentational judgments (i.e., either increased or decreased exclusion within groups and intergroup bias between groups).

For example Rutland, Cameron, Milne, and McGeorge (2005; Study 1) found that 5–16 year-old White British children who were highly aware of the social norm against expressing explicit racism showed low explicit racial prejudice. In contrast, children with little awareness of this norm only inhibited their prejudice when the norm was made salient by increasing their accountability (see Fig. 5). Typically, social norms condemn explicit racism and subsequently self-presentation results in the inhibition of ethnic prejudice. In contrast, pro-prejudice norms regarding national outgroups have been found before in studies with White European children in either the United Kingdom (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003; Rutland, 1999) or the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2001). Therefore, unsurprisingly, Rutland, Cameron, Milne, and McGeorge (2005; Study 2) found that 10–12 year-old White British children increased their national intergroup bias when made accountable to their national ingroup. A recent study by Abrams et al. (2007) also showed that, within an ingroup versus outgroup school context, children over 7 years of age were more likely to exclude peers when they were made accountable to the ingroup. These studies show that the self-presentation process can also operate to facilitate prejudice in the domain of nationality and school groups, whereas with ethnicity, children typically self-present by inhibiting their prejudice. Similarly, Killen and colleagues demonstrated that gender bias is reduced when an anti-prejudice norm is introduced by peers (Killen et al., 2001). They found that young children (ages 4 and 5 years) who made stereotypic decisions in peer play contexts (excluding a girl from playing with trucks) were more inclusive after hearing anti-exclusion probes from peers (“What if she likes trucks and

wants to play, too?”); at the same time, children who made fairness decisions were not more exclusive after hearing pro-exclusion probes (“What if trucks are for boys?”).

Together these studies suggest that children who are able to pick up on social norms about prejudice expression held by their group (i.e., show advanced mental state understanding) and have strong group identities are likely to vary their prejudice due to self-presentational concerns. According to our perspective, this process should lead to positive attitudes toward outgroups, if moral principles like equality and fairness are essential to the group identity. We suggest that although individuals are often motivated to boost their self-esteem or establish meaning for the self by differentiating between groups (i.e., intergroup bias), it is also possible that when individuals identify with outgroups that support moral principles then inclusivity may be more persuasive.

### Intergroup Contact

Our perspective also suggests that intergroup contact (i.e., direct or indirect interaction between individuals from different social groups) promotes the use of moral-based rather than group-based conventional reasoning when children develop their attitudes toward other social groups. One of the most well-known approaches to reducing prejudice is the *contact hypothesis* (Allport, 1954). In this hypothesis, contact means individuals from one group (e.g., White British) meeting and interacting with others from a different group (e.g., Afro-Caribbean British). The underlying theory behind the contact hypothesis is that prejudice is a consequence of unfamiliarity with others from a different group, which results in negative stereotyping of this group. Contact with others from another group, under certain conditions, should expose individuals to stereotype disconfirming information resulting in more positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to this group.

Developmental researchers have recently shown that contact between different social groups under certain conditions reduces childhood prejudice (e.g., Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; McGlothlin, Killen, & Edmonds, 2005; Rutland, Cameron, Bennett, & Ferrell, 2005). For example, research has shown that, as children acquire cross-race friendships, prejudice is reduced (Crystal et al., 2008; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006) and adolescents are able to reject stereotypic expectations about others (due to their understanding that their friendship peers do not hold the negative qualities promoted in societal stereotypic images).

Intergroup contact is also known to reduce the use of stereotypes to explain racial discomfort in interracial peer interactions (Killen et al., in press). Recently, developmental research using a measure of the wrongfulness of race-based exclusion has shown that intergroup contact promotes moral reasoning about social exclusion (Crystal et al., 2008). These findings indicate that intergroup contact provides more than just information—it encourages children to reject group-based stereotypical reasoning in favor of moral reasoning that judges social exclusion as wrong. The role of cross-group

friendship reducing prejudice has been supported by social psychology research with adults (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, Alegre, & Siy, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). There is also evidence that merely being aware of intergroup friendships between members of one's own group and another group can also reduce prejudice (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). This is known as the *extended contact hypothesis*. There is evidence for this hypothesis in both adolescents (e.g., Turner, Voci, & Hewstone, 2007) and young children (e.g., Cameron et al., 2006).

In a series of studies, Cameron and colleagues developed extended contact interventions for children as young as 5 years old (see Cameron & Rutland, 2008). These interventions exposed children to intergroup friendships through illustrated story reading that portrayed friendships between ingroup and outgroup members (e.g., White English children and non-White refugee children). Cameron and colleagues found that their extended contact intervention was effective in improving children's attitudes toward outgroups amongst children aged 5–11 and across a number of different stigmatized outgroups, including the disabled (Cameron & Rutland, 2006), non-White refugees (Cameron, Rutland, & Brown, 2007; Cameron et al., 2006), and south Asian British (Cameron et al., 2007).

### Outgroup Threat

Finally, recent research also supports our view that perceived outgroup threats encourage children to base their exclusion judgments more on group membership factors than on morality. Nesdale and colleagues (e.g., Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005a) have shown that high perceived threat from an ethnic outgroup promotes explicit ethnic prejudice. In their research, they have shown that children are likely to react negatively in defense of the ingroup with which they strongly identify if interethnic relations are conflictual and essentially threatening to the ingroup (e.g., the outgroup wishes to deprive the ingroup of resources or status). Nesdale and colleagues typically manipulated outgroup threat in the Australian context by making ingroup children believe that outgroup children think they are better drawers than the ingroup in a picture drawing competition and would like to win the competition. They found that the Anglo-Australian young children turned their ingroup bias into explicit ethnic prejudice toward the outgroup (i.e., Pacific Islanders) when they thought the status of the ingroup was threatened. In addition, they showed that children with high ethnic ingroup identification were more likely to express explicit dislike (i.e., prejudice) toward the ethnic outgroup (e.g., Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005b). Other research in contexts involving "hot" intergroup conflict and high perceived outgroup threat, such as in Northern Ireland (Cairns, 1989) and the Middle East (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Teichman, 2001), has also shown that ethnic prejudice is often higher at a younger age (i.e., before 6 or 7 years old). In summary, there is strong evidence to support our claim that social norms, intergroup contact, and perceived outgroup threat

are important variables affecting the relative weight children place on moral and group-based criteria in intergroup contexts.

### Conclusion

Findings within developmental science show that children develop moral principles of fairness and equality from an early age, but they also develop implicit and explicit prejudice toward others from different social groups. In this article, we have argued these potential contradictory findings can be reconciled through a new integrative social-cognitive developmental approach to prejudice. This provides a more contextualized analysis of prejudice development than that previously offered by other developmental perspectives, such as those espousing domain-general theories. We propose that this framework provides a robust way of understanding how the dynamic relationship between morality and group identity forges children's social reasoning attitudes. Moreover, we contend that this dynamic exists in adult prejudice too and that research with adults could advance further with a focus on this dynamic.

The body of research described in this article argues against the notion that children's attitudes develop in a step-wise domain-general (or "stage") manner. Our perspective argues that a child's attitudes can simultaneously reflect both group and morality based concerns from an early age. We argue that what determines the specific nature and emergence of prejudice in childhood is reflected by a number of complex variables—including the social context, relationships with others, and social-cognitive development—that make particular conflictual relationships between groups and group identities highly salient or place an emphasis on the universal application of moral principles of fairness and equality.

Whether (and when) children begin to show prejudice depends on the close interplay between their emerging morality, their ability to understand group life, and their motivation to act in accordance with certain group identities. This process is extremely social-contextual and social-cognitive, involving both developing social-cognitive abilities (e.g., advanced mental state understanding, moral judgment, autonomy, and group reasoning) and specific features of the intergroup context (e.g., strength and nature of the group identity, social norms, intergroup contact, and perceived outgroup threat). Our perspective argues that an understanding of this process is essential if we are to identify key factors that can be used to limit or reduce childhood prejudice. To date, psychological science has provided some answers by suggesting that reducing prejudice in children can be accomplished through methods such as the promotion of intergroup contact, inclusive common identities and social norms, social-cognitive skills training, moral reasoning, and tolerance (e.g., Aboud & Levy, 2000; Cameron & Rutland, 2008; Crystal et al., 2008).

We do not see childhood prejudice as inevitable, either due to basic or instinctive perceptual cognitive processes or environmental influences that are blindly followed by children. Neither do we think prejudice is due to an inherent, innate flaw

in a person's moral character. Instead our perspective argues that children and adults actively construct their attitudes using their social-cognitive understanding to navigate between moral principles and group identity concerns. Whether children's ingroup identity results in outgroup prejudice is determined by a number of factors, including lack of high-quality intergroup contact and a strong emphasis on exclusive group norms, identity, and conventional reasoning.

Human history has shown that morality and prejudice often exist side by side. For example, Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 wrote "... all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Yet Thomas Jefferson owned many slaves throughout his lifetime. How was this possible? Arguably, Thomas Jefferson's group identity as an American was critical here, as Black slaves to him were not Americans and as such were a threat to the existence of the embryonic American Republic escaping from the yoke of the British Empire (Onuf, 2007). This situation seems unimaginable now that the United States of America has elected its first president of African heritage, President Barack Obama, which demonstrates to the world one way in which prejudice can be overcome.

Nonetheless, much work remains to be done. As noted above, Jefferson referred to "all men." As has been well documented, gender prejudice remains pervasive throughout the world (Nussbaum, 2001). Further, research has shown that intimate relationships may be the last context in which racial, ethnic, and religious integration is accepted by the majority of society (Kennedy, 2003). Although individuals may vote for someone from a different ethnic background, which was unforeseeable less than one generation ago, decisions about friendship, dating, and marriage remained tied to ingroup identity and are viewed outside the categories of fairness and justice. Yet, the experiences of close intimate intergroup relationships have been demonstrated to reflect the strongest predictor of prejudice reduction in the intergroup contact literature (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Our hope is that our new SRD perspective fosters new integrative lines of research in psychological science, which have the potential to create programs and policy that move us closer to a more just and fair world.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

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