Group Norms, Threat, and Children’s Racial Prejudice

Drew Nesdale  
*Griffith University*

Anne Maass  
*Università di Padova*

Kevin Durkin  
*University of Strathclyde*

Judith Griffiths  
*Griffith University*

To assess predictions from social identity development theory (SIDT; Nesdale, 2004) concerning children’s ethnic/racial prejudice, 197 Anglo-Australian children ages 7 or 9 years participated in a minimal group study as a member of a team that had a norm of inclusion or exclusion. The team was threatened or not threatened by an out-group that was of the same or different race. Consistent with SIDT, prejudice was greater when the in-group had a norm of exclusion and there was threat from the out-group. Norms and threat also interacted with participant age to influence ethnic attitudes, although prejudice was greatest when the in-group had an exclusion norm and there was out-group threat. The implications of the findings for SIDT are discussed.

Although research has shown that peer groups have an important impact on children by at least 5 to 6 years of age, (e.g., Bigler, 1995; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; Nesdale & Brown, 2004; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Nesdale, Maass, Griffiths, & Durkin, 2003), comparatively little research has examined the impact of group norms (i.e., the expectations that particular groups have concerning the appropriate attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to be displayed by group members) on children’s intergroup attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, research with adolescents and adults has revealed that group norms exert a significant influence on group members (see Brown, 2000, for a review). For example, group norms promote members’ bias toward the in-group as well as an increased tendency to differentiate from, and express negativity toward, members of out-groups (e.g., Crandall, Eshelman, & O’Brien, 2002; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996, 1997). Furthermore, responses by in-group members that are contrary to the prevailing norms of a group prompt derogation and rejection of those individuals by other in-group members (e.g., Marques, 1990; Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988).

Although little research has addressed such issues in children, Ojala and Nesdale (2004) found that bullying carried out by members of the in-group against an out-group was considered to be more acceptable by in-group members when it was consistent with group norms and when the out-group represented a threat to the in-group. In addition, Rutland, Cameron, Milne, and McGeorge (2003) reported that children who had low versus high levels of norm internalization revealed greater self-regulation of their out-group prejudice. Other research has also revealed that, from 5 years onward, children show less and less liking for in-group members who do not conform to in-group norms (e.g., Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2004; Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Marques, 2003; Nesdale, 1999b; Nesdale & Brown, 2004).

Of particular concern to the present study was the issue of whether a group norm of out-group prejudice would influence group members to display prejudice (i.e., feelings of dislike or hatred) toward members of ethnic or racial out-groups. In addition, the study examined whether threat from an out-group toward the in-group affected the latter’s ethnic attitudes and whether the impact of in-group norms was interactively influenced by out-group threat. Finally, the study examined whether the foregoing responses would be differentiated by the age of the participants.

In considering the preceding issues, the present research drew on social identity development theory (SIDT; Nesdale, 1999a, 2004), which has taken an explicitly intergroup approach in attempting to account for the development of children’s ethnic and
racial prejudice. SIDT proposes that ethnic or racial prejudice is the end point of a process that involves four sequential phases: undifferentiated, ethnic awareness, ethnic preference, and ethnic prejudice. These phases vary in terms of the social motivations and behaviors that characterize them, and the events that precipitate changes from one phase to the next. Of central importance to the present study is SIDT's distinction between the ethnic preference and ethnic prejudice phases. According to SIDT, by 4 or 5 years of age, children in multiethnic/racial communities are typically in the ethnic preference phase. They are aware of which ethnic/racial group they belong to, they know which groups are better off and more highly regarded than others (e.g., Katz, 1987; Ramsey, 1991; Vaughan, 1987), and they prefer to be members of high- rather than low-status groups because they derive social self-esteem from group membership and group status. It is important to note that SIDT argues that ethnic preference does not instigate an automatic focus on the out-group with accompanying out-group prejudice. Instead, ethnic preference is considered to involve a focus on, and concern for, children's continuing membership of their in-group, as well as the positive distinctiveness of the in-group, in comparison with other groups (see also Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). SIDT argues that this focus on the in-group is revealed in in-group members' tendencies to like, and see themselves as similar to, in-group compared with out-group members, to endorse and be influenced by the in-group's norms relating to intra- and inter-group attitudes and behaviors, and to favor in-group members over other individuals. On this basis, SIDT would predict that whereas children in the ethnic preference phase will always prefer their own group over other groups, they might still like other groups, but just not as much as their own group.

In contrast, the transition to the ethnic prejudice phase implies a new focus on an ethnic or racial out-group(s) in addition to the child's ongoing concern for the in-group. Instead of merely liking an out-group member less than an in-group member, prejudice means that the out-group members are disliked or hated. According to SIDT, ethnic or racial prejudice would normally be unlikely to occur in children younger than 6 to 7 years because their social motives and knowledge would not have reached the requisite level of development to support a feeling of out-group dislike or hatred. However, whether ethnic prejudice actually emerges and crystallizes in children beyond this age depends on the extent to which (a) children identify with their social group, (b) prejudice is a norm held by the members of the child's social group, and/or (c) the in-group members believe that their group is threatened in some way by members of the out-group. As pointed out by Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, and Tur-Kaspa (1998), such threats might include realistic (i.e., threats against the status, power, or physical or material well-being of the in-group), symbolic (i.e., threats against the values, beliefs, or standards of the in-group), or stereotype threats (i.e., threats arising from the in-group's view of the nature of the out-group).

The important implication here is that whereas children in the ethnic preference phase will prefer their own group over other group(s), although other groups may also be viewed positively, children who move into the ethnic prejudice phase will like their own group and dislike or hate ethnic or racial out-groups. On this basis, SIDT argues that there are conditions under which children may never display ethnic or racial prejudice. These include contexts in which children identify strongly with a group that does not endorse prejudice toward ethnic minority groups and settings in which interethnic relations are harmonious. A context in which some superordinate group goal dominates the interest of distinct ethnic groups could also be conducive to positive intergroup relations (see Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993).

Consistent with SIDT's predictions, Bigler and her colleagues (Bigler, 1995; Bigler et al., 1997) reported that the random assignment of 6- to 11-year-old children to groups at a summer camp prompted in-group favoritism in the children in both groups and that children with higher levels of self-esteem showed higher levels of intergroup stereotyping. Other intergroup studies using the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971) have also revealed that when social comparisons and competitiveness between groups are emphasized, in-group favoritism increases (Vaughan, Tajfel, & Williams, 1981; Yee & Brown, 1994). Nesdale and colleagues (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2004; Nesdale & Flessner, 2001; Nesdale et al., 2003) have also revealed that young children prefer to be members of high- versus low-status groups and that, whereas they always liked their in-group more than a comparison out-group, the latter group was liked less when it was composed of children with different rather than the same race or ethnicity as the in-group. Furthermore, whereas these results emphasize the impact of group processes on the children's ethnic or racial preferences, recent research has also supported some of SIDT's proposals concerning
the factors that turn ethnic or racial preference into ethnic or racial prejudice. Thus, Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths (2005) demonstrated that young children’s lesser liking for a racial out-group (compared with their in-group) turned to explicit dislike or prejudice when the children were highly identified with their in-group, or the in-group was threatened by the out-group.

As a further test of the adequacy of SIDT as an explanation of children’s prejudice, the present study examined the effect of in-group norms of prejudice on children’s attitudes toward members of an out-group who were of the same or different race as themselves. Consistent with SIDT, it was expected that an in-group norm of exclusion versus inclusion would instigate more negative attitudes toward the out-group. In addition, consistent with Bigler et al. (1997), it was expected that in-group norms would also affect a behavior intention measure that assessed the participants’ preparedness to move to the other team. That is, it was predicted that the in-group member would be less willing to move to the out-group when the in-group had a norm of exclusion versus inclusion. Moreover, consistent with earlier findings (Nesdale et al., 2004; Nesdale et al., 2003), it was anticipated that the preceding effects would be increased when the out-group was composed of members of different versus the same race as the in-group.

The study also examined the impact of out-group threat (present vs. absent) on the in-group’s racial attitudes and intentions. Consistent with SIDT, it was expected that out-group threat would instigate dislike for the out-group and that the in-group member would show little interest in moving to the out-group. These effects were also expected to increase when the out-group was composed of members of different versus the same race as the in-group.

Also of interest was the question of whether group norms and out-group threat would interactively affect the children’s attitudes and behavior intentions. In particular, how would the children react when their in-group had a norm of inclusion and the in-group was under threat from an out-group? Consistent with SIDT, it was expected that threat to the status of the in-group from an out-group would be keenly felt by members of the in-group. Moreover, although SIDT is silent on the issue, it was plausible that the children’s concern for their group and its status in these circumstances would override the group’s general injunctions concerning inclusiveness. That is, children’s prejudice would be interactively influenced by their in-group norms and threat from the out-group. Specifically, when there was no threat from the out-group, it was expected that the in-group would tend to like the out-group (although less than they liked the in-group) when the in-group had a norm of inclusion but that they would tend to dislike the out-group when the in-group had a norm of exclusion. In contrast, when the out-group threatened the in-group, it was expected that the in-group would dislike the out-group regardless of whether the in-group had a norm of inclusion or exclusion. In other words, the effect of threat would negate the impact of the in-group’s norm of inclusiveness. Furthermore, it was expected that this interaction effect would be enhanced when the out-group had members of different versus the same race as the in-group.

Finally, the present study also examined the impact of group norms, out-group threat, and out-group race as a function of children’s age. Although SIDT does not link changes in prejudice to children’s age, other approaches do. For example, sociocognitive theory (ST; Aboud, 1988) contends that most, if not all, children display ethnic or racial prejudice by 7 years of age. Furthermore, whether it is maintained after this age depends mainly on the acquisition of concrete operational thinking that allows children to differentiate individuals instead of responding to them simply as category members. Consequently, ST predicts that children’s attitudes toward ethnic or racial out-groups would become more positive beyond 7 years of age, whereas their attitudes toward the in-group would become less positive, as the members of the two groups are viewed in an increasingly similar way (Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988). Although there is some research support for ST (Aboud, 1988), there are also findings that are a challenge for the theory (see Nesdale, 2001). The inclusion of samples of 7- and 9-year-old children in the present study allowed for the assessment of possible age effects in their responses.

In sum, the present study assessed whether an in-group norm of exclusion versus inclusion, as well as the presence or absence of out-group threat, would transform the ethnic attitudes of Anglo-Australian children from racial preference to racial prejudice, as proposed by SIDT. The study used a variant of the minimal group paradigm and the participants were 7- and 9-year-old children who indicated their liking for the out-group (either Anglo-Australian or Pacific Islander) and the in-group (Anglo-Australian), as well as the extent to which they wished to change membership from their in-group to the out-group.
Method

Participants

The sample comprised 197 White Anglo-Australian boys and girls, with 94 from Year 2 (M = 7.04 years, SD = .79), and 103 from Year 4 (M = 9.60 years, SD = .98). The children attended two elementary schools serving the same lower-middle-class community.

Design

The study had a 2 (age: 7 vs. 9) × 2 (out-group threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (group norm: inclusion vs. exclusion) × 2 (out-group race: same vs. different) factorial between-subjects design. At each age level, the children were randomly allocated into the Threat × Group Norm × Out-Group Race conditions, with approximately equal numbers of boys and girls in each condition.

Materials

Photos. As detailed in a previous report (Nesdale et al., 2003), a set of photos was collected for use in representing the race of the in-group and out-group in the main study. Separate samples of 7- to 8-year-olds (n = 35) and 9- to 10-year-olds (n = 30) from a different school serving the same general area were selected. In each age group, equal numbers of Anglo-Australian and Pacific Island male and female children had a head-and-shoulders photo taken. Pacific Islander children were chosen because they are physically different (i.e., facial features, skin color, hair texture) from White Anglo-Australian children. Pacific Islander people typically have lower socioeconomic status than Anglo-Australian people and this is known by Anglo-Australian children as young as 5 years. However, the relationship between the two groups has not been characterized by antipathy, disharmony, or disputes (Griffiths, 2004). To maintain consistency in expression, children were requested to look straight at the camera and not to smile. The photos were taken using a digital camera and were printed on 80 gsm white paper. Each photo was 150 × 110 mm and pasted onto 200 × 200 mm white cardboard squares.

A second sample of children (n = 25), with approximately equal numbers in each of the age groups, was shown the photos corresponding to their age group. The children were asked to indicate the gender, age, and racial/ethnic group of the child in the photo. They also rated the child in the photo in terms of attractiveness on a 4-point scale (not at all, a little attractive, quite attractive, very attractive). Photos were discarded if the gender and age could not be determined by the peer group, if they could not be placed consistently into a single racial/ethnic category, or if the photo subject was consistently rated not at all attractive or very attractive. The resulting set of photos (n = 30) used in the main study were thus matched in terms of facial expression, attractiveness, and background, but differed in age and race/ethnicity. A board was used to display the photos to the children in the main study.

Response booklet. A response booklet containing the main measures was prepared for each participant. The booklet included a randomly ordered series of questions, each with a 5-point unipolar or bipolar scale. Each scale comprised five pictures of animals or faces that were graded in size from the smallest in the middle (bipolar scale). The response options on the unipolar scale ranged from 1 (a small amount of the attribute) to 5 (a large amount of the attribute). The response options on the bipolar scale ranged from 1 (a negative response) to 3 (a neutral response) to 5 (a positive response). Each point on each scale was labeled appropriately.

Procedure

In the main study, all students in Years 2 and 4 from the participating schools were asked by their teachers to do a drawing of themselves on a 145 × 210 mm piece of paper. The children were told that during the next week some visitors would look at their drawings, if their parents had given permission for them to participate. One week later, the children with parental permission were tested individually by the fourth author away from the classroom. Before the commencement of each testing session, an instant head-and-shoulders photo was taken of the child. The children were then asked to pretend that they were going to participate in an intergroup drawing competition that would involve children from other schools in the area. At this point, the intent of the instructions was to encourage and facilitate the child’s self-categorization into, and identification with, their team so that the team’s norms became their norms. Accordingly, each participant was told that all the children’s drawings had been judged by an artist and that the children were being put into groups of similar drawing ability. The children in the present study were told that the judge had considered their drawings to be “excellent” and that they had been put into a team of drawers “just
like you.” In contrast, the children were informed that the members of the other team “were judged to be good drawers, but your team’s drawings were better than their drawings.” This part of the manipulation was designed to simulate the common situation wherein groups that display prejudice typically do so against groups that have lower status (Nesdale, 2004).

The child was then shown the photos of the other two same-age and same-gender members of their team displayed on a board. To enhance their in-group categorization, they were asked to pin their photograph on the board between the photos of the other two team members (in-group). The child was also asked to have a good look at their team and was then given the opportunity to give the team a color name (e.g., red, blue) and this was written beside their team. Their team was also awarded a gold star to emphasize the quality of its performance, and this star was attached to the board next to the photos of the team.

The group norms manipulation was designed to vary the extent to which the in-group liked other children, particularly those who were different, and were prepared to include them in their team’s activities. Accordingly, children in the inclusion group norm condition were told “from talking to your other team members, I can tell that the kids in your team like people in other teams even when the other teams have different kids in them. Your team likes to work with kids in other teams so that everyone does well.” In contrast, in the exclusion norm condition, the children were told that “from talking to your other team members, I can tell that the kids in your team don’t like to work with kids in other teams, especially when they have different sorts of kids in them. Your team sticks together and works hard so that your team does better than other teams.”

A sheet of paper covering half of the board was then removed to reveal the members of the other (out-group) team and the experimenter advised the child of the other team’s chosen color name. To manipulate out-group race, the photos of the out-group members revealed them to be either of the same (i.e., Anglo-Australian) or different race (i.e., Pacific Islander) as the participant’s team. No mention was made of the out-group’s race. Thus, comparison of the children’s responses between conditions differentiated only by the race of the out-group provided a clear test of whether the race variable, which was marked only by physical differences, was salient to the participants.

The out-group threat manipulation was identical to that used successfully by Nesdale et al. (2005) and, consistent with SIDT, involved the out-group threatening the in-group’s status as excellent drawers in the drawing competition. Thus, the children in the threat condition were told that “the members of the other team really don’t like your team, they think that the judges cheated when they said that your team were really good drawers, they really think they can beat you and they are out to get you, and they want your team to come last in the competition.” Participants in the no-threat condition were given no further information about the out-group.

The children were then directed to their response booklet, which contained a series of randomly ordered questions, each accompanied by a unipolar or bipolar scale, with each point on each scale labeled appropriately. To ensure that each child was comfortable with using the unipolar and bipolar scales, they first completed several practice questions under the direction of the experimenter. The children then completed the questions in the booklet, some of which were filler items so as not to focus attention on the main dependent measures.

Manipulation Check Measures

Given that the effectiveness of the out-group threat manipulation was confirmed in an earlier study by the present researchers (Nesdale et al., 2005), the present study focused on assessing the effectiveness of the manipulations of group norm and group status.

Group norm manipulation. A single question, with an associated unipolar scale, was used to measure the effectiveness of the group norm manipulation (How does your team feel about the kids in other teams?), ranging from 1 (We don’t like kids in other teams at all) to 5 (We like kids in other teams a lot).

Status manipulation check. A single question, with an associated bipolar scale, was used to check the status manipulation (Which team are the better drawers?), ranging from 1 (The other team are a lot better drawers) to 5 (Our team are a lot better drawers).

Main Dependent Measures

Liking. A single question, with an associated bipolar scale of sad to happy faces, was used to measure how much the participants liked the members of the other team (How much do you like the children in the other team?), ranging from 1 (I don’t like them a lot) to 5 (I like them a lot). In addition, the same bipolar scale was used to measure how much the children liked the members of their own team.
There was also a significant Group Norms (age: 7 vs. 9 years) main effect for group norms, ANOVA revealed three significant effects. Consistent with group race: same vs. different) ANOVA. This analysis revealed three significant effects. There was a significant main effect for group norms, F(1, 181) = 5.04, p < .05, \( \eta^2 = .03 \), with children in the exclusion norm condition (M = 2.68, SD = 1.04), compared with children in the inclusion norm condition (M = 3.01, SD = 1.26), revealing dislike for the members of the out-group. Because the findings of central interest in the present study concerned the conditions under which the participants’ in-group preference turned to out-group prejudice, each of the cell means was compared with the neutral scale midpoint using related-samples t tests. These analyses revealed that whereas the children’s liking for the out-group in the inclusion norm condition did not differ from the neutral scale midpoint, children in the exclusion norm condition displayed significant dislike for the out-group, \( t(95) = 3.04, p < .01 \).

The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of out-group threat, F(1, 181) = 12.94, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = .07 \), with children in the out-group threat condition...
Indeed, even when the in-group had a norm of exclusion, regardless of whether the out-group did not threaten the in-group (M = 3.15, SD = .92). It was only in the relatively unambiguous situation of the in-group having a norm of inclusion and the out-group threatening the in-group that the latter members expressed clear-cut dislike for the out-group (M = 2.46, SD = 1.03).

Compared with the out-group liking ratings, analysis of the participants’ liking ratings for the in-group, in a 2 (age) × 2 (group norm) × 2 (threat) × 2 (out-group race) ANOVA, revealed a significant main effect only for age, F(1, 181) = 8.31, p < .01, η² = .04. The 7-year-olds (M = 4.28, SD = .95) expressed greater liking for their in-group than did the 9-year-olds (M = 3.84, SD = 1.01). Nevertheless, comparison of each mean with the neutral scale midpoint of 3 indicated that both the 7-year-olds, t(93) = 12.96, p < .001, and the 9-year-olds, t(102) = 8.51, p < .001, revealed significant liking for their in-group.

Pearson correlations computed on the in-group and out-group liking scores for each age group revealed significant correlations for both 7-year-olds (r = .19, p < .05) and 9-year-olds (r = .38, p < .001). Pearson correlations computed on the in-group and out-group liking scores for each of the eight experimental conditions revealed significant correlation coefficients in three of the four inclusion norm conditions (rs = .38 to .53, ps < .05 and .002), but not the inclusion-threat-different out-group condition (r = .29, p < .15).

In-group members’ desire to change teams. The children’s ratings of their wish to change teams were analyzed in a 2 (age) × 2 (group norm) × 2 (threat) × 2 (race) ANOVA. This analysis revealed a significant main effect only for race, F(1, 196) = 5.43, p < .025, η² = .03. Children were more willing to change to the other team if that team had members of the same race as their in-group (M = 1.32, SD = .79) rather than a different race (M = 1.12, SD = .44).

Out-group members’ desire to change teams. The children’s ratings of the out-group members’ desire to change to the in-group were analyzed in a 2 (age) × 2 (group norm) × 2 (threat) × 2 (race) ANOVA. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for out-group threat, F(1, 181) = 9.33, p < .01, η² = .05. The children in the in-group believed that out-group members would be more interested in changing to the in-group when they (the out-group) had not threatened the in-group (M = 2.69, SD = 1.09) than when the out-group had threatened the in-group (M = 2.20, SD = 1.15).
In addition, the analysis revealed a significant Age × Out-Group Race interaction, $F(1, 181) = 3.82, p < .055, \eta^2 = .02$. Comparison of the cell means by Duncan’s multiple range test indicated that the 7-year-olds thought there would be little difference in the extent to which the same- ($M = 2.42, SD = 1.27$) versus different-race out-group members ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.11$) would wish to change to the in-group, whereas the 9-year-olds thought the different-race out-group members ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.10$) would have a significantly greater desire to join the in-group than would the members of the same-race out-group ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.06$).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to provide a further assessment of the adequacy of SIDT as an account of the development of children’s ethnic or racial prejudice. The main findings were that, consistent with SIDT, children’s prejudice was influenced by in-group norms as well as by out-group threat. However, contrary to SIDT, the results also revealed that when both factors are present in a situation, they exert an interactive effect on children’s prejudice that differs according to the age of the children. Specifically, when the in-group had a norm of inclusion, the 7-year-old participants revealed liking for the out-group when the latter group did not threaten the in-group, but the children expressed dislike when the out-group threatened the in-group, regardless of the in-group’s norm of inclusion. In contrast, when the in-group had a norm of exclusion, the 7-year-olds tended to dislike the out-group, even when the out-group did not threaten the in-group, and this feeling hardened into clear-cut dislike when the out-group threatened the in-group. These findings confirm the strength of 7-year-old children’s orientations to their in-groups: They prefer their in-group to other groups, they like the other members of the in-group, and they are prepared to be guided by its norms, including being positive toward other children. However, when the in-group is threatened by an out-group, any positive feelings that they might have toward the out-group quickly turn to dislike, regardless of whether the in-group has a norm of inclusiveness.

The out-group liking ratings of the 9-year-old participants provide a clear contrast to those of the younger children. Specifically, the older children’s ratings did not differ from the neutral midpoint of the scale when the in-group had a norm of inclusion, regardless of whether the out-group did or did not threaten the in-group. Indeed, even when the in-group had a norm of exclusion, their liking ratings tended toward the neutral when the out-group did not threaten the in-group. It was only when the in-group had a norm of exclusion and the out-group threatened the in-group that the in-group members expressed unambiguous dislike for the out-group.

The finding that the children’s age interacted with in-group norms and out-group threat to affect their liking for the out-group is a challenge for SIDT because, as noted earlier, the theory does not predict age effects. Although the finding for the 7-year-olds accords with our earlier speculations and is not inconsistent with SIDT, providing an account for the contrasting responses of the 9-year-olds is more problematic.

One possible explanation for the discrepancy between the responses of the 7- and 9-year-old participants might be provided by ST (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Doyle, 1996a, 1996b). Recall that ST argues that children’s increasing cognitive abilities, particularly the acquisition of concrete operations around 7 years of age, allows them increasingly to attend to
the individual rather than group-based qualities of people. The effect of this change is that both the positive and negative qualities of both in-group and out-group members are predicted to be recognized, and as a result, in-group bias is expected to diminish as the members of the two groups are viewed in an increasingly similar way. That is, with increasing age, both in-group bias and out-group prejudice are attenuated (Doyle et al., 1988).

Examination of the liking ratings for the in-group yields some support for the account by ST. Thus, whereas both age groups liked their in-group, the 9-year-old participants actually liked their in-group more than did the 7-year-old participants. However, the participants’ liking ratings for the out-group provide considerably less support for the ST explanation. Whereas the ratings of the out-group by the 7-year-olds tended to be straightforwardly influenced by in-group norms or out-group threat, or both, the ratings of the out-group by the 9-year-olds tended to be more indeterminate than positive, contrary to the ST prediction. Thus, compared with the 7-year-olds, the 9-year-olds were less positive (i.e., more neutral) toward the out-group under the condition of inclusion norm plus no threat, whereas they were more positive (i.e., more neutral) under the conditions of exclusion norm plus no threat and inclusion norm plus threat. Moreover, when the out-group threatened the in-group and the latter had an exclusion norm, the 9-year-olds exhibited as much dislike for the out-group as did the 7-year-olds.

Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that, unlike the 7-year-olds, the responses of the 9-year-olds reflected their increasing tendency to self-regulate the expression of particular attitudes and behavior in accordance with internalized normative beliefs about what is acceptable in a particular situation (Rutland et al., 2003). There is evidence that children begin to understand and engage in self-presentational behavior from approximately 8 years of age (e.g., Aloise-Young, 1993; Banerjee, 2002; Banerjee & Yuill, 1999; Bennett & Yeles, 1990) and that they become increasingly aware that intergroup prejudice and discrimination are generally considered to be unacceptable and inappropriate (e.g., Brown & Bigler, 2004; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim & Ardilla-Rey, 2001; Rutland, 1999; Rutland et al., 2003; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001). Thus, according to this approach, the more neutral responses of the 9-year old children, compared with those of the younger children, could be seen to reflect the formers’ appreciation that, on the one hand, an in-group norm of exclusion is not socially acceptable and that, on the other hand, in-group members should not overreact to a threat from a lower status group in the context of a drawing competition. However, these suggestions still do not account for the fact that the older children responded with as much out-group dislike as the younger children under the joint conditions of an exclusion norm plus out-group threat. It appears that, in this case, the participants set the other conventions aside in favor of standing by their group, given the uniquely demanding nature of the circumstances.

Although the basis of the Age × Group Norm × Out-Group Threat interaction remains to be clarified, the finding does have two important implications. First, it emphasizes that SIDT needs to be modified to take such interactive effects, particularly those involving age, into account. Whereas SIDT has not linked age to intergroup attitudes beyond the ethnic preference phase, the present finding suggests that that approach needs rethinking. At the least, research needs to address the possibility that the present age effects might be related to differences in children’s self-regulation of their social attitudes and behaviors in intergroup contexts.

Second, the present findings are one of the few demonstrations of children’s out-group dislike or prejudice in a controlled study. Earlier research required children merely to indicate their preference for, or assign positive and negative traits to, ethnically differentiated dolls, photos, or drawings (see reviews by Aboud, 1988; Nesdale, 2001). Aside from responding only to single figures, rather than groups, these techniques simply assessed preference rather than dislike or prejudice. Furthermore, in those studies that sought to assess children’s intensity of affect (on a bipolar scale) toward out-group members, the findings almost invariably revealed greater liking for the in-group versus the out-group rather than liking for the in-group and dislike or prejudice for the out-group (Nesdale, 2001). In contrast, the present study revealed that the children actually disliked the out-group, particularly when the in-group had a norm of exclusion and members perceived threat from the out-group. That is, the participants used that part of the bipolar scale where the points were clearly labeled to indicate dislike.

Another important issue concerns the fact that the analysis did not reveal a relationship between out-group race and out-group liking. Consistent with SIDT, it had been expected that out-group race would have interacted with both in-group norms and out-group threat to influence out-group dislike. That is, it had been expected that the racially dissimilar out-group would have been disliked even more than the racially similar out-group when the
in-group had a norm of exclusion, as well as when the in-group was subject to out-group threat. Instead, the children responded with a similar degree of dislike to the out-group, regardless of the out-group’s racial similarity to the in-group.

One possible explanation is that the children simply did not notice the race of the out-group. Because the manipulation of the out-group’s race followed the child’s assignment to the in-group, it is possible that the out-group’s race had little salience to the child. However, against this is the fact that an out-group race effect was revealed in the children’s ratings of the extent to which they wished to change from their in-group to the out-group, as well as in their ratings of the extent to which they felt that the members of the out-group wished to move to the in-group. These findings indicate that the children certainly perceived the race of the out-group and that it affected them. These findings also underscore another important point. Specifically, the extent to which the children wished to change groups, and their liking for the in-group versus the out-group, reveals an interesting difference between attitudes and behavior. In terms of out-group liking, the results indicate that when the in-group has a norm of exclusion or the in-group is under threat from another group, or both, it is highly probable that a child will feel dislike for that out-group regardless of its ethnic or racial complexion. Clearly, these findings emphasize the intergroup and situational nature of prejudice, while reinforcing the generality of the processes underlying ethnic prejudice.

In contrast, when the issue becomes one of changing groups, and thereby coming into contact with specific children, additional factors appear to come into play. Children typically show strong loyalty to their in-group, even in minimal group studies (e.g., Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Nesdale et al., 2004, 2005; Nesdale et al., 2003). Consistent with SIDT, whether a child would change to a same-race/ethnicity group depends on how closely the child identifies with the in-group and whether the out-group is perceived to have higher or lower status. In comparison, the prospect of changing to a group of different race/ethnicity makes salient an additional factor of in-group similarity/out-group difference. That is, the racial or ethnic distinctiveness of the out-group heightens the child’s awareness of the magnitude of the transfer: one really would be joining people who are very different from “us” (the current same-race/ethnicity in-group).

On a related point, recall that the children’s predictions of whether the members of the out-group would wish to move to the in-group also revealed an out-group race effect. Whereas children expressed less interest in moving to an out-group with different versus the same race as themselves, certainly by 9 years of age the children anticipated that members of the racially different out-group would be more interested in joining the in-group than would members of the racially similar out-group. This finding is interesting for several reasons. On the one hand, although there is evidence that by school age children in racially or ethnically mixed communities have acquired some understanding of the existing social structure and that they are aware of which groups are better off and more highly regarded than others (Griffiths, 2004; Katz, 1987; Ramsey, 1991; Vaughan, 1987), the responses of the children in the present study did not appear to be influenced by this information until they were around 9 years of age. On the other hand, whereas our previous research has revealed that children of this age, and younger, predicted that children in a lower versus higher status out-group would show a greater wish to join a higher status in-group (Nesdale et al., 2004), the predictions of the children in the present study were differentiated by the race of the out-group. Presumably, the predictions of the older versus younger children in the present study reflected their recognition that the members of the racially different versus similar out-group came from a low-status racial minority group and a low-status drawing group; hence, they would be doubly motivated to move to the higher status in-group.

Finally, given that a variant of the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel et al., 1971) was used in this study, it is important to consider the external validity of the present findings. In short, there are good grounds for concluding that they provide a realistic insight into intergroup processes involving young children. For example, although the children’s involvement in their group was fleeting, the situation actually captured the main elements of an intergroup scenario—the children were members of a particular group, they were aware that there was another group in the social environment, and there was a potential conflict of interest between the groups (i.e., the intergroup drawing competition) that would have promoted intergroup comparison. The children also revealed themselves to be sensitive to the differences in in-group norms, as well as to the possibility of threat from an out-group, suggesting that these manipulations accorded with their experiences with groups and group membership. Moreover, although single measures were used to estimate their attitudes and behavior intentions, both were apparently unambiguous and have been used successfully in pre-
vious research (e.g., Bigler et al., 1997; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Nesdale et al., 2004, 2005; Nesdale et al., 2003). It is also noteworthy that, to the extent that they focused on similar issues, the present findings are consistent with studies in which children have been assigned to groups but their participation lasted for days or weeks (e.g., Bigler, 1995; Bigler et al., 1997; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961).

On this basis, it seems reasonable to conclude that the present results provide a good approximation of the effects that would be revealed in authentic intergroup relations of longer duration and of greater import to the participants. At the same time, the effects obtained in the latter circumstance would perhaps be of even greater magnitude because of the greater emotional investment in real-world competitive relations.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the emerging picture of the development of children’s intergroup prejudice. Consistent with SIDT (Nesdale, 1999a, 2004), the present study revealed that prejudice tends to be displayed by children when the in-group has an exclusion norm and when it perceives the out-group as posing a threat. However, contrary to SIDT, the results revealed that when both factors are present in a situation, they exert an interactive effect on children’s prejudice that differs according to the children’s age. The findings also indicate that whereas children do show intergroup biases, they appear to be predicated on the nature of the relations between groups rather than on race or ethnicity, per se. However, race or ethnicity does appear to affect children’s willingness to change groups, although future research needs to determine the extent to which this generalizes over social contexts and whether it can be ameliorated by actual intergroup contact.

**References**


Griffiths, J. (2004). The development of children’s understanding of, and attitudes toward, their ethnicity. Unpublished manuscript, Griffith University, Queensland.


