The Role of Ethnic Group and Country Identification in the Implicit and Explicit Ethnic Group Attitudes of Young Children

Stephanie C. Davis*, Martyn Barrett* & Patrick J. Leman**
* Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, GU2 5XH, UK
** Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, London, TW20 OEX, UK

Introduction

• Implicit in Social Identity Theory and its developmental offspring, Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT – Nesdale, 2000) is the suggestion that identification with the in-group is a key variable in inter-ethnic group attitudes.
• Theoretically, high group identification is associated with more pronounced ingroup bias.
• The link between identification and bias in children is unclear, however, and may be mediated by group variability, peer victimisation and parental attitudes (Verkuyten, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001).
• Children exhibit differing explicit and implicit ethnic group attitudes (see Nesdale & Durkin, 1998; Nesdale, 2000; Davis & Leman, 2004) but SIDT does not suggest how the relationship between identification with the in-group and these two levels of attitude might be related.

Aims

• To explore links between identification and ethnic group bias in the developmental context
• To explore whether identification with the in-group is differentially related to implicit and explicit group bias in children

Design Considerations

• Concepts of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ are problematic in the British context with a clear division between the two not always being evident.
• ‘Ethnic Group’ can be defined by religion, skin colour and family’s country of origin.
• Study used ‘ethnicity’ defined by (i) societal ethnic group label (‘skin colour’ labelling) and (ii) family’s historic country of origin.

Participants

• 112 Black (African-Caribbean heritage) and White (English heritage) British children (58 girls and 54 boys attending a multi-ethnic primary school in London, UK)
• Three age groups - 34 5-year-olds (20 Black and 14 White), 41 7-year-olds (21 Black and 20 White) 37 9-year-olds (21 Black and 16 White)

Procedure

• Children were seen on two separate occasions – three weeks apart

Results: Implicit vs. Explicit Consistent vs. Inconsistent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype Type</th>
<th>Implicit Task</th>
<th>Explicit Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent*</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent*</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent*</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent*</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Consistent*</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Consistent*</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Implicit vs. explicit difference significant at p<.001 level

Notes:

• 16 stereotypical traits which could be assigned to a Black or White character in turn
• Non-comparative, multi-response, order of presentation counterbalanced across the group
• For White children, high identification with parental country of origin was associated with greater implicit in-group stereotyping
• For Black children, high identification with ethnic colour label associated with better memory
• In-group identification was unrelated to explicit stereotyping.

Summary of Findings

- All children implicitly stereotyped the Black character but not the White character
- A reliable sense of ethnic group identification based on skin colour was found for Black but not for White children
- For Black children, high identification with parental country of origin was associated with greater implicit in-group stereotyping
- For Black children, high identification with ethnic colour label associated with better memory
- For White children, high identification with parental country associated with better memory

References