

Teaching children about prejudice and discrimination: Recommendations based on Self-Determination Theory

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Introduction

The Dutch *Volkskrant* Magazine has a section called “What would you do?” in which readers can ask other readers for practical advice about social matters. The question in issue 1052 (November 6, 2021) came from a mother with a 12-year-old daughter (“born to two white parents”) who would love to have African American hairstyles like cornrows and box braids just like her friend (“a girl with Surinamese roots”). The mother was in doubt whether she should explain to her daughter that it was inappropriate for white persons to wear those hairstyles, as this would be a form of cultural appropriation. On the one hand, she found it important to do so, but on the other hand, she did not want to create group divisions as her daughter did not make such distinctions herself. The reactions to this dilemma were quite diverse. One reader (a known social scientist) stated that the mother should definitely teach her daughter about cultural appropriation and its painful history, as this could explain why some people have problems with white persons wearing cornbraids. Yet, another reader suggested that the mother should freely encourage her daughter’s decision to have a black hairstyle. That reader made the point that the girl’s spontaneous interest in this hairstyle should be welcomed, precisely because Dutch people of color (among whom she counted herself) had been forced to assimilate to the culture of “the colonial motherland”.

Our current multiethnic societies are heavily polarized when it comes to matters of immigration and cultural diversity (Albada et al., 2021), but as indicated by the

above mentioned example, disagreement can also exist among those who are concerned and worried about prejudice and discrimination. Many social scientists are explicitly committed to preventing and combatting social injustices, and various (education-based) initiatives and intervention attempts have been suggested and examined promote positive intergroup relations in children. However, disagreements such as those illustrated above raise the important question of what children should be taught about ethnic prejudice and discrimination. In the present chapter, I address this question from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). I will focus on children in preadolescence (age 7-13) which is an important period for the promotion of positive intergroup relations: Group attitudes are increasingly dependent on social contexts then (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), and no longer affected by cognitive limitations (Aboud, 1988).

My starting point is that it is important to teach children about prejudice and discrimination, given the wide-spread evidence for the harmful effects of these phenomena (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2014) and the need to acknowledge past and current wrong-doings and their contributions to current inequalities (e.g., Ramos et al., 2021). Yet, I also maintain that these teachings need to promote a consensual, “objective” understanding, which might be more contestable given disagreements about the possibility and even the desirability of universal social knowledge (see Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Rather than stirring up these disagreements, I take a practical perspective by discussing what might or might not “work”. I will not give a systematic overview of the effectiveness of available programs or diversity teachings, because such overviews do already exist in the literature (see e.g., Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2021), and also because it is not always clear what the programs or teachings involved communicate about prejudice and discrimination.¹ Instead, I will use SDT to make theoretically informed recommendations for such communications. Before presenting those recommendations, I will introduce and explain Self-Determination Theory, address some debates around prejudice and discrimination, and discuss children’s knowledge and perceptions of these problems.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a theory about human motivation and well-being that is widely used in psychology.

¹ Another reason is that research evidence for particular interventions does not guarantee their effectiveness in practice (see Biesta, 2007). They may be more effective, for example, for children of parents who provide informed consent for participating in a study on prejudice reduction rather than of parents who refuse this.

It is particularly well suited to the study of intergroup relations – as I will explain later – although it has only to a limited extent been applied in that domain. Motivation involves the question of what moves people, and SDT addresses this question by proposing a particular structure of more versus less productive forms of motivation, and by specifying the conditions that promote or impede those forms.

Structure of motivation. A traditional assumption in motivational psychology is that people are either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to do the things they do (Lepper et al., 2005). When intrinsically motivated, they do things because they find them inherently interesting and pleasurable. This intrinsic valuing is considered to be a strong and reliable motivational force. When people are extrinsically motivated for a particular activity, they want to use it as a means to obtain valuable outcomes. Because the reason for performing the activity lies outside that activity itself, extrinsic motivation is generally considered as less effective than its intrinsic counterpart.

SDT challenges the traditional dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in two ways. First, it states that rather than being either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, people can also be not motivated at all. This is important because earlier research has measured intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on a bipolar scale, which makes it impossible to distinguish a mixture of both from the absence of motivation (see, Lepper et al., 2005). This absence is referred to as *amotivation* in SDT.

Second, SDT stresses that intrinsic motivation is not always possible or realistic (not all tasks and activities are inherently interesting) and challenges the notion that extrinsic motivation is generally ineffective. It proposes four different forms of extrinsic motivation that can be placed on a continuum of self-determination between *amotivation* (least self-determined) and *intrinsic motivation* (most self-determined). These forms are all extrinsic in the sense that the activity concerned is seen as a means to an end. However, they differ in the degree to which the value and the regulation of the activity are internalized, that is to say the extent to which people find it personally important and experience it as originating from within. In case of *external regulation*, the least self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, behaviors are performed to comply with external demands (e.g., to obtain rewards or to avoid punishments). With *introjected regulation*, the second-least self-determined form, people do things for ego-involved reasons (e.g., to feel proud or to avoid guilt) which imply some internalization of external demands, but still indicate that motivation is controlled rather than free. On the higher end of the self-determination continuum lie *identified regulation* and *integrated regulation*. These forms involve obtaining separable outcomes that

are, respectively, personally important, and integrated with the self-concept (i.e., self-defining and fully self-chosen). SDT assumes that self-determined motivation comes natural to people, and that the experience of it is conducive to their well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Conditions for self-determined motivation. According to SDT, the experience of self-determined motivation depends on the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: the need for competence, the need for relatedness, and the need for autonomy. When these needs are satisfied, intrinsic motivation is fostered, the less self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (extrinsic and introjected regulation) are internalized or integrated with the self, and amotivation is diminished (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The need for competence involves the experience of effectiveness and mastery (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). People feel competent when they succeed at tasks that are optimally challenging (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness involves people's sense of belonging and their experience of being securely connected to their social environment. When they experience this connection they are more likely to follow their interests and adopt the standards of others. (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and willingness (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). This third need might seem redundant as self-determination is often described as relative autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Yet acknowledging this need is important as the ways of supporting it are unique. Whereas competence and relatedness can be promoted, respectively, by providing structure (via clarity, guidance, and encouragement), and showing involvement (via affection, attunement, dedicating resources, and being dependable), autonomy can be supported by providing choice, fostering relevance, and showing respect (Stroet et al., 2013).

SDT applied to prejudice and discrimination

Few researchers (e.g., Legault et al., 2007) have applied SDT to the study of prejudice and discrimination and the attempts to counter those problems, yet it provides a promising framework for doing so. As Devine (1989) argued in her seminal paper about the automatic and controlled components of stereotypes and prejudice, it takes (at least some) effort to be non-prejudiced. This effort requires motivation, and such motivation can be quite diverse: It can involve internalized or self-defining concerns with justice and fairness (integrated or identified regulation) but also fears of being a bad person (introjected regulation) or being branded a racist (external regulation). SDT accommodates these different concerns and explains their antecedents and consequences. As such, it offers clues on how to prevent motivationally counterproductive effects of attempts to

address negative intergroup relations. Moreover, SDT claims that the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and the effects of their fulfillment are universal (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). The idea that there are common motivational underpinnings of non-prejudiced behavior aligns well with the idea that prejudice and discrimination are common human problems, a notion I will address later in this chapter.

Motivations to be non-prejudiced. More than two decades ago, Plant and Devine (1998) developed an instrument to measure people's motivations to control prejudice that has been used in various studies. This instrument contains a subscale for internal motivation that refers to internalized beliefs about the value of equality and the non-acceptability of prejudice (e.g., "Because of my personal values, I believe that using stereotypes about Black people is wrong"), and a subscale for external motivation that entails concerns with possible rejection and disapproval by others should one express prejudice (e.g., "I try to hide any negative thoughts about Black people in order to avoid negative reactions from others"). Although these authors did not use the SDT framework, their work and the studies that used their measure are in line with its key propositions. Whereas their internal motivation to control prejudice scale appears to capture the most self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (identified and integrated regulation), their external scale involves its least self-determined form (external regulation). And whereas their internal motivation scale has been consistently associated with less prejudice in both private and public situations and less implicit bias, their external motivation scale has been related to more positive outgroup attitudes in public situations but also to more private prejudice, more implicit bias and more intergroup anxiety (for reviews, see Butz & Plant, 2009; Jargon & Thijs, 2021).

Legault and colleagues (2007) were the first to explicitly apply SDT to the study of prejudice and intergroup relations. They developed the Motivation to be Nonprejudiced Scale (MNPS) which contains reliable subscales for intrinsic motivation, amotivation, and each of the four extrinsic motivation types. Consistent with the theory, they found that only the more self-determined motivations (intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation) were associated with less prejudice, whereas external regulation and amotivation were related to more prejudice (Legault et al., 2007; see also, Legault, Green-Demers & Eadie, 2009).

Arguably, the exact taxonomy of SDT is rather complex for preadolescents. In fact, the six-factor structure of the MNPS seems too refined even for older youth (14-to-18-year-olds), who have been found to "merely" distinguish between strongly self-determined motivation (identified regulation, integrated regulation,

and intrinsic motivation), weakly self-determined motivations (external regulation, and introjected regulation), and amotivation (Thijs et al., 2016). Still, the distinction between internal and external motivation is meaningful to children.

Hughes et al. (2016) adapted Plant and Devine's (1989) measure and used it in two interview studies with 7-to-12-year-olds. They found that the internal and external scales had adequate psychometric properties, and that the former was associated more positive ethnic outgroup attitudes, less ethnic bias and less interethnic anxiety, and the latter with less ethnic bias but also with more interethnic anxiety. Another study among preadolescents (age 7-13) used a newly developed instrument for children's anti-prejudice motivations (Jargon & Thijs, 2021). This measure consisted of an internal and an external scale as well. However, it was administered in an anonymous survey, and in line with SDT, the internal scale did not only assess children's internalized notions of fairness and equality, but also their desire to know and interact with outgroup others. Results showed that the relation with children's outgroup attitudes was strong and positive for their internal motivation, and weak yet negative for their external motivation.

Obviously, more research with these kinds of measures is needed to fully grasp the relevance of anti-prejudice motivations for children's intergroup relations. Yet, the evidence so far indicates that is important that children want to be nonprejudiced for the "right reasons". Anti-prejudice motivations appear to be considerably more effective at regulating prejudice when self-determined rather than controlled, and in the latter case they may even have negative consequences.

Debates about prejudice and discrimination

It might seem not too difficult to teach children about prejudice and discrimination as they appear to be relatively unambiguous concepts. The former is typically considered as a negative and irrational feeling toward members of particular groups, and the latter as unjustified unequal group-based treatment (Chrysochoou, 2004). Moreover, there is (still) considerable agreement that both prejudice and discrimination are morally wrong and socially unacceptable (see e.g., Newman et al., 2021). Still, there is debate about when prejudice and discrimination play a role. There are at least two reasons for this.

The first is that prejudice and discrimination can come in disguised forms. Due to the strong negative connotations of both concepts, people are inclined to hide their biased attitudes. Moreover, people are not always aware of their discriminatory behaviors and the origins of those. Researchers have approached this problem by focusing on subtle forms of prejudice (see Chrysssochou

2004) or discrimination (e.g., racial micro-aggressions; Sue et al., 2007) and by using implicit attitude measures to predict biased behavior (Gawronski, 2019). Those approaches have found their way to the general public and added to the understanding of the persistence and pervasiveness of prejudice and discrimination. Yet, at the same time they have spurred disagreement. There have been disputes, for example, as to whether subtle prejudice, which involves elements like overstating cultural differences and defending traditional values, really is prejudice (see, Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997), and about the degree to which implicit prejudice measures capture prejudice rather than automatic knowledge about stereotypes (Arkes & Tetlock, 2004).

A second and related reason for debate is that ethnic prejudice and discrimination are often connected to racism, which is conceived of as a form of individual prejudice but also as a systemic phenomenon (Salter et al., 2018). In the latter capacity, racism had been defined as “a system of power entwined with practices and beliefs that produce and maintain an ethnic and racial hierarchy” and described as “one-way street in which the role of the perpetrator is associated with those at the top of the ethnic and racial hierarchy, who are in positions of power and privilege”. Some authors, like Fish and Syed, have claimed that prejudice and discrimination can only be truly understood by taking racism into account, and this could suggest that these problems exclusively involve majority group perpetrators and minority victims. Yet although it is clear that its predominantly minorities who suffer from discrimination (see e.g., Andriesen et al., 2020) majorities can do so too, at least in theory, despite the fact that notions of “reverse racism” are highly contested and used to maintain privileged positions (see Nelson et al., 2018; Okuyan & Vollhardt, 2022).

Children’s knowledge and perceptions

The aforementioned debates raise questions about what preadolescent children should be taught about prejudice and discrimination. Before addressing these questions from the perspective of SDT, I will discuss research that has examined children’s knowledge and perceptions of these problems. Most of it has focused on discrimination.

Discrimination understandings and stereotype awareness. Twenty-five years ago, Verkuyten and colleagues (1997) published a pioneering study in which they examined whether and how 10-13 years-olds in the Netherlands understood the term discrimination. The large majority (92%) of their respondents indicated to know the meaning of the term. The prototypical example of discrimination given by the children was a situation where an ethnic majority child called an

ethnic minority peer names without a valid reason, and participant's own ethnic background had little effect on their understandings. The findings of this study show that children conceive of discrimination as an interpersonal rather than a structural phenomenon yet also demonstrate an awareness of power and status differences in society at large. They also suggest that children's understandings of discrimination reflect shared social representations that are relatively independent of the groups (minority or majority) they belong to.

Still, the term discrimination itself seemed to be rather abstract for the participants: Substantial numbers of participants considered intragroup situations (e.g., a native Dutch child calling another native Dutch child names) discriminatory – where group-based discrimination is highly unlikely –, and more ethnic minority than ethnic majority children were unfamiliar with the concept (Verkuyten et al., 1997). Yet, even though they may not always know discrimination as a term, children are clearly aware of its problematic nature. Research has shown that children generally condemn excluding others merely because of the groups they belong to. For instance, children regard race-based exclusion as wrong when directly asked about this (Killen et al., 2010; Ruck et al., 2011), and children who assume that the exclusion of ethnic others is group-based are more likely to reject it (Thijs, 2017). In addition to this, children reject the exclusion of outgroup others when it appears to be based on group membership only (Killen & Stangor, 2001). Whereas this rejection of group-based exclusion is present in all children, it is sometimes stronger among minority groups, possibly due to their own experiences with discrimination (see Cooley et al., 2019).

During late childhood children also increase their understanding of the cognitive underpinnings of prejudice and discrimination. One study found that children became more aware of negative societal stereotypes about stigmatized groups and that this awareness was stronger for minority children, presumably because these stereotypes have more relevance for their daily lives (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). However, another study did not find majority minority differences in stereotype awareness, and found it to be unrelated to their personal experiences with discrimination (McKown & Strambler, 2009; see also Copping et al., 2013).

Recognizing discrimination. Rejecting discrimination is different from deciding that it takes place. The exclusion of outgroup others is not necessarily group-based, because it could be due to interpersonal factors unrelated to group membership, for example, a lack of shared interests. Recognizing discrimination can be hard, as it is not always clear what others think and believe, and perpetrators of discrimination may be motivated to hide their prejudices. Situations of intergroup exclusion can be attributionally ambiguous, and children's perceptions of discrimination depend on cognitive, situational,

and individual factors (Brown & Bigler, 2005). The cognitive factors include abilities that are generally acquired before preadolescence and therefore not further discussed here (such as understanding that people's actions do not always match their beliefs), but also their awareness of stereotypes. Children who have this awareness are more likely to interpret situations as discriminatory (McKown & Strambler, 2009).

The situational factors include contextual characteristics that influence the likelihood that behavior is perceived as discriminatory. One potentially relevant characteristic is the combination of group identities of the persons concerned. Paralleling findings obtained among adults (O'Brien et al., 2008), both Verkuyten et al. (1997) and McKown and Strambler (2009) found that children were most likely to judge hypothetical scenarios as discriminatory if those involved ethnic majority perpetrators and ethnic minority victims. This is not surprising as minority group members are considerably more often victims of discrimination than majority group members (Andriesen et al., 2020). Related to this, children appear to be aware of institutional discrimination and the fact that this affects some groups more than others. Elenbaas and Killen (2017) used a vignette study to examine children's reactions to resource-based inequalities between institutions (schools and hospitals) that either served African American or European-American children. Children were more likely to attribute these inequalities to differential treatment when African Americans were disadvantaged than when European Americans were disadvantaged. Moreover, children who made differential treatment attributions were also more likely to regard the inequality as unacceptable (Elenbaas & Killen, 2017).

Another contextual characteristic factor is the situational relevance of the stereotype (Brown & Bigler, 2005). For example, stereotypes about academic ability are more likely to explain discrimination by teachers than stereotypes about athletic ability. Importantly, however, stereotypes can also be used to justify outgroup exclusion if children personally endorse them. Thus children may condone the exclusion of an outgroup peers by referring to assumptions about their groups (e.g., "a Black student likes different music", Killen, 2007). Technically, they wouldn't see the exclusion as discrimination (*unjustified* group-based) in that case.

A potentially relevant individual factor is children's membership in (non) stigmatized groups (Brown & Bigler, 2005). There is evidence that minority children perceive more discrimination than majority children (e.g., Rashighi & Harris, 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). These perceptions are group-specific in the sense that they involve discrimination of the self or one's ingroup members, but whether minority children and majority children perceive the same situations

as discriminatory is a different question. One study among adults found that minority group members were more likely than majority group members to evaluate prototypical situations (with majority perpetrators and minority victims) as discriminatory (Simon et al., 2013), but research among preadolescent children did not replicate this pattern (McKown & Strambler, 2009; Thijs, 2017). Likewise, research has found that majority children were equally likely to perceive institutional discrimination as minority children (Elenbaas & Killen, 2017), although this might change in adolescence (see Elenbaas et al., 2016).

Summary. We do not know what children in the abovementioned studies had been taught about prejudice and discrimination. Yet, taken together, their findings indicate that preadolescents are *capable* of understanding the nature of discrimination (although the term itself may be quite abstract for them), knowing that minority groups suffer more from interpersonal and insitutional discrimination than majority groups, and being aware of negative stereotypes about these groups. Although minority children have been sometimes found to have more stereotype awareness and more problems with group-based exclusion than their majority peers, the latter tend to reject discrimination as well. Moreover, both groups were equally likely to recognize discrimination, indicating the possibility of arriving at a shared understanding of it.

Recommendations based on SDT

In this section, I will refer to the needs for, respectively, competence, relatedness, and autonomy, to argue that teachings about prejudice and discrimination should present these problems as *demarcated*, *common*, and *intrinsically relevant*.

Prejudice and discrimination as demarcated problems. Within SDT, feeling competent is crucial for the experience of self-determination. Thus, a productive motivation to be non-prejudiced requires the confidence that one can (eventually) control (some of) one's biased tendencies. Accordingly, a recent study found that children who believe that prejudice is not a fixed individual quality, but rather something that can be changed, are more open to cross-racial interactions (Tai & Pauker, 2021). Competence here also implies the ability to identify prejudice and discrimination, and the abovementioned research on children's knowledge suggests that preadolescents are clearly capable of this. However, trusting that one can counter one's own contribution to these problems also requires a clear demarcation of them. Thus, children also need to know when they are *not* biased and do *not* discriminate outgroup others. Such quite demarcation can be difficult due to the sometimes hidden nature of prejudice and discrimination. But this does not mean that it is impossible or unimportant.

Attention for the less overt manifestations of prejudice and discrimination is crucial for understanding the persistence, pervasiveness, and harmful consequences of these problems. Yet, a potential drawback of this focus is that it could undermine the notion that these problems could be objectively approached and consensually known and addressed. The research on racial micro-aggressions, for example, clearly shows that the subtle, everyday manifestations of prejudice can be very stressful and harmful for their recipients (Sue et al., 2019). Yet, these micro-aggressions are ambiguous by their very nature, and that can make it difficult to reach consensus about them. Sue et al. (2007), for example, wrote that micro-insults (a form of micro-aggressions) “represent subtle snubs, frequently *unknown* to the perpetrator, but *clearly* convey a *hidden* insulting message to the recipient of color” (p.274; italics added). Additionally, the denial of racism and prejudice and egalitarian statements like “We are all human beings” are sometimes considered as micro-aggressions (Steketee et al., 2021; Sue et al., 2007). This is understandable given people’s motivations to deny or mask their biases, but problematic if people are genuinely unbiased and committed to equality.

One subset of racial micro-aggressions involves everyday oppressive nativist discourses which stress the superiority of natives over nonnatives. These discourses can be a serious source of stress for students of immigrant origins (Steketee et al., 2021) and it is important to teach children about their harmfulness. Yet, in doing so the conceptual distinction between prejudice and ingroup positivity (in natives as well as other groups) should not be overlooked. It has long been acknowledged that ingroup love is not outgroup hate, but unfortunately this distinction is not always made, also in research. For instance, Raabe and Beelman’s (2011) widely cited meta-analysis on prejudice in childhood and adolescence does not differentiate studies on outgroup evaluations from studies on ingroup preference.

In sum, if we want to make children feel competent enough to counteract their prejudicial and discriminatory tendencies, they need to know what they are up against. Educators should stimulate children’s sensitivity to subtle manifestations of prejudice and discrimination, but also provide them with the ability and the confidence to decide whether and when these problems are not at play. Of course, children can make mistakes with this. What is discrimination does not always seem discrimination, and vice versa. Yet, to correct such mistakes, prejudice and discrimination need to be presented as problems that can, in principle, be objectively identified and addressed, even if they are denied or minimized, and even though some groups are more (directly) exposed to them than others. Fortunately, the aforementioned research indicates that majority and minority children’s understandings of these problems largely converge.

Prejudice and discrimination as common problems. The second precondition for self-determined motivation, relatedness, seems to have particular relevance for children's self-determined motivations to be non-prejudiced. This is because they are clearly aware that there are strong social norms against prejudice and discrimination (e.g., De França & Monteiro, 2013). The possibility that one can be prejudiced and act unfairly to outgroup others implies that one can be morally inadequate, or perceived as such, and thereby threaten one's connection to others. When children become excessively concerned about this they can develop external, less productive motivations (Hughes et al., 2016; Jargon & Thijs, 2021).

Such external motivations could be prevented by teaching children that prejudice and discrimination are *common* human problems. To this end, educators could use the very notion that biases can work in implicit ways, and the idea that all of us have tendencies to make evaluative group distinctions (Tajfel & Turner, 1981). Children are probably less concerned about appearing unprejudiced to others knowing that it is human to make mistakes in intergroup interactions and that doing so not necessarily makes them bad persons. Clearly, such teachings can and should still make the point that acts of prejudice and discrimination are wrong and problematic. In fact, making the distinction between people's acts and their character is essential for developing the notion that prejudice is not a fixed individual quality (see Tai & Pauker, 2021).

The notion that prejudice and discrimination are common human problems also implies that various groups can be perpetrators and victims. Unfortunately, the conceptual blending (by some) of interpersonal discrimination with systemic discrimination obscures this point. Despite the fact that some groups suffer considerably more from these problems than others, they are conceptually independent from structural power relations (Nelson et al., 2018). This means that powerless groups can be prejudiced as well. The research discussed above indicates that both minority and majority children are aware that it is predominantly minority group members who are victims of discrimination (by majority group members). Yet for the latter, it could be quite demotivating to learn about prejudice and discrimination as problems with exclusively majority perpetrators. The message that one belongs to the "bad guys" can undermine one's sense of relatedness, and thereby not stimulate a genuine, self-determined desire to be open toward ethnic others.

Interestingly, this notion is consistent with two lines of social psychological research (mostly among adults) seemingly unrelated to SDT. Studies on exclusive versus inclusive multiculturalism have shown that majority group members may feel left out if their group is not positively acknowledged in multiculturalist messages. This can have the counterproductive effect of making them less

positive toward diversity (Jansen et al., 2015; Plaut et al., 2011). Next, research on stereotype threat examines how the fear of confirming negative stereotypes can undermine the functioning of otherwise capable persons. This is typically done to explain negative test outcomes for stigmatized minorities. Yet, the fear of proving negative stereotypes (e.g., “whites as racists”) can also explain why majority group members (prejudiced and non-prejudiced alike) feel inadequate in interactions with minorities and distance themselves from them (Steele, 2011).

It is important that children learn that prejudice and discrimination have contributed to large inequalities and group injustices, and still do so today. It would also be unreasonable and incorrect to claim that majority groups have suffered from these problems to a remotely equal extent as minority groups. Yet, although prejudice and discrimination are especially present and harmful in contexts of majority oppressors and minority victims, their irrational and unjust nature are not confined to such contexts. Thus, children should be also taught that discrimination is wrong independent of the actors involved.

Prejudice and discrimination as intrinsically relevant problems. The need for autonomy can be supported, among other things, by fostering relevance and providing choice (Stroet et al., 2013). In their research among adults, Legault and colleagues (2001) clearly showed that individuals experienced more self-determined motivation to be nonprejudiced when presented with arguments for the importance of prejudice reduction and reminded of freedom of choice. However, the opposite was true when those individuals were pressured to comply with social norms against prejudice. Likewise, one of the studies among children (Jargon & Thijs, 2021) found that the perception of a prescriptive anti-prejudice norm (“You should be nice and honest to people from other cultures”) was uniquely associated with a stronger external anti-prejudice motivation, and thereby with less positive outgroup attitudes. However, the perception of a shared message explaining why prejudice and discrimination are problematic (“People from all cultural groups are equal”) was uniquely associated with a weaker external motivation and a stronger internal one, and as a result, with more positive outgroup attitudes.

Together these findings indicate the importance of presenting prejudice and discrimination as intrinsically relevant problems. Fortunately, many (though not all) people regard them as such, but it is the inherent, irrational problematic nature of prejudice and discrimination that should be stressed and not such much their normative unacceptability. Researchers working from the so-called cognitive domain perspective have shown that, from a fairly young age, children make the distinction between acts that harm others and therefore are intrinsically wrong (immoral), and acts that are wrong merely because there are norms or rules against them (unconventional) (Smetana, 2006). The studies on children’s

understandings of discrimination and group-based exclusion indicate that they easily regard these behaviors as morally wrong, despite their tendencies to make evaluative group distinctions.

Consistent with SDT, and similar to what has been found in research on adults (Legault et al., 2007) and adolescents (Thijs et al., 2016), the intrinsic appreciation of positive outgroup interactions and the personal endorsement of anti-prejudice beliefs are positively correlated ingredients of children's internal anti-prejudice motivations (Jargon & Thijs, 2021). Thus, to the extent that being open to others comes naturally to children, endorsing equality does so too. Related to this, there is some evidence that children who generally empathize with others are more likely to positively evaluate peers from a stigmatized outgroup, especially if they perceive that others are biased against that group (van Bommel et al., 2020). This indicates that children can have rather intuitive, self-evident reasons for rejecting prejudice and discrimination. Educators should help them to freely discover those reasons.

Conclusion: What would you do?

When a white girl wants to wear cornrows and box braids just like her black friend, this could be explained to her as a form of cultural appropriation. Yet, based on the existing literature on SDT and prejudice in children outlined above, this may not be the best option. One reason is that doing so might inadvertently weaken the girl's confidence in her ability to recognize and control her own prejudiced tendencies. It might also thwart her sense of relatedness, especially to her friend, and diminish her enthusiasm for interacting with ethnic others. Ultimately, this could undermine her self-determined motivation to be non-prejudiced. In this case, it may be more productive to appreciate the girl's desire to look like her friend. The other reader of the *Volkkrant Magazine* (introduced at the beginning of this chapter) wrote: "Today, cornrows and box braids contribute to a white teenage girl's ideal of beauty. Who would have thought that? Wonderful!"

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