

ENGLISH CHILDREN'S REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIONAL GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

Previous research into English children's conceptions of national groups, both their own ingroup and outgroups, has revealed developmental trends. With respect to variability, children's descriptions of both the national ingroup and national outgroups become increasingly diverse with age (Barrett, Wilson & Lyons, 1999). With respect to affect, while English children's representations of their own national group become marginally less positive with age (Barrett, Wilson & Lyons, 1999), their descriptions of national outgroups become significantly more positive with age (Barrett & Short, 1992; Buchanan-Barrow, Bayraktar, Papadopoulou, Short, Lyons & Barrett, 1999; Barrett, Wilson & Lyons, 1999).

This study investigated the representations held by English children, aged 6 years, 9 years, 12 years and 15 years-old, about their own national group and about Italians, French, Spanish and Germans. The children's responses were examined for developmental trends in the perceived variability of national groups, in the evaluative and affective assessments of the groups and in the stereotypical representations reported by the children. The findings revealed significant differences associated with both age and national group and are discussed with reference to theories of children's identity development.

INTRODUCTION

Research into children's understanding of national groups, both of their own ingroup and outgroups, has revealed developmental trends in the children's perceptions. With the findings on affect, children generally establish a preference for their own group by about 6-7, but they can also display strong affect for outgroups (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Johnson, Middleton & Tajfel, 1970). Furthermore, while children are generally more positive about their own group than about outgroups, their representations of other groups tend to become less negative with age, while their conceptions of their own national group may become less positive (Barrett & Short, 1992, Buchanan-Barrow, Bayraktar, Papadopoulou, Short, Lyons & Barrett, 1999). Similar findings in research into children's representations of ethnic groups also suggest that older children are less prejudiced about outgroups (Doyle & Aboud, 1995).

This reduction in prejudice with age is believed to result from developing perceptions of intra-group variability, as children extend their knowledge and understanding of large-scale social groups through such sources as personal contact, education and the media.

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This developing sense of variability within groups has been found in children's perceptions of national groups, with their descriptions of foreigners becoming increasingly diverse with age (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Barrett & Short, 1992; Barrett, Wilson & Lyons, 1999), as well as in their perceptions of ethnic groups (Doyle, Beaudet & Aboud, 1988; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). The increase in the perceived variability of such groups has been argued to be based upon the child's increasing willingness with age to attribute more negative characteristics to ingroups, and more positive characteristics to outgroups; hence the changes in prejudice towards ingroups and outgroups which are exhibited between 6 and 12 years of age.

However, while overall prejudice towards outgroups may thus diminish with age, there is evidence that children may differentiate between groups which are generally positively evaluated by their own ingroup and those negatively evaluated. Representations of foreigners held by English, Greek and Turkish children revealed an 'enemy' effect (Buchanan-Barrow et al, 1999); each of the three groups of children displayed greater negativity about the outgroup traditionally viewed as 'the enemy' by their own ingroup. On the other hand, by the age of 10 or 11, English children report perceptions of Americans which are as positive as those of their own national group (Barrett et al, 1999).

This paper explores English children's representations of both their own ingroups (English and British) and five outgroups (French, Germans, Spanish, Italians and Scottish). It was predicted that the children would be actively differentiating the different groups with respect to perceptions of variability, stereotype content and evaluative responses, according to whether the groups were ingroups or outgroups, as previous research has revealed. However, it was also expected that the children would display differential responses between both ingroups and outgroups, according to age and target group.

METHOD

240 English children (120 girls and 120 boys), aged 6, 9, 12 or 15 years old, took part in the study. The 4 age-groups were approximately equal and with roughly similar numbers of boys and girls within each age-group (see Table 1). All the children were interviewed individually and asked to respond to a series of questions about various national groups: (1) two ingroups, the English and the super-ordinate group, the British (consisting of the three British nations, the English, Scottish and Welsh); (2) four European national outgroups, the French, Germans, Italians and Spanish; and (3) a fifth outgroup, the Scottish, a national outgroup for English children, but one of the three national groups which comprise the British super-ordinate group (see above).

	6 years	9 years	12 years	15 years	Total
Girls	31	31	31	27	120
Boys	28	29	31	32	120
Total	59	60	62	59	240

Interview Schedule

1. Stereotypes

The children were given a randomly ordered set of 12 adjectives, consisting of 6 pairs of polar opposites (happy, unhappy, clean, dirty, clever, stupid, hard-working, lazy, honest, dishonest, friendly, unfriendly). The children were asked if each adjective did or did not apply to each national group.

2. Affective response

The children were asked about their feelings for each national group. This gave a response on a 5-point scale: like a lot, like a little, neither/don't know, dislike a little, dislike a lot.

3. Variability

A variability score was derived from the adjectives in the following way. A score of 1 was given when only either the negative or the positive adjective from a pair of adjectives was attributed to the group, a score of 2 when the child attributed both the negative and the positive adjectives to the group, and a score of 0 if neither the positive nor the negative adjective was attributed to the group. A total score was then derived by summing across all 6 adjective dimensions. This total score was then divided by the number of adjective dimensions that the child had actually used. Thus, the variability scale ranged from 1 to 2. The higher the variability score for a given group, the more variable that group was perceived to be on those dimensions which had been chosen and used by the child.

4. Evaluation

An evaluation score was also derived from the adjectives. Here, a score of 1 was given when only the negative adjective from a pair of adjectives was attributed to a group, a score of 2 when both the negative and the positive adjectives were attributed to a group, a score of 3 when only the positive adjective was attributed to the group, and a score of 0 if neither the positive nor the negative adjective was attributed to the group. A total score was then derived by summing across all 6 adjective dimensions. This total score was then divided by the number of adjective dimensions the child had actually used. Thus, the evaluation scale ranged from 1 to 3. The higher the evaluation score for a given group, the more positively that group was perceived to be on those dimensions which had been chosen and used by the child.

RESULTS

Content of children's thinking

Using Correspondence Analysis, the children's stereotypes were examined. Correspondence analysis, by using well-established geometric principles, provides a pictorial representation between categories and between individuals and groups. It permits a multi-dimensional analysis of categorical data by providing a plot of the relationship between the groups and the types of responses given by the children. This graphical representation reveals those answers which are most exclusively associated with each group and which therefore best discriminate the thinking of the children at different age-points. In this study, it indicates some of the differences in thinking held by the children according to their age and the national group in question.

For the interpretation of the plots given by the correspondence analysis, it is essential to mention that the first dimension is always the horizontal one: that is, the most discriminating responses for Dimension 1 are the ones to the extreme left and right in each plot, and those groups which are most closely associated with those responses will be the nearest outermost groups in each case. The vertical dimension is the second dimension; that is the most discriminating responses for Dimension 2 are the ones at the extreme top and bottom of the plot, and are associated with

the nearest outermost groups on the vertical dimension. Finally, all those responses which are clustered between the groups are the non-discriminating ones that are made or not made by similar numbers of children in all groups.

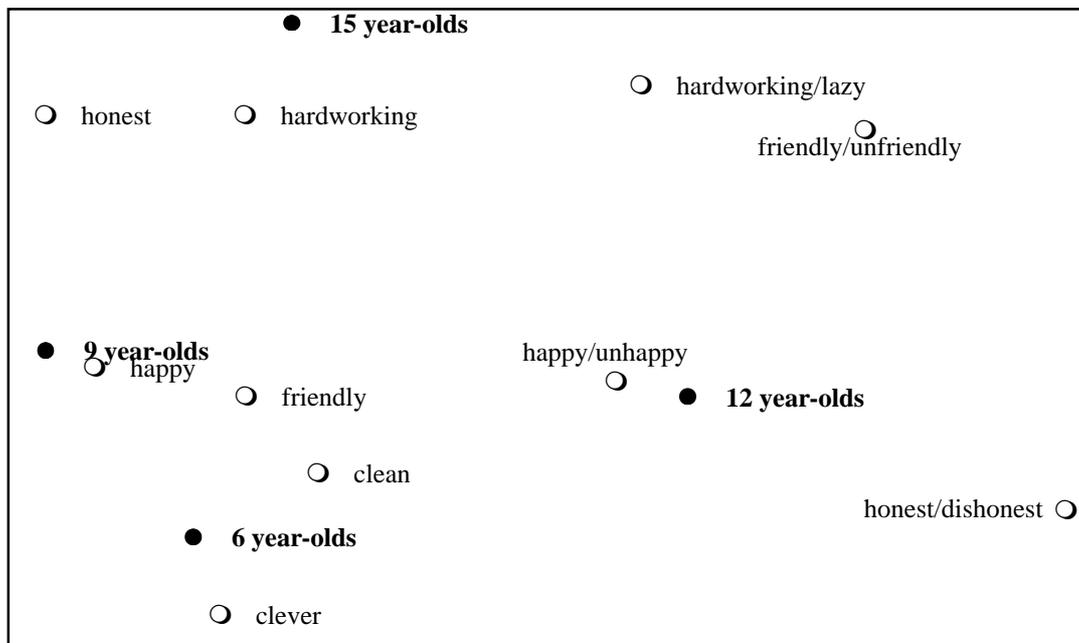
1) Representations of ingroups:

While the younger children were more likely than the older children to report positive adjectives, with age the children perceived greater variability and responded with both negative and positive traits.

English (Figure 1):

This is a two-dimensional plot. The first dimension (inertia = 78%, $\chi^2 = 85.39$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.0005$) differentiates the thinking of the 9-year-olds, who tended to describe the English as honest, from the thinking of the 12-year-olds, who were more likely to say that the English are both honest and dishonest, and also friendly and unfriendly.

The second dimension (inertia = 20%, $\chi^2 = 21.63$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.05$) distinguishes the representations of the 6 year-olds, who were more likely than the 15 year-olds to say that the English are clever.



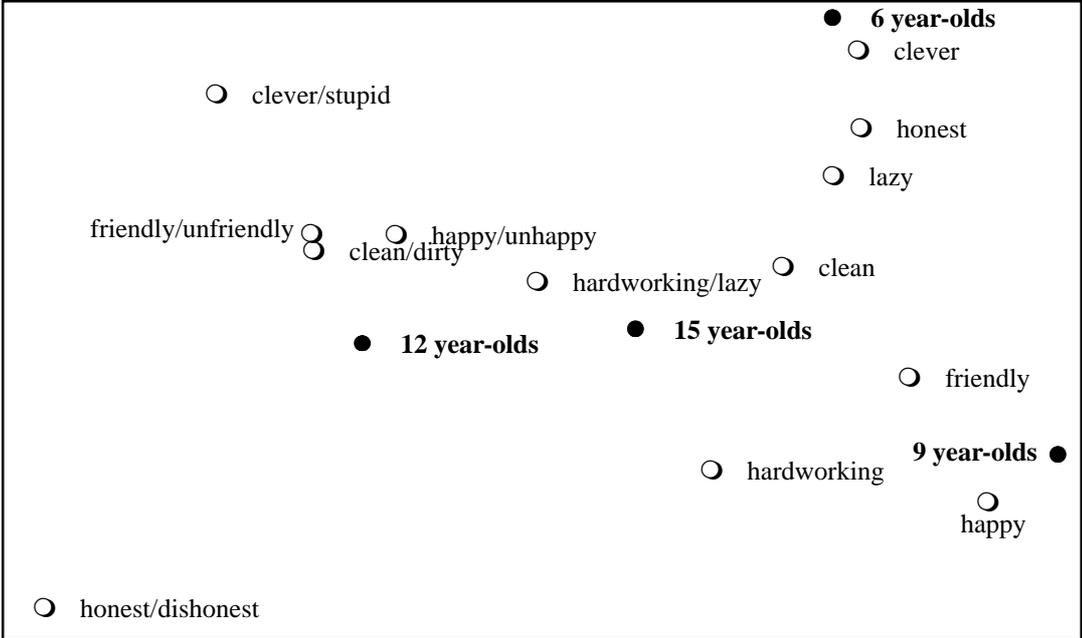
Dim 1: inertia = 78%, $\chi^2 = 85.39$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.0005$

Dim 2: inertia = 20%, $\chi^2 = 21.63$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.05$

Figure 1: Children's representations of the English by age-group

British (super-ordinate group) (Figure 2):

There is one dimension (inertia = 76%, $\chi^2 = 57.04$, $df = 15$, $p < 0.0005$). This differentiates the thinking of the 9-year olds, who tended to say that the British are happy and friendly, from that of the 12 year-olds, who tended to say that the British are both honest and dishonest, and both clever and stupid.



Dim 1: inertia = 76%, $\chi^2 = 57.04$, $df = 15$, $p < 0.0005$

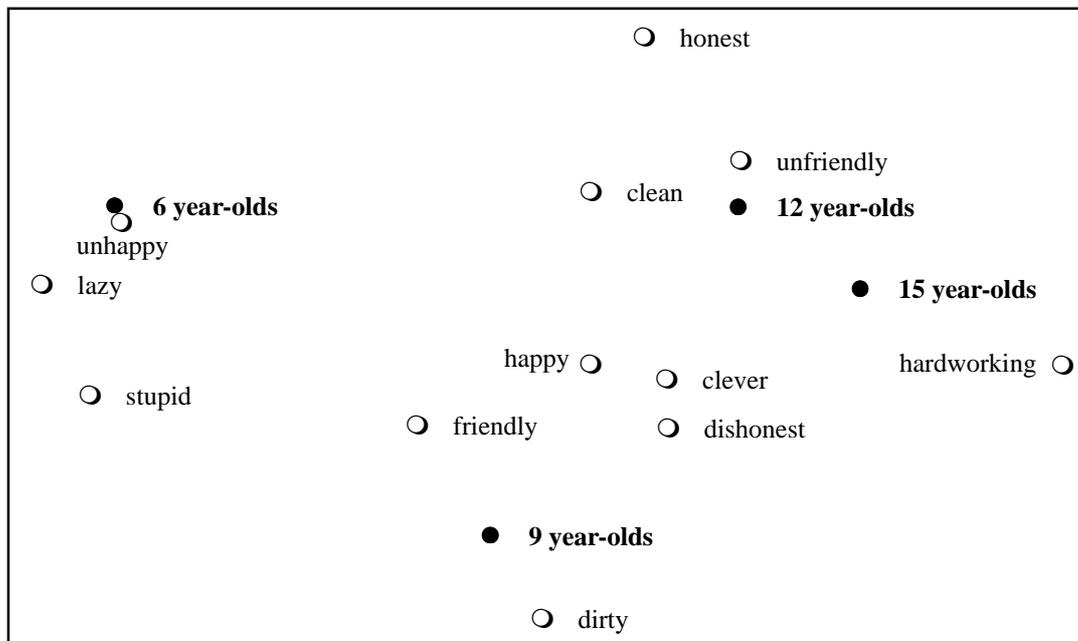
Figure 2: Children’s representations of the British by age-group

2) Representations of outgroups

While the younger groups were more likely than the older children to report negative traits, in most cases the older children tended to report positive traits. However, contrary to this general trend, the oldest children did report negatively about the French by their tendency to say that the French are unfriendly.

Germans (Figure 3):

There is one dimension (inertia = 70%, $\chi^2 = 48.66$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.0005$): this differentiates the representations of the youngest group, who tended to describe the Germans as lazy, stupid and unhappy, from the thinking of the oldest group, whose representations tended towards hardworking.

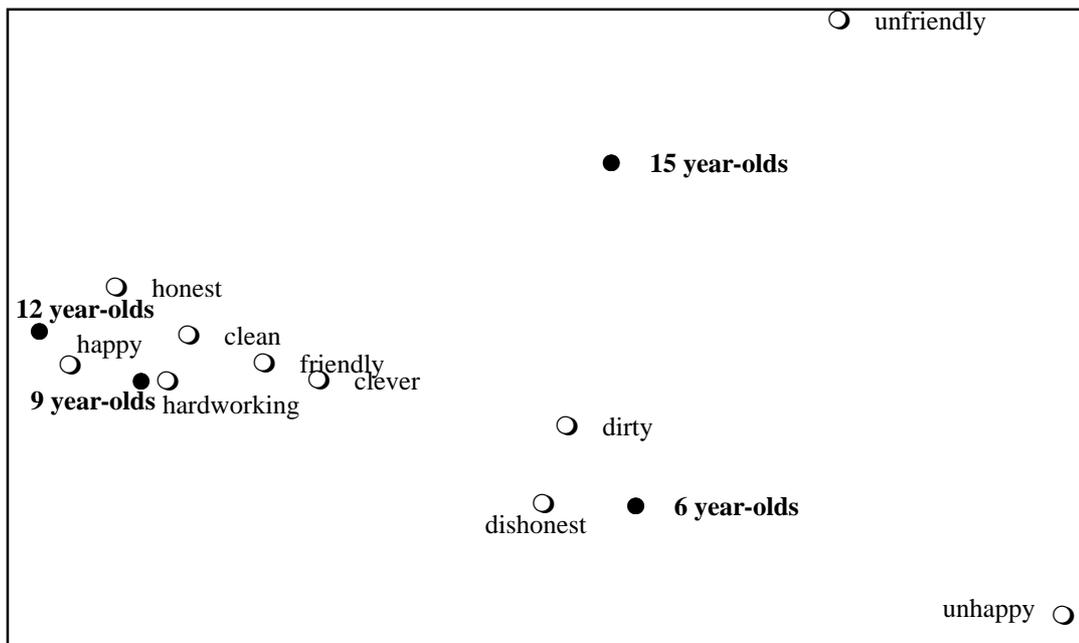


Dim 1: inertia = 70%, $\chi^2 = 48.66$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.0005$

Figure 3: Children's representations of the Germans by age-group

French (Figure 4)

This is a two-dimensional solution. Dimension 1 (inertia = 58%, $\chi^2 = 40.54$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.0005$) differentiates the representations of the 6 year-old children, who tended to say that the French are unhappy, from the representations of the 9 and 12-year-olds, who were more likely to say that the French are happy, honest and hard-working. Dimension 2 (inertia = 31%, $\chi^2 = 21.73$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.05$) differentiates the thinking of the 6 year-olds, again for their tendency to say the French are unhappy, from the thinking of the 15 year-old children, who were more likely to say that the French are unfriendly.



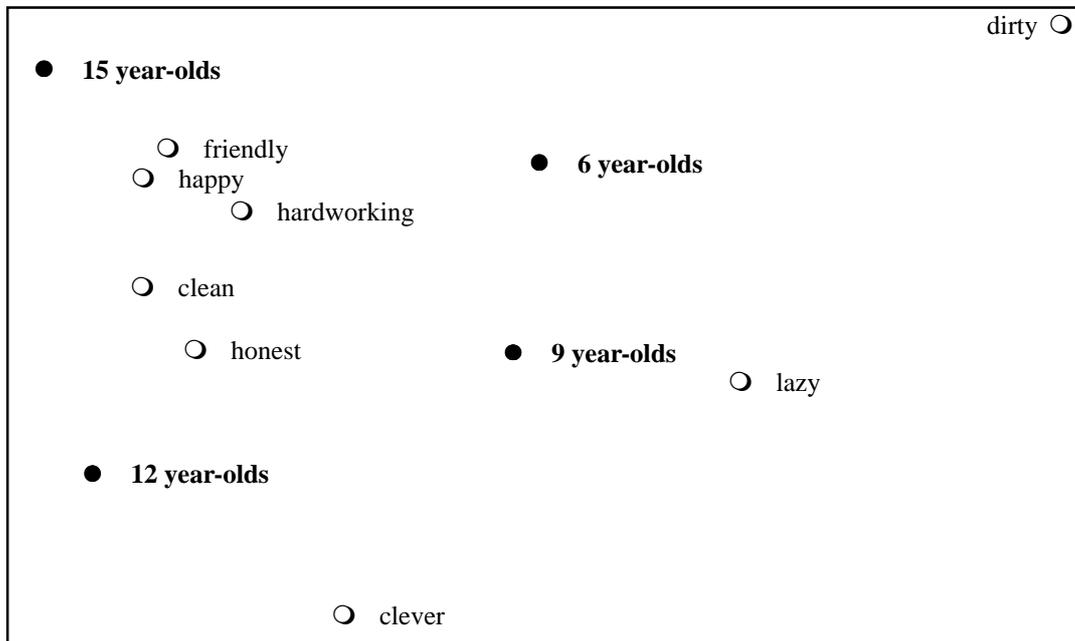
Dimension 1: inertia = 58%, $\chi^2 = 40.54$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.0005$

Dimension 2: inertia = 31%, $\chi^2 = 21.73$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.05$

Figure 4: Children's representations of the French by age-group

Italians (Figure 5)

There is one dimension (inertia = 86%, $\chi^2 = 51.01$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.0005$). This differentiates the representations of the two youngest groups, who tend to describe the Italians as lazy and dirty, from the representations of the two oldest groups, who tend to describe the Italians as happy and clean.

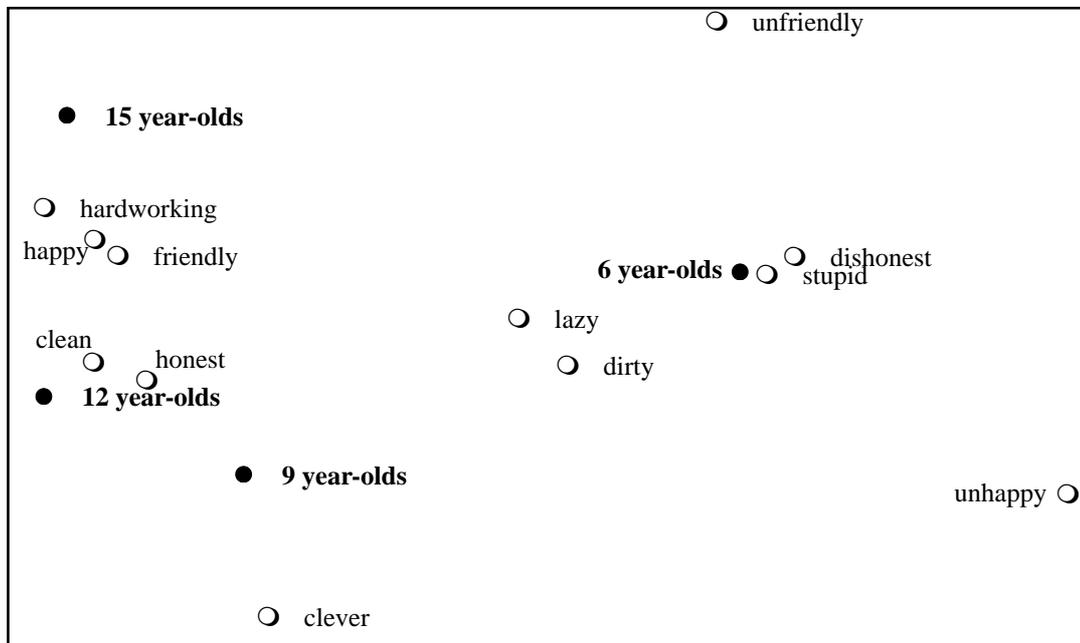


Dim1: inertia = 86%, $\chi^2 = 51.01$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.0005$

Figure 5: Children's representations of the Italians by age-group

Spanish (Figure 6)

There is one dimension (inertia = 89%, $\chi^2 = 160.35$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.0005$). This differentiates the thinking of the youngest group of children, who tend to report the Spanish as unhappy, dishonest, stupid and unfriendly, from the thinking of all the other groups, who are more likely to say that the Spanish are hardworking, happy, clean, friendly and honest.



Dim 1: inertia = 89%, $\chi^2 = 160.35$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.0005$

Figure 6: Children's representations of the Spanish by age-group

Scottish

There were no significant dimensions in the children's perceptions of the Scottish.

Affect

A two-way mixed ANOVA (age group (4) x target group (7), with independent groups on the first factor and repeated measures on the second factor) revealed a main effect of target group ($F(6,202) = 63.38$, $p < .005$) and an interaction between target group and age group ($F(18,572) = 2.31$, $p < .005$). There was no main effect of age group.

Differences associated with target group

The English were significantly more liked than all other groups while the Germans were significantly less liked than all other groups. The children effectively ranked the national groups as follows: 1) English, British and Scottish; 2) Spanish, Italian and French; 3) Germans.

Age trends

1) Affect for ingroups

British

Post hoc tests indicated that the children's liking for the British increased with age, as the youngest children's liking for the British was less than that expressed by all the other three groups: 6 year-olds = 3.69 v 9 year-olds = 4.34 ($p < 0.005$); 6 year-olds = 3.69 v 12 year-olds = 4.20 ($p < 0.05$); 6 year-olds = 3.69 v 15 year-olds = 4.42 ($p < 0.005$).

English

There were no significant differences in affect for the English across the four age groups.

2) Affect for outgroups

For both the Italians and the Spanish, post hoc tests indicated that the youngest children's liking was less than that reported by the 12 and 15 year-old children. Italians: 6 year-olds = 3.12 v 12 year-olds = 3.71 ($p < 0.05$); 6 year-olds = 3.12 v 15 year-olds = 3.91 ($p < 0.005$). Spanish: 6 year-olds = 3.21 v 12 year-olds = 3.83 ($p < 0.05$); 6 year-olds = 3.21 v 15 year-olds = 3.93 ($p < 0.005$).

There were no significant differences in affect for the French, Germans or Scottish across the four age groups.

Variability

A two-way mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of age ($F(3,191) = 2.82, p < .05$) and a main effect of target group ($F(6,186) = 4.76, p < .0005$). There was no significant interaction between age group and target group.

Differences associated with target groups

Overall, the children perceived both ingroups, the British and English, as significantly more variable than all the other groups. The children effectively ranked the groups in order of variability as follows: 1) British and English; 2) Spanish, French, Italians, Germans and Scottish. Thus, there was an outgroup homogeneity effect.

Age trend

There was an increase in perceptions of variability between the 9 year-olds and the 12 year-olds.

Evaluation

A two-way mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of age ($F(3,190) = 3.15, p < .05$) and a main effect of target group ($F(6,185) = 24.96, p < .0005$). There was also an interaction between age and target group: $F(18,524) = 4.21, p < .0005$.

Differences associated with target groups

Overall, the children evaluated the Scottish and the English significantly more positively than all the other groups, while the Germans were evaluated significantly more negatively than the other groups. There were four significantly different levels of evaluation; thus the children effectively ranked the groups as follows: 1) Scottish and English; 2) Italians, British and Spanish; 3) French; 4) Germans.

Age trends

1) Evaluation of ingroups: with age, the children's positivity tended to diminish.

There was a significant difference associated with age in the children's evaluation of the English, as the two younger groups tended to be more positive about the English than the two older groups: 6 year-olds = 2.75 v 12 year-olds = 2.46 ($p < 0.005$); 6 year-olds = 2.75 v 15 year-olds = 2.53 ($p < 0.05$); 9 year-olds = 2.70 v 12 year-olds = 2.46 (0.05).

There were no significant differences associated with age in the evaluation of the British.

2) Evaluation of outgroups: trends were mixed, with perceptions of positivity increasing with age for the Italians and Spanish, but decreasing for the French.

Italians: the two younger groups of children tended to be more negative about the Italians than the two older groups of children: 6 year-olds = 2.20 v 12 year-olds = 2.68 ($p < 0.005$); 6 year-olds = 2.20 v 15 year-olds = 2.73 ($p < 0.005$); 9 year-olds = 2.31 v 12 year-olds = 2.68 ($p < 0.05$); 9 year-olds = 2.31 v 15 year-olds = 2.73 ($p < 0.005$).

Spanish: the youngest group tended to be more negative than all the other groups: 6 year-olds = 1.20 v 9 year-olds = 2.47 ($p < 0.005$); 6 year-olds = 1.20 v 12 year-olds = 2.56 ($p < 0.005$); 6 year-olds = 1.20 v 15 year-olds = 2.58 ($p < 0.005$).

French: the 9 year-olds were more positive about the French than the 15 year-olds: 9 year-olds = 2.48 v 15 year-olds = 2.08 ($p < 0.05$).

There were no significant age trends in the evaluation of the Germans or the Scottish.

DISCUSSION

Content of children's thinking

Overall, as expected, the younger children were more likely to report positive adjectives for the two ingroups, the English and the British, and negative traits for the outgroups. Furthermore, possibly as a consequence of an increasing sense of variability in groups, the older children's responses were more likely to be both negative and positive, as previous research had suggested, but for ingroups only. This increased variability was not apparent, therefore, in the perceptions of outgroups, where the older children's tendency was to replace the younger children's negativity with straightforward positivity. Thus the developing trend for ingroups was from positivity to both positivity and negativity, while the developing trend for outgroups was from negativity to positivity. Therefore, while there was a general reduction in prejudice towards outgroups, it was not the consequence of developing perceptions of variability in this case, contrary to previous research.

There was one exception to this trend towards positivity for outgroups; the 15 year-olds were more likely to say that the French were unfriendly. This age-group are the most likely of all the age-groups to have travelled to France on a school-trip, as most English schoolchildren are required to learn French, and thus would have experienced France in a different way from the family holidays they might have had in Europe generally. It is possible that these children experienced some hostility from their French hosts as schoolchildren are generally much less welcome than normal family tourists in most countries, and that this has resulted in the children's impressions of unfriendliness. Alternatively it may be that the hostility arises more indirectly as a

consequence of the French language occupying an important role in the school curriculum; 15 year-olds would be in the process of taking important school exams, which would include French, and this may result in greater negativity.

Affect

The children's overall preference for ingroups was particularly apparent, as all the children liked the English and the British significantly more than the European groups. They also expressed similar levels of affect for the Scottish children; although the Scottish are an outgroup for English children, the Scottish are part of the 'family' of British nations and the children duly recognised this difference from the other outgroups. However, there would appear to be a lag in the children's affect for the British; the youngest children's liking for the British was less than that expressed by all the other three groups. It would appear that an understanding of the superordinate ingroup, the British, develops in middle childhood.

Of the European groups, the Germans were significantly less liked than the Spanish, Italians and French, thus supporting previous research which has indicated that children have reduced affect for their country's traditional 'enemies' (Buchanan-Barrow et al, 1999). Furthermore, there were no differences associated with age, emphasising the pervasiveness of these feelings. Despite the passage of time, the repercussions of the 20th century's two World Wars persist, with negativity towards Germans routinely and insidiously expressed, both directly and indirectly, in many aspects of British culture and these social representations would appear to be influencing English schoolchildren in their affect for Germans. However, surprisingly, this lower level of affect did not necessarily feed through into negative stereotypes; while the youngest children did tend to report negatively about the Germans, this was the case for all outgroups, and the oldest children's responses, on the other hand, were actually differentiated by their assertion that the Germans were hardworking.

As for the other European groups, the children's liking for both Italians and Spanish increased with age, suggesting that the increased knowledge of and contact with other groups, which almost inevitably happen with age, have positive consequences. However, there was no such increase in liking for the French, giving further support to the possibility that the role of French in the school curriculum may not be conducive to greater affect in English schoolchildren.

Variability

In general, perceptions of variability did change with age as expected, with an increase between the ages of 9 and 12. Children's developing contact with and knowledge of other people may be influencing their assessments of variability. Furthermore, there were differences associated with target group which supports the view that familiarity is an important factor in children's reports of variability. The children perceived both ingroups, the British and English, as significantly the most variable of all the groups, while no differences were reported between the outgroups.

Evaluation

The more complex assessment of children's evaluation of the groups produced a similarly more complicated and different pattern from the children's reports of affect. Overall, the children were most positive about the Scottish and English. They then differentiated the other groups as follows: the second most positive group consisted of the Italians, British and Spanish; then they evaluated the French, followed by the Germans. The evaluative assessment may have been more sensitive to differences because it was a combination of several variables as opposed to the single variable in the measurement of affect. Thus it was able to reveal the children's effective

ranking of the groups as they differentiated more finely their evaluations of the groups. This would suggest that children are actively distinguishing between groups on a variety of dimensions and not simply using a dichotomy of ingroup versus outgroup.

With respect to these distinctions between outgroups, the negativity towards the Germans is consistent with the low affect for Germans reported by the children, and is also probably a further reflection of low positivity towards Germans in the English population as a whole. As for the low evaluation of the French, this also revealed an age-trend with the 15 year-olds much less positive than the 9 year-olds. This reflects the unexpected tendency of the oldest children to report that the French were unfriendly and reveals a strand of negativity which was not apparent in the children's thinking about either the Spanish or the Italians. Therefore, this may be why the French emerged significantly lower than the Spanish and Italians in the evaluative assessment of outgroups. Furthermore, while perceptions of positivity for all the other outgroups either increased or showed no change with age, the French were the only outgroup to show a decrease in positivity with age.

Finally, the British were evaluated significantly lower than the English and Scottish, possibly echoing the youngest children's lower levels of affect for the British. This further supports the view that a full appreciation of the British superordinate group as an ingroup may take children time to acquire.

CONCLUSION

Overall, many of the expected developmental trends in the children's representations of groups were found. The children consistently demonstrated ingroup favouritism. They also displayed decreases in prejudice and stereotyping and increases in affect towards outgroups with age. On the other hand, the expected increase with age in perceived variability was not apparent in the children's representations of outgroups, while it was the case with ingroups. With outgroups, the older children's thinking was marked by a tendency to report positive traits; without the maintenance of earlier negative perceptions as a balance, there was therefore no increase in variability. However, this move towards simple positivity may possibly be an interim stage on the path to perceptions of greater variability in outgroups; it is possible that an older sample might display both positivity and negativity for outgroups.

However, this general picture masks a much more varied pattern. It would appear that the children did not simply divide ingroups from outgroups, but that they examined the groups on other dimensions. Thus there was evidence that children differentiated between both ingroups and outgroups, according to various factors. This suggests that children are actively building a rich and complex understanding of national groups, which may be based on various influences, such as personal contact, educational input, geo-political links, travel and historical context.

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