

# Children's opinions through social and moral judgement on racial and gender diffe...

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This research will be looking into the moral, social-conventional and personal reasoning that co-exist in children's evaluations of inclusion and exclusion, racial prejudice and gender differences. It is noted that the priority given to these forms of judgments varies by the age of the child, the context and the target of exclusion which is discussed in previous studies. Racial prejudice is a pre-formed personal opinion about individuals on the basis of their race.

For example, John thinks that Mary will have bad attribute X solely because Mary is a member of race Y. According to Kohlberg's (1984) foundational stage model of moral development which had followed Piaget's research on moral judgement, Children justify acts as right or wrong on the first basis of consequences to the self which is known as the pre-conventional stage. In terms of group norms (the conventional stage) and the post-conventional stage, this means a justice perspective in which individual principles of how to treat one another are understood. In a study conducted by Clark, Hocevar & Dembo (1980) It is discussed that children's understanding of the origins of race followed a developmental hierarchy and correlated significantly with performance on previously researched measures of physical conservation, physical casualty and social identity.

In recent research, the possibility that skin colour preference is influenced by social desirability among children has been discussed. In Clark et al. 1980) study, current explanations of pro-white prejudice among young children have included child-rearing practices, personality organisation, a generalised fear of the dark, an amount of interracial contact and also the teaching of prejudice in a larger society through reinforcement and modeling. The

theoretical researches discussed in Clark et al. (1980) explain that perceptual and cognitive processes are both significant in the acquisition of attitudes.

The focus of this study was to investigate the cognitive prerequisites that underlie a child's understanding of the origins of skin colour. The Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (PRAM II) had been used to measure attitudes toward skin colour. These measures were based on a variation of the semantic differential, requiring the subject to assign 'good' or 'bad' qualities to coloured drawings of white and of black people. Children's casual attributions concerning skin colour had correlated significantly with age as well as developmental measures of physical conservation, comprehension of physical casualty and the conservation of social identity.

Clark et al, 1980) This was also seen in the work of Katz (1976) who argued that a child's perceptions and concepts about people should follow the same developmental rules as their perceptions and concepts about other stimuli. Katz (1976) shows that although the process of acquisition of 'racial' attitudes is similar to the formation of other attitudes should not be analysed independently of other ongoing internal processes of the child, their development must be viewed as a consequence of children's socialisation within a society where racist attitudes prevail. Racism is a consequence of social processes and institutional structures rather than individual tendency to categorise which is implemented in the workings of Clark, Hocevar & Dembo (1980). Even though social cognition is a reasonable explanation for the decrease in pro-white bias associated with a black examiner, the

increase in pro-white bias from the age of three to six was more challenging to explain. It can be viewed in Clark et al (1980) that several researchers have reported a similar effect using different measures of racial attitudes.

Killen (2007) states that social judgments do not reflect one broad template or stage such as Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage to characterize childhood morality. (p. 32). Instead children tend to use different forms of reasoning, moral, conventional and psychological all simultaneously when evaluating transgressions and social events. In Killen's (2007) study, decisions to exclude others involve a range of reasons from group norms and stereotypical expectations to moral assessments about the fairness of exclusion. Major empirical findings on intergroup exclusion decisions show that children do not use one scheme 'stage' to evaluate all morally relevant intergroup problems and scenarios, so although some types of decisions are age related as seen in the work of Martin (1989) others are not.

Killen (2007) states that the vast majority of students (ninety-five percent) had judged it wrong to exclude a peer from a group solely because of gender and race. For example, a ballet club would exclude a boy because he is a boy and a baseball club excludes a girl for she is female. p. 33). In Killen's study, it is evident in Figure 3.

that children had used fewer moral reasons to evaluate exclusion in a peer-group music context with gender target, For Example, ' What if the boys' music club would not let a girl join? ' and then with a ' race' target ' What if the white students in a music club would not allow a black student to join? '.

(p. 34). in this study, a significant proportion of students had used social-conventional reasons such as, ' A female black student would prefer different music, so she wouldn't fit in with that group'. According to Martin (1989) Gender stereotypes can be considered " schemata" or organised knowledge structures that consist of a network of associations. (p.

80). these associative networks are used to make the best guesses in order to find out about others in information-deficient situations. Children also make stereotypic judgments about others even when all they know about another is their sex type. It is known that because of the salience of gender in our culture, it wouldn't be surprising to find that gender is often used as the basis of making judgments. Forming impressions of others typically involves organising and integrating multiple kinds of information into overall judgments Martin (1989) also stated that there are three types of gender related information that children are capable of using. The first type is targeting the persons sex, the second type is concerning a person's sex-typed interests, behaviours or appearance and the third type, which are common counter-stereotypic labels ' tomboy' and ' Sissy' which are terms given to children who engage in cross-sex behaviour and cross-sex dressing.

(p. 81). In Martin's (1989) study younger and older children were expected to make different predictions about the targets interests in toys when multiple types of gender-related information were available. It was hypothesised that children should predict that male targets would be more interested in masculine sex-typed toys as opposed to feminine toys and that female targets would be more interested in feminine sex-typed toys than in

masculine toys. Therefore, it was expected that younger children would generally rely on gender categories to make social judgements rather than using gender-related individuating information.

A total of seventy-two children were recruited from day-care and after-school care facilities. Most of the children were Caucasian and from middle-class homes. Post hoc analyses showed that younger children disliked tomboys more than all the other targets combined and that older children disliked sissies more than all other targets combined. (p.

83). Two major predictions had been made when it came to children's attributions, both younger and older children were expected to attribute masculine and feminine interests on the basis of the targets sex. Difficulties in the Martin study were evident when interpreting the results in age range of the children within each group. For example, Children in the younger group were between three and a half and six years old, children in the older group were between six and a half and ten years old.

The children within each group would vary considerably in their responses which made it difficult to interpret the results. Regardless of the targets actual interests, these children assumed that boys would like masculine toys and girls would like feminine toys. Young children appear to be 'gender-centric' in their failure to differentiate within gender groups. Martin (1989) claims they seem to have blanket rules such as "all boys like trucks" rather than the rule that "most or some boys like trucks". This shows that these straightforward conceptions of the sexes may make it unlikely that they

would use information that distinguishes between boys who like ' boys'' toys and boys who like "girls'' toys. (p.

86). A separation must be made between the kinds of information that children are able to use and what information they choose to use when making complex judgments. Young children were not able to use interests but were able to use counter-stereotypic labels. Nevertheless, they used labels only when judging how much they liked someone and did not use them when predicting how much others may like someone. (Martin 1989) found that younger children ignore relevant individuating information if it contradicts their expectations for the sexes and instead tune into the sex of the target.

Essentially, younger children tend to assume that members of each gender group are virtually interchangeable for as children get older they appear to be more capable to use relevant information about others' interests. p. 87). this suggests that by the ages of seven or eight, children have the ability to recognise some differences among girls and boys.

This research clearly points out the results as an increasing tendency to make highly differentiated judgments about the sexes when only gender category information was available. According to Berk (2006) more firmly than at younger ages, children assert that dress, hairstyle, diary records and friendships are solely the province of the individual and not subject to control by authority figures. p. 408).

In order for children to implement proper moral reasoning many factors influence these moral understandings which include child rearing practices, schooling, peer interaction and culture. Berk (2006) states that children whose parents listen sensitively, ask clarifying questions and demonstrate higher levels of reasoning gain most in moral development as opposed to younger individuals whose parents lecture, use threatening ways or make sarcastic remarks show little or no change. It can be seen within the research conducted that there have be a few challenges and implications in studying the moral, social-conventional and personal reasoning that co-exist in children's evaluations of inclusion and exclusion, when it came to the studies of racial and gender theories. Future investigators of racial attitude changes in the three to six age range need to incorporate cognitive ability measures that are sensitive to the developmental differences between three and six year olds as well as to the strategies young children employ during assessments of racial attitudes. Other undercurrents were found in the study of Martin (1989) in which the results had less reliance on gender categories when other relevant information was available to use.

Similar barriers are discussed in Katz (1976) research who noted that empirical findings based on recent theories of racial prejudice are " often inconclusive and methodologically problematic". (pp. 332). Whilst recognising that the etiology of racial preference had been necessarily complex, Katz (1976) suggested that more attention needed to be focused on to the ' normal' developmental context of racial attitude acquisition. In addition, as children develop they continue to distinguish the sexes in new



domains, thereby expanding the breadth of their stereotypic knowledge, the outcome of this study had an increasing tendency to make highly differentiated judgments about the sexes when only gender category data was available. Children's intergroup biases influence their judgments about exclusion.

Given that stereotypes are difficult to change in adulthood, interventions need to be conducted in childhood for it is important in understanding when children resort to stereotypic expectations and it would be crucial in creating effective interventions to address these complex issues in childhood to reduce prejudice behaviours. Bibliography: Berk, L. E. (2006). Development through the lifespan (4th ed.

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