

The Many Colors Children See: Development and Intervention of Children's Social Prejudices

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Abstract

In light of the current socio-political situation that magnifies the majority-minority group division in the country, it is essential for parents and other elements of the society to discuss about how this situation may affect the development of the next generation. Both explicit and implicit information on social categorization provided by adults and other resources assist in the formation of children's stereotype and prejudice towards various social groups. This paper reviews empirical studies on the development of prejudice across childhood and the strategy that can potentially facilitates the reduction of prejudice among children. It is evident that children have begun to use social categories to describe different social groups from a very young age and promoting intergroup contact may be used as a promising solution to lower prejudice among children.

Keywords: children prejudice, intergroup relations, in-group favoritism, intergroup contact

Introduction

Recently, the issues of majority-minority division resurfaced in our beloved country and has been magnified by Ahok's blasphemy case that somehow divided citizens of the same nation into at least the so-called Ahok's supporters and non-supporters. Ahok received his sentence over this case in May 9, 2017, yet debates on this issue did not end there. In fact, the discourse went into a deeper and more rooted stereotype and prejudice issue that have always been existed since the beginning of the country's history, though many people either seemed to think it has somehow vanished or simply did not care that it existed the whole time.

The stereotype and prejudice issue that could potentially lead to conflict is nothing

new in the global world, let alone in one single country that also happens to be multicultural. There are two sides in everything, and this applies to a multicultural society. On one side, multiculturalism provides a community with considerable amount of opportunity for personal and social skills development (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). On the other side, however, too many dissimilarities in one single society can be challenging, as they have the ability to create intergroup tension and conflict (Lee, McCauley, Moghaddam, & Worchel, 2004; Levy & Killen, 2008). Unfortunately, the stereotyping process that can possibly lead to prejudice is a normality and a pervasive element in our everyday life (Allport, 1954/1979; Fiske, 2005). Everyone has automatic stereotype knowledge about their own and others' groups (Devine, 1989). In fact, whenever we interact with other individuals, we employ a social cognitive strategy through associating

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others with certain social categories in which these individuals may belong to (Brewer, 2003). At the same time, we evaluate their qualities associated with those categories that will affect our feelings and behaviors toward them (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Therefore, the stereotyping process itself is automatic. However, whether one would activate the stereotypic knowledge or not, depends on their levels of prejudice: those who are high in prejudice are more likely to activate their stereotypic knowledge about a certain group without further examination on the person's de-individuating information (Devine, 1989).

With the current socio-political situation that happens in this country, along with the highlights of the issue in various online platforms, headlines in a number of media outlets, as well as open discussion in everyday discourse, one may ask: how does this situation affect our children? Further, we may wonder whether it is possible to raise children with low prejudice level. As a respond to those questions, this paper aims to discuss about the development of prejudice among children as well as a strategy to reduce prejudice that has been supported with a large body of research.

Discussion

Defining Prejudice

Prejudice has been defined in various ways. Many scholars view prejudice as a negative or unfavorable evaluation toward members of a particular group (see Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Bodenhausen & Richeson, 2010; Levy, Rosenthal, & Herrera-Alcazar, 2010; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Similarly, despite acknowledging that prejudice can be both pro and contra attitudes toward a group,

Allport (1954/1979) suggested that prejudice is mostly formed in negative way.

On the contrary, Eagly and Diekman (2005) noted that prejudice toward social groups can be ambivalent, but not necessarily a generalized antipathy. This view is supported by Fiske and colleagues (Cuddy et al., 2008; Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 1999) who illustrated that the occurrence of the specific emotional prejudices is depending on how we perceive others' warmth and competence levels, such as that: (1) perceived high warmth-high competence triggers pride and admiration, (2) perceived low warmth-low competence triggers disgust and contempt, (3) perceived high warmth-low competence triggers pity and sympathy, and (4) perceived low warmth-high competence triggers envy and jealousy. Thus, whether prejudice is positive, negative, or ambivalent, depending on the target of evaluation and the social context.

In-group Favoritism and Out-group Prejudice among Children

Out-group prejudice has typically been associated with in-group favoritism. This assumption is mostly drawn upon the works from the 'social identity perspective' research (Hornsey, 2008). Sherif's (1958) study on intergroup conflict suggests that intergroup competition triggers out-group hostility; while at the same time, also increases in-group solidarity and cooperativeness. Later, through employing the minimal group paradigm in his study, where intergroup conflict was inexistent, Tajfel (1970) concluded that out-group hostility and in-group favoritism are coexistent whenever intergroup categorization is applied in any situation. Hence, a mere awareness that an out-group is present leads to intergroup competition or out-

group discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In contrast, Allport (1954/1979) suggested that even though the out-group presence may strengthen ones' in-group belongingness, out-group hostility is not a prerequisite. In support to this view, Brewer (1999) suggested that in-group and out-group evaluation is "a matter of in-group favoritism and the absence of equivalent favoritism toward out-groups". Group identification, according to Brewer (1999; 2003; 2007), is a product of need for inclusion and need of differentiation from others. Thus, assimilation toward in-group is expected while maintaining distinction with out-groups. Hence, out-group is not always associated with hostile attitudes, instead it can be viewed with indifference, sympathy, and even admiration, as long as the need for differentiation is maintained (Brewer, 1999).

Aboud (2003) tested the association between in-group preferences and out-group prejudice in a series of study with White Canadian children across two samples: (1) children who resided in predominantly White community and (2) children who attended a racially mixed school. Findings from this study revealed that positive in-group attitudes were associated with negative out-group attitudes only among children with little out-group contact, but not among children with sufficient contact opportunity with out-group members. Moreover, the study also found that although in-group preference was already prevalent at a younger age, it only appeared strongly and significantly at 5 years old. The same was also found for the out-group prejudice, though with weaker effect.

In sum, Aboud's (2003) study showed that the occurrence of in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice reciprocity

depended largely on the opportunity of contact with out-group members. Furthermore, the fact that strong level of in-group favoritism was only weakly associated with out-group prejudice once it occurred at the age of 5 indicated that the in-group favoritism and out-group hostility are not necessarily dependent on each other (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001).

How Do Children Develop Prejudice?

Prejudice throughout Childhood

With regards to group prejudices in children, there is a popular myth suggesting that children are colorblind or, in other words, are unaware of racial and ethnic differences (Winkler, 2009). In fact, children as young as 3-4 years old have noticed the differences between race/ethnic groups (Aboud, 1988) and begun to use evaluative forms of prejudice since they were 5 years old (Aboud, 2003; Aboud, 2005). Children as young as 24 months have also been found to use certain words to refer to social categories that are different from their own. For instance, Bar-tal (1996) found that Jewish Israeli children have started using the word 'Arab' as early as 24 months old, attached some forms of evaluation towards the word since 2.5 years old, though only started to apply negative evaluation towards the word at the age of 5. Later, Jewish children started to associate the word 'Arab' with both positive and negative evaluations at the age of 10-12, and at the same used multidimensional and various features in defining 'Arab' (Bar-tal, 1996).

This pattern was also evident in the findings of a meta-analytical study on ethnic, racial, and national prejudice which revealed that the pattern of prejudice across childhood and adolescence was moderated by group status (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Prejudice levels toward minority groups increased between early (2-4 years) to

middle childhood (5 to 7 years), but then remained unchanged or slightly decreased between middle and late childhood (8 to 10 years). In contrast, prejudice levels toward majority groups did not differ systematically between early and middle childhood, but increased between middle and late childhood. The study did not find any significant prejudice development beyond 10 years old, which implies that children have learned about prejudice at pre-adolescence and may keep their thoughts and beliefs about group membership from early on. Overall, these studies illustrate that children do have prejudices toward different social groups.

The Developmental Intergroup Theory

If prejudice is so prevalent in children, what are the mechanisms that can explain the development of prejudice? The social identity theory suggests that the odds that children will develop prejudice are depending on the extent to which the salience of social categorization is widely shared by people in the child's social environment (Nesdale, 1999). Furthermore, based on this approach, children prejudice will remain stable through middle childhood to adolescence or even becomes more negative (Killen & Rutland, 2011), which is not always the case (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011).

On the contrary, the cognitive developmental theory suggests that prejudice occurs among children as a consequence of lack of cognitive ability in understanding the world (Levy et al., 2010), following Piaget's cognitive developmental stage theory (Aboud, 2003). Hence, with the lack of ability to weigh multiple variables simultaneously, the egocentric children developed in-group preference prior to age of 7 years old, and only later developed understanding that other people may belong to multiple categories through active

classification (Aboud, 2003; Cameron et al., 2001; Killen & Rutland, 2011). As a consequence, prejudice among children is not manifested in a sophisticated form as adults and adolescents. Rather, it is expressed in the forms of avoidance, social exclusion, and negative evaluations which may affect friendship development and stability with out-group peers (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Aboud, 2005).

The Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT) explains the underlying mechanism of prejudice development by integrating the two opposing views. This theory suggests that there are four basic processes involved in the formation and maintenance of stereotype and prejudice (Arthur, Bigler, Liben, Gelman, & Ruble, 2008; Bigler & Hughes, 2009; Bigler & Liben, 2007; Killen & Rutland, 2011).

First, children establish the psychological salience of different person attributes by attending to (a) the perceptual discriminability such as race, gender, age, and attractiveness, (b) the proportional group size which leads to the distinctiveness feature of the minority group, (c) explicit labelling use by adults, and (d) implicit use related to social categorization. Indeed, both Ichheiser (1949) and Allport (1954/1979) had once suggested that the visible differences can imply to the perception of real differences between racial and ethnic groups. The explicit labelling used by adults, such as teachers (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001; Patterson & Bigler, 2006), was also found to influence children's attitudes toward other groups such as in the case of the Jewish children towards Arab (Bar-tal, 1996). Specifically, the explicit use of labelling by adults or authority figures allowed children to create links between the implicit messages, such as classroom posters, with the groups' social status (Bigler et al., 2001).

Next, children categorize the encountered individuals by attending to the salient dimension in that particular situation, that could be in any form of social identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The DIT proposed that this categorization process will be moderated by children's classification skills (Bigler & Hughes, 2009). Thus, the consequences as suggested using the cognitive developmental approach are applied in this stage.

The subsequent process involves developing stereotype and prejudice toward social groups through internal and external mechanisms. One of the internal mechanisms used is through the essentialist thinking, i.e. the belief that members of a social group share the same principal qualities (Bigler & Hughes, 2009). Indeed, kindergarten age children who belonged to majority group were found to possess a high level of essentialist belief on ethnicity, though later declined at the second grade of elementary school (Deeb, Segal, Birnbaum, Ben-Eliyahu, & Diesendruck, 2011). In this process, parents, peers, media, and other sources play important roles in providing children with both explicit and implicit information on attributes associated with different racial groups that later form stereotype and prejudice in children (Aboud, 2005; Bigler & Hughes, 2009).

Finally, the last process proposed by the DIT is the use of stereotype and prejudice. Stereotyping and prejudice were found to be associated with children's friendship pattern with out-group members. Aboud and colleagues' (2003) study found that the prejudiced white children placed more cross-race classmates in their non-friend categories, had fewer cross-race companions, and gave them lower quality ratings. Intergroup name-calling may also occur as one of the social group prejudice

expressions among children (Aboud & Joong, 2008).

Promoting Intergroup Contact to Reduce Prejudice among Children

Although the explicit forms of prejudice tend to decrease in middle childhood, implicit forms of prejudice remain through older age (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), even to adulthood (Dunham, Chen, & Banaji, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to employ different strategies that aim to lower prejudice since early age. One of the promising venues in this area is through promoting intergroup contact.

Indeed, a meta-analytical study on intergroup contact effect has uncovered that more intergroup contact was associated with lower level of prejudice in various contexts and settings (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This is consistent with Aboud's (2003) study findings which revealed that children who attended a mixed-race school had weaker level of out-group prejudice than those who attended a racially homogenous school. In addition, Raabe and Beelmann (2011) also found that greater contact opportunities were associated with lower increase in prejudice between early and middle childhood and higher decrease in prejudice between middle and late childhood. Moreover, even a slight contact opportunity in the school allowed for similar intergroup contact effect to occur (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011).

Nevertheless, Pettigrew (1998) suggested that the direct contact with out-group members can only be effective to reduce prejudice when there is an opportunity to develop friendship. In-line with this, the duration of friendship was found to increase positive attitudes toward out-group in general (Aboud, 2009). However, despite the promising findings from intergroup contact studies, it was also

found that direct contact had stronger effect for children from the majority than minority groups (Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Gómez, Tropp, & Fernandez, 2011). Meanwhile, cross-group friendship was found to be associated with higher social competence for minority group members, but not for the majorities (Eisenberg et al., 2009). In sum, the effect of direct contact on positive intergroup relations is moderated by the groups' social status.

Though direct intergroup contact could be an ideal solution for prejudice, it is advised that building friendship between members of different social groups requires extra efforts. Cross-race friendship was found to be rarer and less stable when we get older (Aboud et al., 2003). Thus, as an alternative to direct contact, Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) suggested that a mere knowledge that other in-group member(s) has out-group friend(s), termed as the 'extended contact', can also have a positive impact in improving attitudes toward out-group members. Even though studies in this area have found that direct contact effect was stronger when contact opportunity was high (Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, & Petley, 2011), extended contact was found to improve positive attitudes toward out-groups, regardless of group status (Feddes et al., 2009; Gómez et al., 2011).

In order to reduce prejudice among children, the findings from intergroup contact research should be incorporated into the immediate settings of children, such as through school-based program. This program should promote intergroup cooperation (Dovidio et al., 2004), in which children can work together on activities both in dyadic and bigger playgroup contexts (Aboud, 2009). Aboud and colleagues also suggested that attempts to reduce prejudice among children could be

successful if it incorporates dialogue between children about prejudice reduction and is directed to the listener's concerns (Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999).

Conclusion

This paper reviews empirical studies on prejudice among children. It is evident that the formation of stereotype and prejudice started at a very young age, and although prejudice tends to decline in middle childhood, a more subtle form of prejudice may remain through adulthood. The developmental intergroup theory suggests that children develop prejudice through their own active construction about the world as well as through external mechanisms. In sum, in contrast to the myth that children are colorblind, this review shows that prejudice is prevalent among children. It is important to note that children do learn from various resources in their environments, and this includes learning about stereotype and prejudice towards different social groups.

Considering the intergroup division that resurfaced in the everyday discourse in this country, parents and other elements of the society should provide a supportive environment for children to grow up as adults who are capable of treating diversity with respect. Promoting intergroup contact in children that facilitates cross-group friendship and cooperation is one strategy discussed in this paper that is believed to have the potential to lower prejudice among children of different groups.

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