

# NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INGROUP-OUTGROUP ATTITUDES IN CHILDREN: THE ROLE OF SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTINGS

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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The purpose of this special issue is to report on the findings of a series of studies which examined national identity and ingroup-outgroup attitudes in 7- and 11-year-old children from countries that have not experienced violence or war in the recent past (England and The Netherlands) and countries that have recently been or still are subject to armed conflict or intergroup violence (Bosnia, northern and southern Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Basque Country and Israel). In total, 12 national groups participated in these studies involving Bosniak and Serbian children (Bosnia), Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children (Cyprus), Catholic and Protestant children (Northern Ireland), Basque and Spanish children (the Basque Country), Jewish and Arab children (Israel), and Dutch and English children (The Netherlands and England).

The guiding hypothesis for these studies proposed that children's national identifications (a) are related to the everyday patterns of discourse and practices that occur within the particular socio-historical settings in which they are living, (b) are dynamic psychological constructs whose salience is context-dependent, and (c) are part of a larger system of interacting multiple identifications (e.g., religious, gender, etc.). As a consequence, differences in the structure and content of national identity between age groups (i.e., 7- and 11-year-olds), as well as between children from different national groups (i.e., socio-historical settings) may not only be the result of processes of knowledge acquisition and cognitive development but also of cohort and context effects, individual and/or gender differences, and the result of different identifications interacting with each other. Hence, in the following papers, the findings within each national group as well as between groups are analyzed and discussed by age and gender patterns in terms of the cultural heritage of the particular group to which the children belong, the meanings which are associated with being a member of that group, and the precise pattern of historical and contemporary relationships which exist between their own group and the various outgroups towards which their attitudes were assessed.

In examining the relationship between national identification and attitudes towards the ingroup and outgroups, we expected that:

1. When the national ingroup is made salient, children will tend to rate the ingroup more positively than outgroups. A number of studies have now reported that, from the age of 5, children make a distinction between the ingroup and outgroups and typically (although not always) display a more positive attitude toward the ingroup (e.g., Barrett, 2007; Bennett et al., 1998; Bigler et al., 1997, 2001; Masangkay et al., 1972; Nesdale & Flessner, 2001; Poppe & Linssen, 1999; Teichman, 2001).
2. However, in line with the findings of recent analyses (Barrett, 2007; Bennett et al., 2004), it was anticipated that different patterns in the development of national identity and ingroup-outgroup attitudes would be exhibited in different socio-historical settings.
3. Different socio-historical settings were also expected to differentially affect the relationships between national identity and ingroup-outgroup attitudes (Barrett, 2007).

Recent data (Oppenheimer, in preparation) suggest that such differences may also be affected by gender and age.

In this special issue, the findings of the studies conducted in England, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, northern Cyprus, southern Cyprus and the Basque Country are reported both separately and together as a cross-national comparative study, while the full comparative study additionally includes the data which were collected in The Netherlands and Israel.

In all locations, national identity was assessed using the Strength of Identification Scale (Barrett, 2007) involving six questions pertaining to the degree of national identification, affect toward national identity, positive and negative internalization of aspects of national identity, the importance of national identification, and national pride. Attitudes toward ingroups and outgroups were examined using the attribution task developed by Barrett and colleagues (e.g., Barrett, Wilson & Lyons, 2003; Reizábal, Valencia & Barrett, 2004). In this task, the participants are asked to assign different positive and negative qualities to citizens of different countries including their own country or national group, the “traditional enemy” outgroup, and other more neutral outgroups. Attitudes were also assessed using general affect questions about how much the children liked each of the target groups. The data were analyzed and are reported using a common pre-set procedure, as well as procedures specific to the individual national locations according to each team’s particular theoretical and methodological orientation and the specificities of their own local national context.

The first paper by Barrett and Oppenheimer provides an overview of the empirical and theoretical background against which the studies were designed. This paper also reports the full details of the common measures and procedures which were employed by all of the research teams. This opening paper is then followed by six further papers, which separately report the findings from the data which were collected in England, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, northern Cyprus, southern Cyprus and the Basque Country. The final paper by Oppenheimer then reports the results of the full cross-national comparative analyses.

As the papers in this special issue reveal, the development of national identifications and national attitudes shows considerable cross-national variation as a function of the specific socio-historical contexts within which children develop. These studies, considered together, indicate the need for developmental theorising within this area to avoid simplistic conclusions based on data that have only been collected within one specific location, to acknowledge the crucial role of socio-historical settings in children’s development within this domain, and to adopt a much broader cross-national comparative perspective when attempting to address questions concerning how children’s national identifications and national attitudes develop within real-world settings.

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