Intergroup Attitudes: Prosocial Helping, Social Exclusion, and Group Dynamics

The origin of intergroup attitudes is a pressing topic in today’s global society. Intergroup tensions emerge in childhood and continue throughout life, contributing to large-scale cultural conflict. Understanding where and how intergroup attitudes begin is essential. To facilitate change, interventions have to be implemented early in development, prior to adulthood, when prejudicial attitudes and stereotyping are deeply entrenched. The field of developmental intergroup attitudes has expanded greatly over the past 15 years, due in large part to integrative approaches that draw on developmental, social, and comparative psychology. Developmental psychology, addressing the origins of prejudice, how it emerges, changes, and evolves from infancy to adulthood, has drawn on social psychology regarding the formation of social and group identity as well as implicit biases. Further comparative psychology provides theories about the origins of intergroup cooperation and conflict. In this panel, four speakers from different perspectives will discuss their research on the origins of intergroup attitudes, with a focus on intergroup helping and intergroup exclusion, followed by a discussant. New avenues of research have been designed to focus on both the positive factors that reduce bias (prosocial and moral orientations) and those that contribute to it (implicit bias, conventional reasoning, ingroup preference).

First, Yarrow Dunham will discuss his research on intergroup social cognition with a focus on how group membership affects children’s preferences for and beliefs about others. He will review research which has examined automatic and implicit attitudes in the context of group belonging, and specifically in a cross-cultural context. His research reveals that young children are sensitive to perceptions of social status.

Second, Harriet Over, will describe two experiments on young children’s commitment to the group. She examines this issue by determining when children experience collective guilt and loyalty to the ingroup. She theorizes that this commitment to the group facilitates successful group cooperation. Third, Melanie Killen will discuss her research on intergroup social exclusion and inclusion, reporting on studies which have examined how group loyalty changes as a function of the types of group norms held by a group, as well as form of group membership. Further, she and her colleagues have revealed the contexts in which children use conventional reasoning to justify social exclusion and moral reasoning to reject exclusion based on group membership.

Fourth, Maykel Verkuyten and his colleagues discuss their research on intergroup helping intentions. The experiments they will report were designed to vary whether children’s intentions to help national in-group or out-group peers differ in public or private contexts. They found that children’s empathic tendencies were related to their intentions to help in these two contexts. Further they examined intergroup helping in low and high need situations, and found that when the need was relatively high empathy did outweigh children’s reputational considerations. This research provides a new angle on how empathy is related to intergroup attitudes.
Finally, Adam Rutland, who has studied intergroup attitudes in childhood from both social and developmental psychological viewpoints, will serve as the discussant and highlight the central themes of the symposium.

Paper 1
Automatic and implicit attitudes regarding group belonging and social status
Yarrow Dunham, Yale University

Automatic or “implicit” evaluations of social groups can support both inclusion and exclusion by affecting how potential interaction partners are perceived. How do such evaluations emerge, and when do they reliably affect behavior? I first discuss results from several cross-cultural investigations of implicit group attitudes in children between ages 3 and 15 years. These studies demonstrate that even quite young children are sensitive to perceptions of group belonging and social status. I then consider when those evaluations do (and do not) affect children’s behavior towards others. Results suggest that the path from evaluation to behavior is determined by both the group evaluation and the salience of the groups in the immediate context, raising several possible avenues to positive intervention.

Yarrow Dunham is an assistant professor in psychology and cognitive science at Yale University. He works on intergroup social cognition with a particular focus on how group membership affects children’s preferences for and beliefs about others.

Paper 2
Intergroup attitudes and children’s commitment to groups
Harriet Over, University of York

This talk describes two studies investigating young children’s commitment to the group. One experiment investigated whether children experience collective guilt. Five-year-olds (N=65) watched an ingroup or an outgroup member break a neutral individual’s toy. When this toy was broken by an ingroup member, children were more likely to say that their own group should apologise and that they themselves should repair it. Another experiment investigated whether 5-year-olds (N=48) are loyal to their groups. Children were bribed to reveal a secret told to them by their own group or another group. Children were less vulnerable to bribery when it was their own group’s secret. This commitment to the group enables children to become reliable collaborators and so facilitates successful group cooperation.

Harriet Over is an Anniversary Research Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of York. She studies social learning, social motivation and intergroup cognition and behaviour in development.

Paper 3
Social exclusion, group dynamics, and children’s intergroup attitudes
Melanie Killen, University of Maryland

Children often exclude others due to an ingroup preference. Yet what defines the ingroup? Is it about group membership (gender, race, nationality), or group norms, and do children reject ingroup
members? Study 1 (N = 381) surveyed 9 and 13 year olds and found that children disliked ingroup members who advocated for inequality, preferring outgroup members who supported moral norms. In Study 2, (N = 729), however, 9 = 16 year olds liked ingroup members who challenged group norms about conventions such as dress codes. In Study 3 (N = 199) when a group had an exclusive norm, children expected their own group to be inclusive and the outgroup to be exclusive. Investigating group norms reveals early sources of prejudice.

Melanie Killen is Professor of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology at the University of Maryland, USA. She studies moral reasoning, social cognition, social exclusion, and intergroup attitudes.

Paper 4
Children’s intergroup helping: The role of empathy and prosocial reputation
Maykel Verkuyten, Jellie Sierksman, & Jochem Thijs, Utretcht University

Two studies were conducted on children’s (8 to 13 years) intergroup helping intentions. In Study 1, children indicated their intention to help national in-group or out-group peers in high need in either a public or private context. Children’s empathic tendencies predicted their intention to help and neither the public-private context nor group membership had any effects. Study 2 examined intergroup helping in low and high need situations. In line with the competitive altruism model, in the low need situation and when helping was public, children intended to help out-group peers more than in-group peers, particularly when they perceived a prosocial classroom norm about the out-group. When the need was relatively high empathy did outweigh children’s reputational considerations.

Maykel Verkuyten is Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science in the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science and the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (Ercomer) at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. He studies ethnic identity and interethnic relations.

Jellie Sierksma is PhD student at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science and the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (Ercomer) at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Her research area is on children’s prosocial intergroup behaviour.

Jochem Thijs is an assistant professor at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science and the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (Ercomer) at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. He studies multiculturalism and intergroup relations in school contexts.

Adam Rutland, Goldsmiths, University of London

Adam Rutland is Professor of Social Developmental Psychology, Goldsmiths, University of London, U.K. His research interests are social cognitive development, intergroup attitudes, moral reasoning, bullying, and victimization.

Role: Discussant for the Symposium