

# Introduction: Extending the conversation: Transdisciplinary approaches to social identity and intergroup attitudes in children and adolescents

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Ali, then 14, and his younger brother fled Afghanistan after their parents were arrested and killed by the Taliban. They found refuge with a friend in Iran, but the anti-Afghan prejudice they encountered made them embark on their journey to the UK at the hands of people-smugglers. (*The Guardian*, London, 15th June 2007)

Social identity and intergroup prejudice continue to serve as a source of strife and conflict throughout the world into the early part of the 21st century. The example above suggests this is true for children and adolescents. It also testifies to the complexities of negotiating social identity and dealing with prejudice in the modern era of international wars, inter-ethnic conflict and mass migration across the globe. We believe that understanding the genesis, functions and moderators of prejudice and social identity remains a multifaceted problem, as well as a key to developing early and effective policy and practice to fight discrimination.

There has been a steady accumulation of research and theory on the development of social identity and intergroup attitudes among children and adolescents since the ground breaking work of Aboud (1988) and Katz (1976). In recent years, moreover, there has been a new impetus in this area of research by developmental and social psychologists with shared interests. Indeed the social and developmental perspectives are increasingly being integrated as an explicit project (e.g. Killen & Levy, in press; Killen & McKown, 2005). This special issue therefore provides an important opportunity to extend the conversation between developmental and social psychology. A trans-disciplinary approach is challenging as it involves synthesizing the current research findings in related but different sub-disciplines, which often have employed different methodologies and operated with different underlying assumptions. Nonetheless, we contend this approach is necessary to understand the multidimensional nature of social identity and intergroup attitudes (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Bennett & Sani, 2004; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2006).

The idea of this special issue arose from a number of symposia and conferences we have helped organize in the last five years at both developmental and social psychology conferences (General Meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, San Sebastian, 2002; Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Convention, Washington D.C., 2004; Annual Conference of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, New Orleans, 2005; Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Atlanta, 2005; European Conference on Developmental Psychology, Tenerife, 2005; and European Association of Experimental Social Psychology Medium Size Meeting, Canterbury, 2006). These meetings testify to that fact that both developmental and social psychology are interested in the development of social identity and intergroup attitudes in

children and adolescents. We would like to thank all the developmental and social psychologists, many of whom are included in this special issue, for contributing to these symposia and stimulating us to put together this volume.

The special issue includes a wide ranging set of papers that capture the complex and intricate nature of social identity and intergroup attitudes amongst minority and majority children and adolescents. The articles draw on theory in both developmental psychology (e.g. social-cognitive domain theory, ethnic identity development theory and integrative developmental contextual theory) and social psychology (e.g. social identity theory, optimal distinctiveness theory; and intergroup contact theory).

The focus on minority children and adolescents from around the globe is noteworthy since these groups have often been neglected within the field. Minority status makes a difference to adults' intergroup behavior, as do cultural differences (Abrams, Frings, & Randsley de Moura, 2005). In addition, adolescence is known to involve changes in the self-concept, social relationships, cognitive development and social experience. Consequently, evidence from minority groups in a diverse array of contexts is highly illuminating both of those phenomena that might be generalizable in developmental terms and pervasive, and those that might be distinctive to particular contexts or intergroup relationships.

While the papers in this special issue cover a wide range of topics or groups (e.g. race, religious and minimal) the focus is on the important developmental and social psychological processes involved in the genesis of social identity and intergroup attitudes, rather than the specific nature of children's identity and attitudes in any given domain. The papers are organized around three themes: the establishment of intergroup attitudes and social exclusion in childhood and adolescence; the development of social identity; and the reduction of children's intergroup bias.

Verkuyten and Slooter (2007) examine the development of tolerance towards Muslims amongst ethnic majority Dutch adolescents. In line with the social-cognitive domain model (Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1998) they do not find a stage-like sequence of intolerance leading to tolerance, rather they find significant contextual effects on tolerance beliefs. Killen, Henning, Kelly, Cystal and Ruck (2007) also utilize the social-cognitive domain model to examine ethnic minority and majority American children's and adolescent's judgments of social exclusion. They too demonstrate important contextual differences in the application of moral and social-conventional

reasoning. Significantly they show that peer exclusion based upon more ambiguous or implicit reasoning was less tolerated by minority than majority children.

Davis, Leman and Barrett (2007) also show different patterns in British children's implicit and explicit ethnic intergroup attitudes amongst ethnic minority and majority children. Research presented by Teichman, Bar-Tal and Abdolrazeq (2007) on Arab children and adolescents from Israel and the Palestinian Authority demonstrates differences in the intergroup attitudes held by groups varying in terms of social status and level of intergroup conflict.

Patterson and Bigler (2007) show how being perceptually atypical within a group can heighten ingroup identification and increase a common sense of superiority. These effects were most evident amongst young children who are known to fixate on perceptual characteristics (e.g. color) when forming intergroup attitudes. Nesdale, Maass, Kiesner, Durkin, Griffiths and Ekberg (2007) also investigate the influence on intergroup attitudes of being an atypical peer, though in their case defined by rejection from the peer group. Notably, their findings suggest that rejected peers demonstrate outgroup prejudice because they are motivated to identify with a new accepting group. This is compatible with social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which suggests a link between social identification and intergroup attitudes (cf. Brown, 2000).

Phinney, Jacoby and Silva (2007) along with Marks, Szalacha, Lamarre, Boyd and Garcia Coll (2007) examine the relationship between social identification and intergroup attitudes amongst American immigrant groups who hold multiple identities. Both papers find that amongst a bicultural sample of children and adolescents the development of a secure ethnic identity (i.e. ingroup confidence and openness to other outgroups) is related to positive intergroup attitudes. In addition, Aboud and Sankar (2007) find identification with the outgroup is positively associated with having cross-group friendships. These findings suggest that dual identity (i.e. attachment to a subgroup and a shared common group) may be instrumental in promoting positive intergroup attitudes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Aboud and Sankar's findings also indicate that direct intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) within integrated bilingual schools advances high quality cross-group friendships. In a similar vein, Cameron, Rutland and Brown (2007) demonstrate that extended or indirect intergroup contact fosters positive intergroup attitudes in children. They find that knowing a member of your ingroup is friends with an outgroup member is enough to encourage more positive intergroup attitudes. Though, importantly, this effect was only evident in the intergroup contact condition in which subgroup identities remained salient. Finally, Turiel (2007) provides an insightful commentary on this volume addressing many of the broad issues inherent in the study of social identity and intergroup attitudes amongst children and adolescents.

In conclusion, we think this volume examines timely issues in our increasingly multicultural and interconnected world. An analysis of social identity and intergroup attitudes informed by an integrative developmental and social psychology perspective is much needed if we are to understand the origins and multidimensional nature of social identities and intergroup attitudes. Only then can we realistically begin to develop policy and practice to promote positive social identities and reduce discrimination amongst children and adolescents.

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