Social Exclusion of Children: Developmental Origins of Prejudice

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Over the past decade, developmental and social psychological research has explicitly adopted a developmental intergroup framework, integrating social and developmental psychology fields to understand the origins of social exclusion and prejudice. This article argues that a social developmental analysis of how groups and individuals experience, evaluate, and understand exclusion is essential for a complete picture of the human experience, interpretation, and consequences of exclusion. What has been missing in much of the social psychological research on exclusion is an incorporation of developmental perspectives; likewise, what has been missing in development psychological research is a focus on group identity and group dynamics for understanding the basis for exclusionary behavior in childhood. Yet, the roots of adult forms of exclusion can be documented in childhood, and children who experience exclusion are particularly at risk for negative outcomes, and especially when exclusion is based on group membership. Moreover, interventions designed to ameliorate social problems associated with exclusion need to be based on an understanding of how, why, and under what conditions, children and groups make decisions to exclude others, how they experience this exclusion, and how exclusion originates and changes over the course

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of the lifespan. Thus, a growing body of psychological work, exemplified in this issue of the Journal of Social Issues *(2014), highlights implications for theory in psychology and related social sciences, and for interventions and policies to tackle social exclusion.*

Social science accounts of social exclusion in childhood have largely focused on the structural exclusion of particular sectors of society (see Abrams & Christian, 2007). Children living in optimal environments with high-quality parenting, access to early childhood education, and economic stability are more likely to thrive than children without these opportunities, who suffer in many ways from a perpetual cycle of stress, disengagement, and negative healthy outcomes. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) was created to address the problems stemming from children excluded from basic fundamental human rights (see Killen, Rutland, & Ruck, 2011). In this *Journal of Social Issues* volume on *Social Exclusion in Childhood*, ten cutting-edge, novel, and substantive approaches to social exclusion in childhood reveal the complexities of how exclusion emerges, the factors that children become aware of very early in life, and the central role that group identity plays in how children both experience, and perpetuate exclusion.

A Social Developmental Perspective on Exclusion

Only recently has the psychological dynamics of exclusion in childhood been featured across the broad social science spectrum, including economics and social policy (for an exception see Ludwig et al., 2008). Yet developmental and social psychology has much to say about children and social exclusion, particularly focusing on children's relationships with groups, and how group dynamics contribute to the exclusion cycle that begins in early development. For children, among the negative personal consequences of being socially excluded are lack of motivation to succeed in school, problematic peer relationships, and psychological maladjustment, such as depression and anxiety (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). These distressing consequences reflect the power of exclusion to threaten people's fundamental psychological needs to belong to and be part of social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kerr & Levine, 2008; Williams, 2007).

In fact, over the past decade, developmental and social psychological research has explicitly adopted a developmental intergroup framework, integrating social and developmental psychology fields (e.g., Abrams & Rutland, 2011; Bennett & Sani, 2004 Dunham & Degner, 2010; Enesco & Guerrero, 2011; Levy & Killen, 2008). We argue that a social developmental analysis of how groups and individuals experience, evaluate, and understand exclusion is essential for a complete picture of the human meaning and consequences of exclusion. What has been missing in much of the social psychological research on exclusion is an incorporation of developmental perspectives; likewise, what has been missing

in development psychological research is a focus on group identity and group dynamics for understanding the basis for exclusionary behavior in childhood. Yet, the roots of adult forms of exclusion can be documented in childhood, and children who experience exclusion are particularly at risk for negative outcomes, and especially when exclusion is based on group membership.

Interventions designed to ameliorate social problems associated with exclusion need to be based on an understanding of how, why, and under what conditions, individuals and groups make decisions to exclude others, how they experience this exclusion, and how exclusion originates and changes over the course of the lifespan. Therefore, this growing body of psychological work is important for policy as well as for other social sciences perspectives.

As an example, academic achievement gaps overall, and particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) subjects are of concern to policy makers, economists, and sociologists. Exclusion is a part of this process because, for example, ethnic minority students who feel excluded from their peers in the social context of school become less motivated to be in school (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Juvonen & Graham, 2001). More directly, ability stereotypes associated with gender create stereotype threat effects on performance in young children (Hartley & Sutton, 2013).

We believe that examining the psychological connection between children and wider social structures, defined by group and social category memberships, can shed much light on children's experiences of social exclusion. The collection of papers in this issue draws on both social and developmental psychology and highlights the question of how children's relationships with peers and with different social groups and categories may either create or prevent various forms of social exclusion.

Why is it so important to focus specifically on social exclusion and childhood? Economic exclusion that affects children is known to create cycles of disadvantage, and many believe that investment in children can help to break such cycles (European Commission, 2013; cf. Micklewright, 2002). Beyond material and economic forces, there are four key reasons for a psychological perspective on children's social exclusion. First, social exclusion is every bit as detrimental for children as it is for adults (Abrams, Weick, Colbe, Thomas, & Franklin, 2011; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Therefore, it is imperative to find ways to minimize the short- and long-term negative outcomes of social exclusion so that the problems associated with exclusion are not exacerbated. Second, social attitudes and experiences developed through childhood have implications for subsequent adult cognition and behavior. Children who exclude others on the basis of implicit or explicit stereotypes may, as adults, perpetuate negative patterns of social interactions in the workplace, furthering social inequities and social hierarchies, based on unfair criteria. Children who are persistently excluded by others may find it difficult to establish trusting relationships. Hence, tackling processes of social

exclusion during childhood should help to reduce levels of social exclusion perpetrated and experienced by adults. Third, by adulthood the biases and stereotypes that contribute to exclusionary behavior are deeply entrenched. This suggests that interventions early in childhood are uniquely powerful for creating changes in attitudes, given that these attitudes are not yet fully formed (Killen et al., 2011).

Finally, social exclusion is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are contexts in which social exclusion is legitimate to make groups work well. Groups create inclusion and exclusion criteria, which are often viewed as necessary to make the group function smoothly, such as the criteria associated with entrance exams, auditions, and tryouts. For example, it may be defensible and appropriate to exclude someone from a group because he or she fails objective entry criteria, or transgresses laws. Thus, attempting to prohibit all exclusion would neither be practical or effective. However, enabling children to differentiate between exclusion that is legitimate from exclusion that is based solely on group membership preference or prejudicial criteria is essential for reducing unjust or cruel social group exclusion.

In fact, part of studying social exclusion involves taking into consideration issues of hierarchy, power, and status, on the one hand, and intentionality, social goals, and motivations, on the other hand. There is little question that those children at the bottom of social hierarchies status are psychologically "at risk" (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Ruck & Horn, 2008; Turiel, 2002). Drawing from Tajfel and Turner's (1979) insight that groups and social identity are largely defined in comparative terms, what we think is notable here is that exclusion of others often arises through a process of ingroup preference—it is the world view, the social relationships, and the shared identity that binds such people together and provides the boundaries for the social capital they provide. Less powerful groups and individuals become excluded psychologically by ingroup preferences among members of higher status groups (Aboud, 2003; Brewer, 1999) and exclusion is likely amplified through other social processes. Therefore, who is included has implications for who is excluded, and the two processes are generally related in meaningful ways.

Unfortunately, children, and especially children who are, for whatever reason, socially excluded, have almost no formally recognized voice in most societies—no vote, no money, and no power. This means that their needs are often obscured or misunderstood. Thus, it is easy to view children themselves as the problem, and their social exclusion to result from dysfunctional social development. We contend that funding for research and interventions must address the wider underlying social and developmental processes that are involved in exclusion, as reported in this volume.

Because children lack political voice it is important that psychologists discover children's experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of about exclusion, and then explain and share what we discover to be relevant to policy and practitioner audiences. Consequently, contributors to this issue were asked to address the

nature of children's and adolescents' experiences of exclusion, how they detect, evaluate, and perhaps engage in exclusion in typical school and family contexts. The broader aim of pursuing these different lines of research and drawing them together is to inform interventions to reduce the negative aspects of exclusion. This will help to promote healthy social development and a civil and just society.

Importantly, then, we consider that children are key actors in processes of social exclusion and inclusion; they are making sense of their social context and establishing an identity within that context, one that is meaningful to themselves and their peers but one that changes with age and experience. Therefore, we can conceptualize children as being at a focal point of exclusion—as targets, sources and observers of exclusion, making sense of it, and relating it to their social context and identity.

Finally, a reason for focusing on the intersection of social and developmental psychology is that we consider social exclusion to be a fundamentally relational process (Doise, 1986), and these relationships are nowhere more focal than in the social and psychological worlds of children. Elsewhere, we have developed this idea through a fairly comprehensive relational taxonomy, or matrix, that tries to capture some of the multifaceted aspects of social exclusion by distinguishing between four components that are involved: different "actors"; "levels" of relationship (e.g., interpersonal, group, societal); different "modes" of exclusion; and different "dynamics" of exclusion (e.g., Abrams & Christian, 2007; Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005). We have focused particularly on explicating the connections and differences between interpersonal and intergroup exclusion (e.g., Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013; Killen & Rutland, 2011).

Current Research Featured in this Issue

The empirical articles in this collection reflect a fascinating cross-section of research areas within our relational framework and show how a social developmental perspective rather naturally draws on different elements of it. The collection addresses at least four general themes central to the study of social exclusion in childhood: (1) evaluations of inclusion and exclusion (how do children evaluate it?); (2) resistance and vulnerability to exclusion (why do children resist exclusion and how are their own experiences with it implicated in their ability to cope with it?); (3) intergroup contact (how does contact affect exclusive and inclusive social orientations?); and (4) theories of change (how can exclusive attitudes be changed?).

The different contributions span a wide age range and multiple contexts. Four papers consider exclusion among elementary age and preschool children, whereas six papers focus on similar processes in the more socially experienced and adept, as well as cognitively mature adolescent age range. One set of papers focus on ethnicity and race, another set is concerned with gender and sexuality, and others

explore more transitory groups, such as teams, minimal groups, or classrooms. The research is drawn from several different continents and cultural contexts, including Australia, Europe, and the United States. Across these samples and contexts there are strong theoretical and conceptual themes that interlock across contributions. For example, social reasoning about exclusion is explored in detail in several papers, and the potential efficacy of intergroup contact for reducing exclusion is a common theme across several others. Across all of these issues and contexts, the authors have also provided clear directions for future research and considered the practical or policy implications of their findings.

Specific Papers

Nesdale, Zimmer-Gembeck, and Roxburgh (2014) focus on the relationship context to show how inter- and intragroup sources of exclusion matter. Their findings reveal how the group dynamics may depend on the target's own social motivational orientation in the form of their application of social acumen and their rejection sensitivity, resulting in intrapersonal exclusion. Mulvey, Hitti, Rutland, Abrams, and Killen (2014) focus on exclusion dynamics in the moral domain, involving resource inequality in inter- and intragroup relationship contexts. Surprisingly, pressures to be fair dominate over group loyalty, perhaps highlighting that exclusion is less likely to arise when digressions from equality norms are easy to perceive. Yet, Mulvey et al. also find that, with age, children expect that groups will consider group functioning goals along with equality goals, reflecting an age-related increase in the understanding of group dynamics.

Ruck and Tenenbaum (2014) consider the transnational/societal and intergroup levels of relationship to investigate how young people view the human rights of asylum seekers. Here, the modes of exclusion are partly ideological and partly categorical, and the dynamics need to be understood in the context of a longer time frame—a continuous process of decisions whether to accept or reject asylum seekers into one's country. What is interesting is how the justification for a source's (the ingroup country's) treatment of a target (asylum seeker) may switch from moral to social conventional reasoning depending on whether the target is to be included or excluded, respectively.

Also examining moral and social conventional expectations, Heinze and Horn (2014) explore a key issue for adolescents—the complex connection between inclusion and exclusion based on gender conformity and that based on heterosexuality. Here, the relationship context is particularly salient as there are pressures to form close interpersonal relationships at the same time as strong intergroup distinctions between genders, reinforcing strong intragroup relationships. Thus, the modes of exclusion are liable to be complex and to include representational, categorical, physical, and communicative forms, and the dynamics are likely to center on different motivations, and different perceptions of interdependence.

Dunham and Emory (2014) consider how it is that children are prepared to affiliate with ingroup members rather than outgroup members—how children become sources of exclusion. Here, the relationship context is intergroup and the mode of exclusion is purely categorical. What is revealed is how the dynamics of intergroup exclusion may proceed with relatively little help from outside. Between the ages of 3 and 6 years children become much more predisposed to prefer members of minimal ingroups than outgroups. Extrapolating to the emerging dynamics in this relationship, if followed through in behavior, children's propensity to relate more positively to ingroup members could result in intergroup resource inequality and a competitively interdependent intergroup relationship, which would likely to generate still more intergroup exclusion.

Huckstadt and Shutts (2014) document 3- to 5-year-olds' preferences for unfamiliar individuals with and without disabilities. They also consider the role of the institutional context to investigate whether being part of an inclusion program would affect these preferences. Although this variable turned out not to be influential, the study raises the question of how schools, teachers, and carers can relate institutional policies or strategies to children in a way that enables children to apply the relevant concepts to their interpersonal relationships with peers. A similar challenge is considered by Pahlke, Bigler, and Martin (2014). They considered how children's interpretation of exclusion might be honed, and in particular whether children aged 4–10 years might be helped to recognize gender bias. This requires children to recognize the relationship context (e.g., as interpersonal) and modes of exclusion (e.g., representational, categorical, or communicative), and to respond critically to it (influencing their motivational orientation). Evidence from the study showed that it was possible to equip children to identify sexism in the media by specifically addressing that particular categorization and relevant types of communication.

The paper by Thijs, Verkuyten, and Grundel (2014) explores exclusion in a relationship context that links intergroup to the societal levels (Dutch and Turkish–Dutch adolescents in school classes), and they consider the two groups both as being sources and targets of exclusion. Thijs et al. focus on dynamics that arise from interdependence and resource inequality, operationalized in terms of relative group sizes, and social power. Their study reflects issues of status and hierarchies in the immigrant context in the Netherlands, which has only recently become a focus for educational curricula and positive interventions.

Tropp, O'Brien, and Migacheva (2014) report two survey studies to examine the relationship between perceptions of peer norms of interethnic exclusion and children's interest in forming cross-ethnic friendships. The sources and targets differed across two studies (European American and either African American or Latino American). This research highlights that a potentially powerful psychological route for tackling exclusion is to address how children link their personal preferences with their group's norms. This highlights that wider societal pressures

or institutional norms may be less compelling routes than working from within peer groups to tackle exclusion. Moreover, this study reflects a much needed in-depth examination of how intergroup contact and cross-group friendships is related to a reduction of prejudice in childhood.

Abbott and Cameron (2014) focus on the role of cross-group contact as a basis for children to intervene between sources and targets in episodes of intergroup exclusion. The concern is very much with the physical and communicative modes of exclusion, and in influencing children's motivational orientation on witnessing exclusion. Interestingly, this study exposes potentially important mediating roles of cultural openness and greater empathy. Thus, it raises the possibility of countering the intergroup level of exclusion using either the institutional/societal or interpersonal levels of relationship.

Bennett (2014), as the commentator, draws from these contributions to formulate a set of questions for future work. He argues for deeper investigation of the role of social identity in all of these exclusion contexts. He identifies a key research challenge, namely, to find ways to capture the way that the self-concept becomes implicated in exclusion and inclusion processes. There is scope for new, more dynamic, and sensitive measures of identification, and new methods for assessing how different aspects of identity are involved in social exclusion. Finally, he reinforces the value of developing a richer and fuller taxonomy of social exclusion processes relevant to children's social development.

Conclusion

As a whole, this set of papers reflects the positive outcomes of social and developmental researchers working closely together, sharing ideas and methods to move the field forward. This integrative approach enables social and psychological research to examine the emergence of the inevitable tensions that exist between affiliating with social groups (group identity) and valuing the goals of inclusion, fairness, and prosociality. This conflict exists in childhood through adulthood. Studying the onset, change, and emergence of inclusion and exclusion is the key to facilitating social justice, and particularly in the next generation. This is important territory for psychologists, and provides a basis for informing strategies and policies to create healthy social development.

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