

entrenched in our social, economic, and political systems (from colonialism and slavery to capitalism and corporate control of democratic institutions). The kind of “motivated ignorance” that follows from system-justifying ways of thinking may help to “keep the peace,” but it can also prevent us from tackling serious social problems, including structurally embedded forms of inequality and oppression.

What works to address prejudice? Look to developmental science research for the answer

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Abstract: Developmental perspectives on prejudice provide a fundamental and important key to the puzzle for determining how to address prejudice. Research with historically disadvantaged and advantaged groups in childhood and adolescence reveals the complexity of social cognitive and moral judgments about prejudice, discrimination, bias, and exclusion. Children are aware of status and hierarchies, and often reject the status quo. Intervention, to be effective, must happen early in development, before prejudice and stereotypes are deeply entrenched.

The target article by Dixon et al. is provocative and will create new dialogue about how to create effective interventions for addressing prejudice. As developmental scientists, though, we were disappointed by the absence of any attention to research on the developmental origins of prejudice, especially given that extensive research indicates that for intervention to be effective it must start early in life, before negative attitudes and stereotypes are deeply entrenched by adulthood (Levy & Killen 2008; Quintana & McKown 2007). Even more telling is that, according to the argument laid out by Dixon et al., developmental research is ahead of the pack. Dixon et al.’s call for research to reflect both historically advantaged and disadvantaged perspectives has been reflected in developmental research for at least a decade (see Killen et al. 2002; Verkuyten 2003).

Dixon et al. assert that researchers studying prejudice reduction focus too much on how it is that we can get individuals to think more positively about others. They view this approach as a problem because it ignores issues of hierarchies and status that do not change even when people “like each other” (as with gender relations in which females may experience inequality but not necessarily “dislike” from men in high-status positions). Yet, child development research on prejudice reveals a complex pattern in which young children view inequalities as wrong even when adults condone it and, even further, they have an awareness of the conventions, hierarchies, and societal expectations about group membership that perpetuate the status quo (Turiel 2002).

Using a theoretical framework in which children’s moral, social-conventional, and psychological attitudes are examined, developmental researchers have shown that children’s interpretations of intergroup peer encounters reflect a mixture of fairness and equality judgments (when it is wrong to exclude based on race), social-conventional judgments (when it is okay to exclude because of traditions and societal expectations), and judgments about autonomy (when it is okay because of personal choice). Although it has also been shown that group identity is a core

part of these judgments such that identification with groups results in ingroup bias (Dunham et al. 2011), even these judgments are highly contextual (Nesdale & Lawson 2011). Children reject in-group members who express inequality regarding allocation of resources, but with age, adolescents differentiate their view of what the group will do from their own preference about what would be the right course of action (Killen et al. 2012). Intervention is not just about promoting positive attitudes about each other, but also about determining when it is that children interpret interracial encounters with a biased lens and how to address the underlying social cognitive constraints related to the attributions of intentions based on race (or group membership).

Children as young as 6 years of age, from both minority and majority status ethnic and racial backgrounds, discuss what makes exclusion based on race wrong (e.g., unfair treatment). Children’s social reasoning reflects the social action called for by Dixon et al., through the rejection of acts of exclusion based on group membership; importantly, this comes from both historically advantaged, as well as disadvantaged groups contesting the thesis that collective action occurs only with disadvantaged groups. With age, children do, in fact, challenge the status quo: “When someone excludes another person for that type of reason [“race”] then maybe they were brought up with people who thought that blacks were different, and they didn’t like them because of that and sometimes you have to teach them that racism is wrong.” In contrast, the status quo and social expectations are often invoked to justify exclusion: “Blacks and whites didn’t hang out with each other before so why should they now? It’s just the way it is” (Crystal et al. 2008). Developmental science research, has empirically demonstrated significant links between intergroup contact (cross-race friendships) and the use of moral judgments to reject social exclusion based on race (Crystal et al. 2008), as well as the reduction of prejudice and bias (Feddes et al. 2009).

What happens, then, with age, that creates the adult world in which prejudicial attitudes are perpetuated at the individual and at the institutional level? As children move into adolescence, exclusion is often justified based on group functioning and group identity (Abrams & Rutland 2008). Prejudice is not a unilateral quantitative measure on a scale; it is a complex profile of different types of judgments applied to a wide range of intergroup social encounters (Killen & Rutland 2011).

How should we address prejudice? We assert that the answer lies in “all of the above.” Programs designed to reduce prejudice are essential and help to diminish the developmental emergence of negative attitudes about outgroups. Supporting children’s judgments to challenge the status quo when it contradicts moral judgments about equality, fairness, and justice serves as a form of collective action from the ground up developmentally (see *Tinker v. Des Moines School District*, 1969, where the U.S. Supreme Court upheld three public school children’s decisions to wear black armbands to protest the U. S. government’s policy in Vietnam). In childhood and through to adulthood, moral judgments about right and wrong are differentiated from conventional judgments about social groups, hierarchies, and conventions (Smetana 2006; Turiel 1998). When and how these judgments are used to reject or support social exclusion is essential to investigate.

As adults we have to convey to children what makes it wrong to promote in-group identity, traditions, customs, and stereotypic expectations at the expense of moral judgments about fairness, equality, and justice. Children do not have to be taught morality, though; they begin to understand its underlying conceptual structure very early in childhood. Intervention, to be effective, though, has to occur early in development before stereotypic expectations are deeply entrenched and hard to change, and must involve all children from both majority and minority status groups. The efforts at reducing prejudice and creating collective action in childhood are both fundamental goals for promoting justice and equality.