

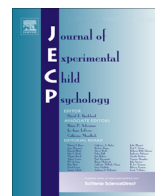


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Children's evaluations of interethnic exclusion: The effects of ethnic boundaries, respondent ethnicity, and majority in-group bias



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ABSTRACT

Two vignette studies were conducted in which preadolescent children (Study 1: $N = 542$; Study 2: $N = 137$; aged 8–13 years) evaluated the exclusion, for unknown reasons, of an immigrant minority child by a native majority peer (majority interethnic exclusion). Study 1 compared children's evaluations of majority interethnic exclusion with their evaluations of (majority and minority) intraethnic exclusion and minority interethnic exclusion, and Study 2 examined children's underlying explanations. Each study compared ethnic majority and ethnic minority respondents and examined the role of in-group bias for the former. Overall, both ethnic majority and ethnic minority respondents regarded majority interethnic exclusion more negatively than the other exclusion types (majority intraethnic, minority interethnic, and minority intraethnic). All children, but especially older minority respondents, were more likely to reject majority interethnic exclusion if they perceived it to be discriminatory (ethnicity based). Among the majority children, a strong in-group bias was associated with a weaker condemnation of majority interethnic exclusion, but this was not due to a larger tolerance of ethnicity-based discrimination. Biased majority children were also less likely to reject minority intraethnic exclusion, indicating an overall weaker concern for out-group victims. Taken together, the studies show that children are relatively negative about majority (prototypical) interethnic exclusion because it implies the possibility of ethnic discrimination, and they concur with previous evidence for a developmental increase in the awareness of discrimination in ethnic minority youths.

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Introduction

The last decades have seen ample research attention for children's evaluations of ethnic and racial exclusion (Cooley, Elenbaas, & Killen, 2016; Killen & Rutland, 2011) and different studies have shown that from 10 years of age, children have knowledge about discrimination (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Verkuyten, Kinket, & van der Wielen, 1997). Although they can use conventional reasoning, stereotypes, and group identity to justify intergroup exclusion, most of them consider it morally wrong and unfair to exclude peers explicitly *because* of their ethnicity or race (Killen, Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, 2010; Killen & Rutland, 2011; Ruck, Park, Killen, & Crystal, 2011). However, in many circumstances such group-based discrimination is difficult to prove because it typically involves the presence of prejudiced attitudes and intentions that are often not directly visible to the outside observer (Brown, 2008). Although such attitudes and intentions may be explicitly expressed in some situations, such as when peers utter ethnic or racial insults, most of the time they come in disguised or more subtle forms. There is a pervasive social norm against ethnic and racial prejudice (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002), and children as young as 6 years appear to be concerned about not showing their explicit out-group bias (Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005) and disinclined to openly disadvantage others based on their ethnic or racial group membership (De França & Monteiro, 2013). As a result, social exclusion can be suspicious when it crosses group boundaries: It may be regarded as discriminatory even if there is no prejudice involved, and for minorities and majorities alike intergroup exclusion is characterized by "chronic attributional ambiguity" (see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

We know relatively little about children's judgments of interethnic exclusion for unknown reasons. Previous research indicates that children generally regard it as morally unacceptable (Killen & Stangor, 2001), although they might justify it by referring to reasons unrelated to ethnicity such as a lack of shared interests (Killen et al., 2010). Most of that research has focused on majority children as (hypothetical) perpetrators, which suggests that children are quite prone to presume that majority interethnic (or interracial) exclusion is discriminatory in nature. Such a tendency is important because children need to be able to recognize discrimination in order to stand up against it. However, they should also learn that negative interethnic encounters are not necessarily discriminatory but instead can be based on, for example, interpersonal dislike. To help children make realistic assessments, it is important to first study their evaluations of majority interethnic exclusion that is not explicitly discriminatory.

To appreciate the importance of ethnic group boundaries for children's evaluations of social exclusion, it is essential to compare their evaluations of interethnic versus intraethnic situations. Such comparisons have not been regularly made in the literature. A notable exception is a study by Verkuyten, Weesie, and Eijberts (2011) that used a cross-categorization design to examine how children evaluated hypothetical perpetrators and victims of exclusion. The authors found that children's judgments depended on the match between the combination of their own ethnicity and gender and the ethnicity–gender combination of the protagonists. There was no unique effect of the perpetrator–victim configuration. However, as noted by the authors, this may have been due to the complex design of the study, which involved the combination of ethnicity and gender, and the fact that these characteristics were not made very salient given that they were operationalized by manipulating the first names of the protagonists (Verkuyten et al., 2011).

The current studies used a vignette approach and an explicit operationalization of ethnicity to examine how ethnic majority and ethnic minority preadolescents (aged 8–13 years) evaluate interethnic exclusion by a majority peer. The reason for this exclusion is unknown: It is interethnic but not necessarily ethnicity based (cf. Killen, Kelly, Richardson, & Jampol, 2010). The research makes an original contribution to the literature by comparing children's evaluation of majority interethnic exclusion with their evaluations of (majority and minority) intraethnic exclusion and minority interethnic exclusion (Study 1), by examining children's underlying explanations (Study 2), by investigating the role of majority in-group bias (both studies), and by comparing the judgments of majority and minority peers (both studies).

During preadolescence, children have not yet developed a fully fledged understanding of ethnicity (Quintana, 1998). However, in the Netherlands, where the research was conducted, there is a historically large native majority population and ethnic diversity is very much connected to migration (Gijbbers, Huijnk, & Dagevos, 2012). Therefore, the ethnic group boundaries in the vignettes were operationalized by making the broad distinction between “Dutch children” (ethnic majority) and “children from another country” (ethnic minority).

Majority interethnic exclusion

According to social domain theory (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2002), social practices can often be evaluated in different ways, depending on their specific nature and context but also on the characteristics of the evaluating person. Social exclusion has negative consequences for psychological well-being (Leary, 1990) and can be easily condemned based on moral grounds such as concerns with harm and fairness. Yet, with age children come to understand that exclusionary practices can sometimes be defended based on social conventional considerations (e.g., concerns about group functioning) or individual autonomy and preferences, and this means that it is not necessarily wrong, and is sometimes acceptable, to exclude others (Killen & Rutland, 2011).

Ethnic group boundaries may play a critical role in the judgment of social exclusion because without those boundaries there can be no ethnic discrimination. Although there is evidence that individuals may also perceive group-based discrimination in intragroup encounters (O'Brien, Major, & Simon, 2012), attributions to discrimination are clearly more plausible and more readily made in intergroup situations (Brown, 2006; Simon, Kinias, O'Brien, Major, & Bivolaru, 2013). This is especially likely in the case of a majority perpetrator and a minority victim (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991). Research among adults has demonstrated that situations in which members from high-status (or more powerful) groups reject members from low-status (or less powerful) groups are much more likely to be classified as discriminatory than situations in which the roles are reversed (Inman, Huerta, & Oh, 1998; O'Brien, Kinias, & Major, 2008; Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990). In children, the majority-perpetrator–minority-victim configuration may be prototypical for discrimination as well. One study found that when asked to write a short story about discrimination, preadolescents typically come up with a scenario in which the victim is a minority person and the perpetrator is identified as a majority group member (Verkuyten et al., 1997). This finding fits with other evidence that the awareness of group stereotypes increases from middle childhood onward (McKown & Weinstein, 2003) and that preadolescents are aware of status differences between ethnic groups (Quintana, 1998).

In addition, there is clear evidence that ethnic minority children report more ethnic discrimination than their majority peers (Durkin et al., 2012; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Such findings suggest that children are relatively likely to assume that majority–minority exclusion is ethnicity based and therefore discriminatory. Because discrimination involves group-based treatment that is unjust and undeserved, it violates moral principles of justice and fairness (Major & Sawyer, 2009). Thus, it can be hypothesized that children are more likely to think negatively of their majority peers for excluding an other-ethnic minority child than for excluding a co-ethnic majority child. Likewise, it can be expected that they evaluate this exclusion more negatively than its non-prototypical opposite (a minority child excluding a majority peer).

The notion of discrimination prototypicality also raises the question of how children judge interethnic exclusion committed by a native peer relative to intraethnic exclusion committed by an ethnic minority peer. One possibility is that children reject prototypical exclusion because they are predominantly focused on the minority status of the target. In the aforementioned study by Verkuyten et al. (1997), 77% of the preadolescent participants spontaneously referred to the ethnicity of the target in their self-generated descriptions of discrimination, and the target was a minority child in 84% of those cases. However, only 25% of the participants referred to the ethnicity of the perpetrator (who was a majority child in 72% of those cases). This stronger focus on the ethnic minority target may be due to a social representation of minorities as sufferers from majority wrongdoings and who therefore are entitled to compensation and positive treatment (see, e.g., Moscovicci & Perez, 2007). Majority children may acquire this representation of “minorities as victims” when they receive cultural diversity education at school and learn about the importance of being fair to children from other

cultures (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). As a result, they may regard the exclusion of a minority peer as especially unacceptable even in situations where the perpetrator is not a majority. Study 1 examined this possibility by comparing children's evaluations of majority–minority and minority–minority exclusion.

An important question is whether the evaluations of interethnic exclusion are different for ethnic majority children and their ethnic minority peers. Given their larger experiences with discrimination directed at them personally or at other members of their ethnic group (Romero & Roberts, 1998; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), it might be expected that ethnic minority youths are relatively sensitive to the role of ethnic boundaries in social interactions. Due to their larger “inside” knowledge of discrimination, minority children might also pay more attention to status asymmetry in interethnic situations and be more critical of prototypical versus non-prototypical interethnic exclusion (see Simon et al., 2013). Yet, existing empirical findings among children have not provided consistent evidence for these notions (Brown, 2006; Verkuyten et al., 1997).

Majority in-group bias

Numerous studies have supported social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) by showing that humans have a basic tendency to make positive evaluative distinctions between their in-groups and out-groups, and much of this research has involved children (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Yet, there is important individual variation in this tendency, and preadolescents' group attitudes depend on various factors such as their in-group identification and multicultural beliefs and the social norms in their environments (Nesdale, Griffith, Durkin, & Maass, 2005; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). Thus, whereas some children express only a mild preference for their ethnic in-group, others are highly biased and prejudiced. Such differences can have important implications for how they judge situations of interethnic and intraethnic exclusion. In the current studies, in-group bias was examined by subtracting majority children's evaluations of their ethnic minority out-groups from their evaluation of their Dutch in-group (cf. Thijs, Verkuyten, & Grundel, 2014). This measure closely corresponds to social identity theory's notion of positive group distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and has the advantage of taking the effects of some response biases into account such as the tendency to give positive responses.

Discrimination is typically seen as the behavioral expression of prejudice (Allport, 1954), and there is evidence that the discrimination experiences of ethnic minority children partly depend on the ethnic bias of their native majority classmates (Thijs et al., 2014). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that majority children are more likely to condone interethnic exclusion by an in-group peer when they are strongly biased against ethnic minorities. Unlike their unbiased counterparts, strongly biased children will probably not regard this prototypical interethnic exclusion as more blameworthy than intraethnic exclusion by a co-ethnic or non-prototypical interethnic exclusion. In fact, they might regard the latter even more negatively (see Brown, 2006). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the desire for positive group distinctiveness derives from the need for a positive social identity, that is, the need to feel good about the in-group and thus about the self. This means that children with a strong preference for their ethnic in-group are probably more concerned about its status and relative value. The exclusion of an ethnic majority child by an ethnic minority peer poses a threat to the social identity of ethnic majority children (cf. Sierksma, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2014), and for strongly biased children this may override the effect of its non-prototypicality. Thus, among majorities, in-group bias may be related not only to a positive evaluation of “how we treat them” but also to a negative evaluation how “how they treat us.”

Finally, there are different ways in which the ethnic bias of majority children could affect their evaluation of intraethnic exclusion by a minority out-group member. A strong preference for the in-group may make majority children less concerned about the well-being of ethnic minority children. Thus, they might simply be less likely to condemn the exclusion of an immigrant child regardless of the group identity of the perpetrator. Yet, biased majority children might also use their evaluation of intraethnic minority exclusion as an occasion to express their relative dislike of the minority out-group. In that case, they would blame the minority protagonist more than the majority protagonist for excluding a minority peer.

Overview of the current research

The current research includes two studies that examined how ethnic majority and ethnic minority children evaluate the social exclusion of an immigrant minority child by an ethnic majority peer (majority interethnic exclusion). The participating children were either native ethnic Dutch (majority), or of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, or Antillean descent (minority). Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans are the largest non-Western ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands, and they face relatively much discrimination (Gijsbers et al., 2012). The exclusion situations in the current research probably have less direct psychological relevance for these minority children because their ethnic in-groups were not explicitly involved and most of them are second-generation or even third-generation immigrants. Thus, it was not meaningful to examine the role of ethnic in-group bias for them.

Study 1 used a full experimental design (between participants) to systematically vary the identity of the excluding child (native or foreign) and the excluded child (native or foreign), and it tested the moderating role of in-group bias among the majority children. It was expected that majority interethnic exclusion (native child excludes foreign child) would be regarded more negatively than majority intraethnic exclusion (native child excludes native child) and minority interethnic exclusion (foreign child excludes native child), but not by the majority children who were strongly biased. Those children were expected to be more tolerant of prototypical exclusion (majority interethnic) than of non-prototypical exclusion (minority interethnic). Study 1 also compared the evaluations of majority interethnic exclusion and minority intraethnic exclusion (foreign child excludes foreign child) to examine whether minority children were seen as victims, and it examined whether this difference depended on the ethnic bias of the majority children. Study 2 examined children's explanations for the interethnic exclusion to directly test whether they regarded it as discriminatory and whether that could explain their reaction to it. Specifically, it was expected that children who perceived the exclusion to be race based would be more likely to reject it. Study 2 also tested whether highly biased majority children were less negative about interethnic exclusion by an in-group peer.

Both studies examined whether the evaluations of the minority respondents differed from those of their majority peers and also took age and gender into account. There were no explicit hypotheses about age effects because the age range was limited in the samples. Yet, age was controlled for in the analyses, and it was explored whether the effects were similar for younger versus older preadolescents. Gender was included as a control variable because girls tend to be less biased than boys (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) and evaluate social exclusion more negatively than boys (Killen & Stangor, 2001).

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 552 students from 38 classes (Grades 4–6) in 17 primary schools serving typically developing children in different parts of the Netherlands. The ethnic composition of the classes ranged from 0% to 100% Dutch students ($M = 57\%$, $SD = 34$). The students ($M_{\text{age}} = 10.89$ years, $SD = 0.97$; 52% female) took part in a short-term longitudinal study on classroom dealings with ethnic diversity. The study consisted of two waves. Wave 1 was halfway through the school year (January–March), and Wave 2 was at the end of the school year (June and July). The current study included data from the second wave, but data from both waves were used to select the final participants. During both waves, children completed questionnaires in their classroom, and the anonymity of their responses was guaranteed. The Wave 2 questionnaire contained the measures described below but also questions on the self, parents, classroom relations, academic engagement, and ethnic and national identity. Importantly, these other questions, and the order in which they were presented, were identical for the different versions of the questionnaire (see below). Thus, they could not have affected the effects of the experimental manipulation. Participation was voluntary, and passive parental consent was obtained. Children and parents could opt out at any time.

Of the children, 351 (63.6%) were identified as native Dutch ethnic majority, 88 (15.8%) as Turkish, 78 (13.9%) as Moroccan, 15 (2.7%) as Surinamese, and 22 (4%) as Antillean. This identification was based on children's ethnic self-labeling at Wave 2. Moreover, for those children who also completed the Wave 1 questionnaire (98% of the sample), two additional criteria were used, namely that their self-labeling should be consistent with that at Wave 1 and, for the native Dutch children, both parents should be born in the Netherlands. Originally, 565 children could be selected in this way, but because there were few missing values on the study variables (<2%) and missing values appeared to be at random, $\chi^2(5) = 8.878, p = .114$, listwise deletion was used.

The minority respondents were somewhat older than the majority respondents ($M = 11.02$ years, $SD = 1.01$ vs. $M = 10.81$ years, $SD = 0.94, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$), but the gender distribution was similar in both groups. Information on immigration status and socioeconomic status was included in the Wave 1 questionnaire and therefore was available for 97.0% to 98.2% of the final participants. Most minority respondents were born in the Netherlands (89%), and most of them indicated that at least one parent was born in the Netherlands (93.2%). Based on an index involving the number of cars, computers (including laptops and iPads), and televisions in the household, it could be concluded that the ethnic minority respondents had considerably lower socioeconomic status than their Dutch peers ($p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$).¹

Measures

Majority group bias was measured using the “seven faces” response format (see Yee & Brown, 1992), which has been successfully used to examine group evaluations among preadolescents (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2016; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). The children were asked to evaluate Surinamese, Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan people in the Netherlands, and the scale was recoded so that a score of 1 indicated the most negative evaluation possible (saddest face) and a score of 7 indicated the most positive one (happiest face). Children's group bias score was calculated in two steps. First, it was examined whether the Dutch respondents considered Surinamese, Turks, and Moroccans as a single minority out-group. The evaluations of these three groups appeared to load on one principal component explaining 75.4% of the variance, and they yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .84. Subsequently, the mean of the three out-group evaluations was computed ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.52$) and subtracted from the evaluation of the Dutch majority group ($M = 6.75, SD = 0.68$).

To measure children's evaluation of social exclusion, a short vignette was used.² A previous version of this vignette was piloted in a questionnaire study among 308 Grade 4 to Grade 6 students in the Netherlands. The pilot study (within participants) indicated that the vignette was appropriate for measuring differential reactions to interethnic and intraethnic majority exclusion among both majority and minority children ($\eta_p^2 = .085$ and $\eta_p^2 = .203$, respectively), but it did not use a counterbalanced design. It also showed that the evaluations of the exclusion depicted were very negative and not normally distributed, with skewness down to -2.10 and kurtosis up to 5.02 . To prevent skewed evaluations in the current study, the vignette was rewritten to make the exclusion short-lasting and therefore less blameworthy.

The vignette was placed at the end of the questionnaire and had four randomly distributed versions that reflected unique perpetrator-victim configurations (majority–minority, presented to 25.2% of the cases; majority–majority, 22.8%; minority–majority, 26.8%; and minority–minority, 25.2%). The majority–minority version of the vignette read, “A group of Dutch children is playing tag in the school yard. A child from another country wants to join in, but a child from the group says that it's not allowed just now.” The other versions were exactly the same except for the identity of the group of excluding children (Dutch/from another country) and/or the excluded child (Dutch/from another

¹ Socioeconomic status (SES) was not included in the main analyses because it had no main effects and showed no two-way interactions with the experimental manipulations. Moreover, including the main and interaction effects (two way and three way) of SES did not explain away the effects of respondents' ethnicity.

² Directly after each social exclusion situation, children in Study 1 were also asked to evaluate a situation of bullying/name calling. The manipulation of the ethnic boundaries in that second situation was similar to that of the social exclusion situation. The bullying/name-calling scenario was not included in the current research because the evaluations were too skewed.

country). Importantly, the excluded child in the minority–minority condition was described as a co-ethnic of the excluding group (“a child from that same country”).

Directly after the vignette, respondents rated the behavior of the perpetrator (“How do you feel about that child saying that it is not allowed just now?”) on a Likert-type response format consisting of seven faces ranging from a big smile (1) to a big frown (7) and including a neutral midpoint (straight face, coded as 4). The seven faces response format was designed to examine children’s affective orientations toward groups, persons, or objects (Yee & Brown, 1992), and it has been successfully used to evaluate the behaviors of protagonists in hypothetical scenarios (Sierksma et al., 2014; Verkuyten et al., 2011). In addition, children used a 5-point Likert scale to indicate whether they thought the behavior was mean (ranging from “No, not at all!” to “Yes, certainly!”). There was a strong positive correlation between the two judgments ($r = .80$). After rescaling the 5-point scale to a 7-point scale, the mean of the two judgments was calculated for each scenario. On average, this evaluation was negative ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.61$), but its distribution had little skewness (-0.61 , $SE = 0.10$) or kurtosis (-0.29 , $SE = 0.21$).

Analyses

The effects of the experimental manipulation were examined in two sets of analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The first set tested the effects of exclusion situation and student ethnicity (minority vs. majority), and the second set examined the contribution of majority in-group bias among the ethnic Dutch respondents only. In both sets, gender and age were controlled and the moderating effects of age were explored as well. Age was included as a continuous variable, and to facilitate interpretation of effects the bias and age measures were standardized (z scores) in the analyses.

Results

Exclusion situation and ethnicity

To examine children’s evaluation of majority interethnic exclusion relative to their evaluations of (majority and minority) intraethnic exclusion and minority interethnic exclusion, and to compare the judgments of majority and minority peers, a 4 (Exclusion Situation) \times 2 (Respondent Group) ANOVA was conducted in which age and gender were included as controls. Because there was no interaction between condition and respondent group, $F(3, 542) = 0.89$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, ns , the analysis was repeated without this interaction.

Inspection of the estimated marginal means showed that the children regarded majority interethnic exclusion more negatively than majority intraethnic exclusion, minority interethnic exclusion, and minority intraethnic exclusion ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 0.13$ vs. $M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.14$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$, $p < .01$; $M = 4.87$, $SD = 0.13$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, $p < .05$; and $M = 4.93$, $SD = 0.13$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, $p < .05$, respectively). In addition, there were significant (main) effects of respondent group and gender ($\eta_p^2 = .016$ and $\eta_p^2 = .064$, respectively, both $ps < .01$) but not of age ($\eta_p^2 = .002$). Overall, minority children appeared to be more tolerant of the exclusion than the majority children ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.11$ vs. $M = 5.16$, $SD = 0.08$), and boys reported a less strong rejection of the exclusion than girls ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.10$ vs. $M = 5.36$, $SD = 0.09$).

In an additional ANOVA, with exclusion evaluation as the dependent variable, the moderating effects of age were explored and there was a significant three-way interaction among age, condition, and respondent group, $F(3, 535) = 2.76$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$, $p < .05$. To examine this interaction, simple slope analyses were conducted comparing the moderating effects of respondent ethnicity at different age levels (1 standard deviation $>$ mean, old vs. 1 standard deviation $<$ mean, young; see Aiken & West, 1991). As can be seen in Fig. 1, the responses of the younger minority respondents did not significantly differ from those of their younger majority peers. However, compared with their older majority peers, the older minority children made stronger evaluative distinctions between majority intraethnic and minority interethnic exclusion versus majority interethnic exclusion ($\eta_p^2 = .011$, $p < .05$ and $\eta_p^2 = .013$, respectively, $p < .01$). However, this was due to less rejection of the former ($\eta_p^2 = .014$, $p < .01$ and $\eta_p^2 = .018$, $p < .01$, respectively) rather than more rejection of prototypical interethnic exclusion ($\eta_p^2 = .001$, ns).

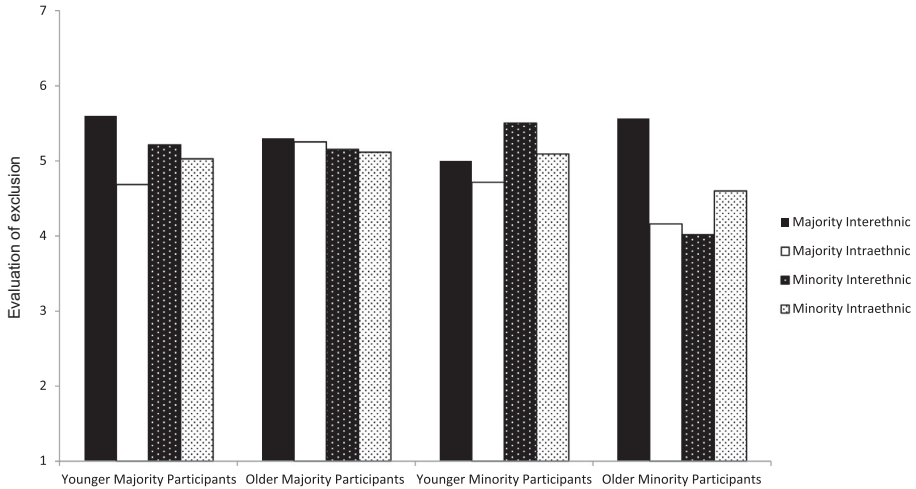


Fig. 1. Estimated marginal means for exclusion evaluations of younger (1 standard deviation < mean) and older (1 standard deviation > mean) majority and minority participants in Study 1, where 1 is the most positive evaluation possible and 7 is the most negative one.

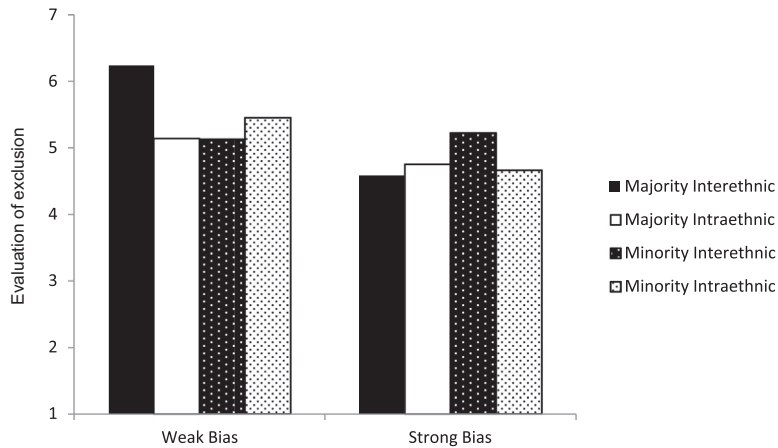


Fig. 2. Estimated marginal means for exclusion evaluations of majority participants with weak versus strong bias in Study 1, where 1 is the most positive evaluation possible and 7 is the most negative one.

Majority in-group bias

Next, to examine the role of ethnic in-group bias, an ANOVA was conducted among the Dutch respondents only. Exclusion evaluation was the dependent variable, and again age and gender were included as control variables. Results showed that ethnic bias had a main effect, $F(1, 341) = 20.45$, $\eta_p^2 = .057$, $p < .01$, which was qualified by an interaction with condition, $F(1, 341) = 5.97$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$, $p < .01$. Next, simple slope analyses were conducted to compare the effects of the exclusion situations for children with weak ethnic bias (1 standard deviation < mean) versus strong ethnic bias (1 standard deviation > mean). Results are illustrated in Fig. 2. Children with a weak in-group bias rejected majority intraethnic, minority interethnic, and minority intraethnic exclusion less than majority interethnic exclusion ($\eta_p^2 = .041$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$, $p < .01$, and $\eta_p^2 = .019$, $p = .01$, respectively). Strongly biased children did not make an evaluative distinction between majority and minority intraethnic exclusion ver-

sus majority interethnic exclusion, but they regarded non-prototypical interethnic exclusion as more unacceptable than its prototypical counterpart ($\eta_p^2 = .014, p < .05$).

As another way of examining the interactions, the effects of ethnic bias were calculated for each of the conditions. For majority intraethnic exclusion and minority interethnic exclusion, those effects were not significant. However, biased children were clearly less negative about prototypical exclusion ($b = -0.83, SE = 0.15, \eta_p^2 = .078, p < .01$) and also less inclined to condemn intraethnic exclusion by a minority peer ($b = -0.40, SE = 0.16, \eta_p^2 = .017, p < .05$). A final ANOVA with exclusion evaluation as the dependent variable showed that there was no interaction between age and bias and no overall significant three-way interaction among age, condition, and bias.³

Discussion

The results of Study 1 show that children were more likely to condemn an ethnic majority peer for excluding a minority child versus a majority child. In addition, they had more problems with this prototypical interethnic exclusion than with interethnic exclusion that was non-prototypical and with intraethnic exclusion by a minority protagonist. These findings imply that children are responsive to status asymmetry in situations that are potentially discriminatory and that they pay attention to the identity of the perpetrator when evaluating the social exclusion of a minority peer.

The effects of the exclusion conditions were overall similar for the majority and minority respondents, but there were moderating effects of age. Compared with their majority contemporaries, the older minority children made stronger evaluative distinctions between prototypical interethnic exclusion and the exclusion of a majority peer by both a majority child and a minority child. Thus, the findings support the notion that minority preadolescents become increasingly sensitive to the possibility of prototypical discrimination compared with their majority peers (see Simon et al., 2013).

Study 1 also showed that the ethnic in-group bias of the majority children played an important role in their exclusion evaluations. The more biased children were more tolerant of majority interethnic exclusion, and as a consequence they made weaker negative evaluative distinctions between this type of exclusion and the other ones. In fact, these children regarded prototypical interethnic exclusion less negatively than its non-prototypical opposite. This latter finding cannot be attributed to a stronger rejection of minority interethnic exclusion given that ethnic bias was unrelated to the evaluations of the (interethnic and intraethnic) exclusion of a majority peer. Yet, as with majority interethnic exclusion, the more biased children did have fewer problems with minority intraethnic exclusion, which indicates that they were overall more accepting of the social exclusion of ethnic minority children. A limitation of this first study is that it did not measure whether and to what extent children concluded that the majority interethnic exclusion was based on the ethnicity of the victim. Therefore, the second study measured children's explanations for this type of exclusion.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to further understand children's rejection of majority interethnic exclusion by examining their explanations for it. Children are likely to condemn social exclusion if it violates moral principles of fairness and justice, and group-based discrimination is a clear example of such a violation. But interethnic exclusion is not necessarily discriminatory, and children might justify it by referring to concerns about group functioning (social conventional reasoning) or personal preferences (personal reasoning) (Killen & Rutland, 2011). This second study considered discrimination, group functioning, and personal dislike as possible explanations for majority interethnic exclusion, and the expectation was that the discrimination explanation would be the strongest predictor of children's exclusion evaluations. Next, the study further inspected the role of in-group bias among the majority children. It again tested the hypothesis that biased children have fewer problems with

³ There was a three-way interaction among bias, age, and the differential evaluation of intraethnic versus interethnic exclusion by a majority peer ($\eta_p^2 = .012, p = .044$), but to avoid Type 1 errors it is not reported in the text. It appeared that the moderating effect of bias on this differential evaluation was stronger for the older majority children than for the younger majority children.

interethnic exclusion, but it also explored whether the effect of the discrimination explanation was moderated by children's bias. Finally, to facilitate the interpretations of the responses of minority versus majority respondents, Study 2 also examined whether the former identified more with immigrant children than the latter.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 137 students (50% female) from 24 classes (Grades 4–6; 0% to 100% Dutch students, $M = 50\%$, $SD = 34$) in 16 regular primary schools in different parts of the Netherlands. Of these children, 100 had a Dutch ethnicity and 37 had Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, or Antillean backgrounds. They took part in a larger short-term longitudinal study on teachers' classroom dealings with ethnic diversity. That larger study consisted of three waves, and at all waves children anonymously filled in questionnaires in their classroom under supervision of their teacher or a research assistant. Again children participated voluntarily, and there was passive consent from their parents and the possibility to opt out. In the current study, data from Wave 3 (June and July) were used but the Wave 1 data (October and November) were relied on to select the participants. At Wave 1, the children were on average 10.09 years old ($SD = 0.90$). To be included, all of them needed either to self-identify as ethnic Dutch and indicate that both of their parents had the Dutch ethnicity or to indicate that both of their parents were Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, or Antillean and provide an ethnic self-definition consistent with their parents' ethnicity.

Originally, there were more participants at Wave 3. There were two different versions of the questionnaire, and the current study used only one of them, resulting in an initial selection of 140 children.⁴ Listwise deletion was used to remove cases with missing values on the measures in the main analyses (i.e., not including the victim similarity measure; see below), which led to the final sample of 137 respondents. Few scores were missing (<1.5%), and there was no evidence that the pattern of missing values was not completely at random, $\chi^2(17) = 15.33$, $p = .57$. Unfortunately, the questionnaires did not contain measures for socioeconomic status. There were no age differences between the minority and majority respondents, but there appeared to be fewer girls among the former as compared with the latter (37.8% vs. 55.0%), $\chi^2(1) = 3.18$, $p < .10$.

Measures

Children's evaluations of majority interethnic exclusion were measured using the exact same version of the majority–minority interethnic vignette of Study 1. Children used the seven faces scale (Yee & Brown, 1992) to judge the exclusion. After their evaluation of the exclusion, children gave their interpretation of its underlying reasons. More specifically, they were asked why they thought “the child from the group acts this way” and were told that they could indicate the likelihood of three possible reasons that were selected and formulated for the current study. The first reason involved *personal dislike* (“Because s/he doesn't like the other child”), the second reason involved *situational constraints* (“Because otherwise there are too many children to play”), and the last one involved *group-based discrimination* (“Because the other child is not from the Netherlands”). A 5-point response scale was used that ranged from 1 (*No!*) to 5 (*Yes!*) and had a neutral midpoint of 3 (*In between*). Finally, children used the same 5-point response scale to indicate whether they were similar to children “who are not from the Netherlands.” This measure was not included in the main analyses but was used to examine children's identification with immigrant children.

Prior to the evaluation of majority interethnic exclusion, participants evaluated Moroccan, Turkish, and Dutch children on three stereotypic trait dimensions (see, e.g., Brown & Bigler, 2002) that have been successfully used in previous research in the Netherlands (e.g., Verkuyten, 2002). These evaluations were used to construct an *ethnic in-group bias* measure for the ethnic Dutch majority children only. Participants needed to estimate whether most of the children in each group were “honest,”

⁴ The other version assessed the evaluation of non-prototypical interethnic exclusion, but unfortunately it did not include a correct measure for group-based discrimination as an explanation.

“fun to play with,” and “eager to help you,” and the response scale ranged from 1 (*NO, certainly not!*) to 5 (*YES, certainly!*). Prior to calculating the bias score, principal components analysis was conducted to examine whether the Dutch children evaluated Turkish and Moroccan children as a single minority out-group. This analysis yielded two different factors explaining 70.6% of the variance. After oblique rotation, the evaluations of the Turkish and Moroccan out-group peers loaded on the first factor, and the evaluations of the Dutch in-group peers loaded on the second one. Next, a Dutch in-group bias measure was constructed by taking the mean of the out-group evaluations (Cronbach's alpha = .92) and subtracting it from the mean of the in-group evaluations (Cronbach's alpha = .79).

Analyses

Four sets of analyses were performed. In the first set, the means and intercorrelations of main variables were inspected to assess, among other things, the perceived plausibility of the explanations and their simple relations to the evaluation of interethnic exclusion and the ethnic bias of the Dutch majority children. Next, a multiple regression was conducted to examine the independent contributions of the explanation variables to the exclusion evaluation and to examine the role of ethnic bias. The third set of analyses explored whether there were moderating effects of majority in-group bias and age, and the last set examined whether the minority respondents more strongly identified with immigrant peers than the majority respondents. Again age was examined as a continuous variable.

Results

Means and correlations

Table 1 shows the variable means and correlations for the main variables for Dutch majority respondents (below the diagonal) and their ethnic minority peers (above the diagonal). Note that the Dutch bias measure is not included for the minority respondents because it was not meaningful for them. A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with ethnic group and gender as factors, age as a covariate, and the evaluation and three explanations as dependent variables showed that there were no differences between the responses of the majority and minority children; both the omnibus test, $F(4, 130) = 0.91, p = .45$, and the univariate test ($p > .15$) were not significant. Inspection of the overall mean scores showed that the respondents rejected the exclusion; their average evaluation was above the midpoint and at the “sad” side of the seven-face scale ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.69, t = 6.57, df = 136, p < .01$). They were rather unlikely to attribute the exclusion to situational constraints ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.21, t = -6.09, df = 136, p < .01$), but their attributions to personal dislike and discrimination were close to the middle of the scale ($M = 2.93, SD = 1.18, t = -0.72, df = 136, p = .47$ and $M = 2.84, SD = 1.43, t = -1.32, df = 136, p = .19$, respectively), indicating moderate plausibility of those explanations. The exclusion evaluation was unrelated to the personal dislike attribution, but both groups of respondents were more likely to reject it if they thought the exclusion was discriminatory. In addition, the majority children were more negative about the exclusion if they were biased toward their in-group or attributed the exclusion to situational constraints.

Regression analysis

Next, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the aforementioned relations were unique. That is, the exclusion evaluation was regressed on situational constraints, discrimination, Dutch bias, and age and gender (both of which were related to the evaluation of the exclusion, $r = .20$ and $r = .18$, respectively, both $ps < .05$) but not on personal dislike (unrelated to the evaluation). To examine ethnic differences, a dummy variable was constructed for the minority respondents, and this dummy and its interactions with the other predictors were included in the regression model. Results are shown in Table 2. Note that the main effects pertain to the majority respondents only because they were the reference group. Of the two explanation measures, only discrimination had a significant independent effect, indicating that it was a relatively important reason for rejecting majority interethnic exclusion. This effect was even stronger among the minority respondents. For the majority children, there was a negative effect of in-group bias that was marginally significant ($p = .085$).

Table 1

Intercorrelations for majority children and means for majority and minority children.

Correlation	1	2	3	4	Majority children [M (SD)]	Minority children [M (SD)]
1. Evaluation	–	–.04	–.23	.55**	5.11 (1.45)	4.51 (2.18)
2. Personal dislike	–.05	–	.04	.06	2.93 (1.09)	2.92 (1.40)
3. Situational constraints	–.29**	–.03	–	.04	2.37 (1.13)	2.38 (1.40)
4. Discrimination	.40**	.17 [†]	–.33**	–	2.83 (1.39)	2.86 (1.55)
5. Dutch bias	–.24 [†]	.27 [†]	.22 [†]	–.05	0.56 (0.85)	–

Note. Values of 1 and 7 on the evaluation variable indicate the most positive and most negative evaluations possible, respectively.

[†] $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Interactions with bias and age

An additional analysis was performed to examine whether majority children's in-group bias interacted with the situational constraints and discrimination explanation. None of these interactions was significant ($p > .38$). In another analysis, it was explored whether situational constraints, discrimination, and bias interacted with age. It was found that there were two marginally significant three-way interactions among age, situational constraints, and respondent ethnicity ($p = .076$) and among age, discrimination, and respondent ethnicity ($p = .068$). It appeared that the two-way interaction between age and situational constraints was negative for the minority respondents and positive for the majority respondents but not (marginally) significant in both cases ($p > .14$). In addition, the two-way interaction between age and discrimination appeared to be significant for the minority respondents only ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .05$). To further examine this interaction, simple slope analyses were conducted to compare the effects of the discrimination attribution for younger minority children (1 standard deviation < mean) versus older minority children (1 standard deviation > mean) (Aiken & West, 1991). The effect of the discrimination attribution appeared to be stronger for the former ($\beta = 0.83$, $p < .01$) than for the latter ($\beta = 0.25$, *ns*).

Identification with immigrant children

A last analysis examined whether the ethnic minority respondents were more likely to identify with immigrant children. An ANOVA with ethnic group and gender as factors and age as a covariate showed that, compared with their majority peers, minority children considered themselves to be more similar to children who were not from the Netherlands (marginal means: $M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.20$ vs. $M = 2.09$, $SD = 0.12$), $F(1, 132) = 10.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .071$. Inspection of the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the marginal means showed that the mean score for the majority respondents, but not for the minority respondents, was below the neutral midpoint of the scale ([1.85–2.32] vs. [2.43–3.21]). Thus, on average, the majority respondents did not identify with immigrant children, but their minority peers felt relatively similar to them.

Discussion

Study 2 showed that both majority and minority children were moderately and equally likely to conclude that majority interethnic exclusion is ethnicity based and therefore discriminatory when no reasons are given for it. Clearly, not all children regarded the situation as discriminatory, and personal dislike appeared to be a moderately plausible explanation for it as well. Yet, unlike personal dislike and situational constraints, discrimination was convincingly related to the rejection of interethnic exclusion. Apparently, discrimination makes social exclusion unacceptable, and this can explain why the children in Study 1 had more problems with the interethnic versus intraethnic majority exclusion. The effect of the discrimination explanation was stronger for ethnic minority children as compared with ethnic majority children, but for them there was also a moderating effect of age. Apparently, it was especially the older minority children who had more problems with discrimination.

Table 2
Regression results for children's evaluations of majority interethnic exclusion.

	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β
Constant	3.26 (1.73) [†]	–
Situational constraints	–0.17 (0.13)	–0.12
Group membership	0.34 (0.11) [*]	0.29
Dutch bias	–0.29 (0.17) [†]	–0.18
Age	0.14 (0.17)	0.07
Gender (1 = girls; 0 = boys)	0.09 (0.25)	0.03
Minority respondents (ref = majority)	–0.41 (2.82)	–0.11
[†] Situational constraints	–0.06 (0.22)	–0.04
[*] Group membership	0.48 (0.18) ^{**}	0.43
[*] Dutch bias	1.13 (0.27)	0.44
[*] Age	–0.11 (0.29)	–0.30
Model statistics		
<i>AR</i> ²	0.40	
<i>F</i> _{change}	8.36 ^{**}	

Note. Values of 1 and 7 on the dependent variable indicate the most positive and most negative evaluations possible, respectively.

[†] $p < .10$.

^{*} $p < .05$.

^{**} $p \leq .01$.

As expected and consistent with Study 1, in-group bias had a negative effect on the rejection of interethnic exclusion among the majority respondents. Importantly, this variable did not moderate the effect of children's endorsement of the discrimination explanation, and it was unrelated to this explanation. Thus, biased majority children were less negative about interethnic exclusion, but not because they denied the likelihood of discrimination or because they had fewer problems with it. Perhaps these children were simply less concerned about the well-being of the excluded minority child because for them he or she was an out-group member. The previous finding (Study 1) that bias was negatively related to majority interethnic exclusion and minority intraethnic exclusion but unrelated to the other exclusion types clearly supports this interpretation. Finally, Study 2 also showed that the minority respondents were more likely to identify with immigrant children than their majority peers. Yet, on average their scores on identification were not high; they did not exceed the midpoint of the scale.

General discussion

Children can have various motives for rejecting others, and interethnic exclusion is not necessarily discriminatory given that other-ethnic and same-ethnic peers may be excluded for exactly the same reasons. Still, discrimination is always a possibility in negative intergroup encounters. This "chronic attributional ambiguity—having to regularly consider prejudice as an explanation for one's negative outcomes" (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002, p. 176)—is relevant not only for the potential victims of discrimination but also for potential perpetrators who regard discrimination as morally unacceptable or want to come across as unprejudiced. The current research examined how ethnic majority and minority children evaluated the social exclusion, for unknown reasons, of a minority child by a majority peer. It investigated whether and how children took ethnic boundaries into account by comparing their evaluations of interethnic and intraethnic exclusion, examining their underlying explanations, and investigating the role of ethnic in-group bias for the majority children.

Given the stronger possibility of discrimination, and previous findings that children consider it morally wrong and socially unacceptable to exclude others simply based on their ethnicity (Killen & Rutland, 2011), it was expected that the participants would more likely blame a majority child for the exclusion of a minority as compared with a majority peer. Study 1 bore out this prediction, and Study 2 indeed showed that participants were less accepting of majority interethnic exclusion when they attributed it to discrimination. For both majority and especially minority children, the pos-

sibility of discrimination was the most important reason for this negative evaluation, and this outweighed the importance of situational constraints as a justification for interethnic exclusion.

Although there were moderating effects of ethnic in-group bias (discussed below), the respondents were overall relatively tolerant of non-prototypical interethnic exclusion (involving an immigrant perpetrator and a native victim), which indicates that, just as adults, children pay attention to status asymmetry in intergroup relations (Inman et al., 1998; O'Brien et al., 2008; Rodin et al., 1990). Quite likely, the respondents presumed that the immigrant perpetrator acted in a nondiscriminatory fashion and that the perpetrator had valid reasons, rather than group-based ones, for excluding the native victim. Unfortunately, children's explanations for non-prototypical exclusion were not included in the current research, but given the evidence that minority children do experience more ethnic victimization than their majority peers (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), such an assumption is not an unreasonable one to make. Durkin et al. (2012), for example, found that minority children were more than twice as likely to report personal experiences with discriminatory peer aggression. Overall, the children were also more critical of the social exclusion of a minority child if the perpetrator was a majority peer versus a minority peer. This effect again implies that children are (more) oriented toward the possibility of discrimination in prototypical interethnic exclusion situations and that if they have a representation of "minorities as victims" (Moscovici & Perez, 2007)—as the other results suggest—it clearly involves the notion of "majorities as perpetrators."

Both studies showed effects of respondent ethnicity that were moderated by age. Compared with their majority peers, the older minority children in Study 1 were relatively less tolerant of majority interethnic exclusion. These results seem to converge with Simon et al. (2013) finding that minority adults are more likely than majority adults to perceive discrimination in situations where a majority rejects a minority than in situations where the roles are reversed. However, Study 2 showed that, overall, the minority children were not more likely than their minority peers to condemn the prototypical exclusion or regard it as discriminatory. Yet, these participants (especially the older ones) did report a stronger rejection of this exclusion if they assumed that it was ethnicity based, which indicates that they were more sensitive to the threat of discrimination.

In addition to this, the adults in Simon et al. (2013) study differed in their perceptions of the prototypical and non-prototypical situations. By contrast, the older minority children in the current Study 1 were not more critical of prototypical interethnic exclusion in an absolute sense but only when compared with the exclusion of a majority child by either a majority or minority peer. It could be argued that the minority and majority children might have used different standards in their evaluation of social exclusion—simply because the former are more "used to it"—and relative to their own standards the prototypical exclusion was clearly the most unacceptable one for the ethnic minority respondents. But apparently this finding was not due to their greater sensitivity to status asymmetry given that they were not more likely to perceive discrimination in Study 2. Another more plausible interpretation is that the minority respondents might have considered the native Dutch children in the vignettes as out-group peers even though their identification with the immigrant protagonists appeared to be only moderate in size. Research has shown that people can experience less empathy for those they categorize as out-group members (Tarrant, Dazeley, & Cottom, 2009), and this could explain why the minority children had fewer problems with both the interethnic and intraethnic exclusion of a native majority peer.

Taken together, the interactions between respondent ethnicity and age in the studies show that the ethnic group boundaries became increasingly important for the ethnic minority participants. Although the age range was small in this research, these findings concur with a developmental increase (during childhood and adolescence) in the awareness of the meanings of discrimination and negative stereotypes in ethnic minority youths (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Quintana, 1998). According to Quintana (1998), preadolescent minority children acquire a social perspective of ethnicity, which means that they learn about the social consequences of having a particular ethnicity, including the problems of ethnic discrimination. Such a development can explain why the older minority children in Study 2 were more likely to reject prototypical exclusion once they concluded that it was ethnicity based.

The current research was the first to relate majority children's ethnic bias to their evaluations of interethnic and intraethnic exclusion. Because of the theoretical and empirical links between bias and discrimination (Allport, 1954; Thijs et al., 2014), it was expected that the more biased majority

children would have fewer problems with majority interethnic exclusion versus the other types of exclusion. The analyses provided support for this expectation: Unlike their less biased peers, the more biased children did not regard this prototypical exclusion as more blameworthy, and even regarded it as more acceptable, in comparison with the non-prototypical exclusion. However, the findings of Study 2 indicate that this cannot be attributed to a larger tolerance of prototypical discrimination. Majority children were more likely to reject the prototypical exclusion if they perceived it as ethnicity based, and this effect was not moderated by their ethnic bias. Thus, for biased and nonbiased participants alike, ethnicity was not a valid criterion to reject an out-group peer. Instead, the former's larger tolerance of prototypical exclusion appeared to be due to less concern for the minority out-group victim given that bias was also associated with a less negative evaluation of minority intraethnic exclusion. This interpretation is consistent with the last finding in Study 2; both in an absolute sense and in comparison with their minority peers, the majority children were unlikely to identify with immigrant minority children.

It is important to note that the ethnic bias of the majority children was unrelated to how they evaluated the exclusion of a co-ethnic majority peer by an immigrant out-group child. It was anticipated that the strongly biased children might regard this non-prototypical exclusion more negatively because it implies that the out-group holds power over the in-group in that particular situation. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this power difference was assumed to be less acceptable for children with a strong in-group preference. However, in-group bias was relevant for evaluating "how we treat them" but not for "how they treat us." This result seems to run counter to Brown's (2006) finding that biased majority children were more likely to perceive discrimination in non-prototypical situations. Yet, it should be noted that the exclusion situations that were evaluated in her study had relatively large consequences for the excluded children (e.g., not being selected as a class leader, not being allowed to join a baseball team). Apparently, in low-impact situations, such as the temporal exclusion from a school yard game, a more powerful position of the out-group is less threatening for highly biased children. In fact, these children might be hesitant to perceive non-prototypical discrimination in such situations because in so doing they would ascribe even more power to the out-group—the power to deliberately exclude others based on their group membership. Unfortunately, the current research did not examine children's explanations for minority interethnic exclusion, but future research could test this interpretation.

Taken together, the current findings have implications for (school-based) attempts to prevent and reduce discrimination and ethnic hostility. Numerous studies on adults, as well as on children, have attested to the damaging consequences of perceived discrimination for psychological well-being (for meta-analyses, see Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014), and therefore it is important that children learn to stand up against group-based exclusion. However, learning this requires the ability to make a realistic assessment of ambiguous interethnic encounters. Children should know that ethnic bias often comes in disguised forms and acknowledge the possibility of discrimination in such encounters. The current research suggests that children generally have such awareness, and schools and teachers could capitalize on this to promote positive interethnic relations among their students. Yet, at the same time, children should not become overvigilant and should realize that interethnic exclusion is not necessarily discriminatory given that it can involve reasons unrelated to ethnicity. Although discrimination is sometimes difficult to prove, perceiving it is no mere guesswork. Experimental research among adults has shown that people are more likely to perceive discrimination when it is a strong possibility, for example, when potential perpetrators are highly biased or when they are rejected in favor of less qualified applicants (Major & Sawyer, 2009). On a similar note, children could be taught to attend to situational cues that increase or decrease the probability of discrimination. In this respect, there is an important role for multicultural education. Teachers and schools can increase children's awareness of discrimination against their own and other groups but can also improve students' interethnic attitudes and thereby decrease the need to be vigilant and suspicious of the motives of out-group others (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

To evaluate the current research, some limitations and qualifications need to be considered. First, the scenario in the current research involved social exclusion from a particular play activity (playing tag). Although this scenario is appropriate for assessing children's evaluations of interethnic exclusion (Verkuyten et al., 2011), it remains to be investigated whether children would show similar responses

to other exclusion situations. It is reasonable to assume that more extreme forms of exclusion, such as bullying and name calling, can be less easily justified, and this suggests that ethnic boundaries would play less of a role in the evaluation of those practices. Related to this, it would be interesting to examine situations where social exclusion can be more easily justified. There are circumstances in which children can afford and even need to be picky, such as when deciding who they want to invite for a sleepover party (see Killen et al., 2010), and in those cases they can be less easily blamed for excluding others.

Second, the exclusion situation was rather abstract given that the names and gender of the protagonists were not specified and little context was given. This abstractness was necessary to assess the isolated role of the ethnic group boundaries, but presumably it also increased the salience of the latter. Ethnicity was the only child characteristic that was explicitly mentioned in the vignettes. Therefore, future studies should examine the effects of ethnic boundaries in more richly described exclusion situations or use pictorially based vignettes that show ethnicity but do not explicitly mention it. Alternatively, future research could also be more specific about the ethnicities of the minority children in the exclusion scenarios. Although the ethnic minority respondents reported moderate identification with immigrant children, their in-groups were not directly involved, which meant that it was not meaningful to examine the role of in-group bias for them. Still, the current research provides a foundation for more complex studies and may help to interpret their findings. For example, the cross-categorization study of Verkuyten et al. (2011) found that children's judgments of exclusion or victimization were independent of the perpetrator–target configuration, but the current findings clearly show that this configuration does matter in the simpler case where the focus is on ethnicity alone.

Finally, the sample size of the ethnic minority group was considerably smaller than that of the ethnic majority group in Study 2, and this may have undermined the power to obtain additional findings. Moreover, that study used closed questionnaire items to analyze children's explanations for prototypical interethnic exclusion rather than the open-ended and probing questions that are typically used in research on sociomoral reasoning (Killen & Rutland, 2011). As a result, the study might have missed other important interpretations and justifications. Still, its findings show that the possibility of discrimination plays an important role in the rejection of interethnic exclusion.

Despite its limitations, the current research adds to the existing literature on children's evaluations of exclusion and ethnic discrimination. It showed that children respond to ethnic group boundaries when peers are excluded for unknown reasons but also that these responses depend on children's ethnic background and majority in-group bias. Future studies can build on the current findings by examining how children deal with different kinds of ambiguous interethnic exclusion and by further studying their underlying judgments and justifications. In addition, children should be helped in distinguishing exclusion that is discriminatory from exclusion that is not. Eventually, a realistic assessment of interethnic encounters is to the advantage of all.

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