

# The development of national prejudice, in-group favouritism and self-stereotypes in British children

Adam Rutland\*

*Department of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, UK*

This study explores the development of national prejudice, in-group favouritism and self-stereotyping in a sample of 329 British children. The aim was to test the prediction, derived from self-categorization theory (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Spears & Haslam, 1997) and in opposition to cognitive-developmental theory (Aboud, 1988), that the supposed limited cognitive ability of young children to engage in individuated perception will not necessarily result in intergroup discrimination and self-stereotyping. The children were presented with a photograph evaluation task and some open-ended questioning. It was found that national prejudice, in-group favouritism or self-stereotyping developed only in children aged over 10 years and was not evident in young children. These findings question the validity of the cognitive-developmental approach which contends that intergroup discrimination and stereotyping are a product of information-processing biases in young children. The apparent contradiction between the findings of this study and previous research on ethnic prejudice development is discussed in terms of the potential importance of group norms in determining the willingness of people to express national prejudice and in-group favouritism.

The belief that perception of people in terms of social categories is shrouded in error and bias has a long history (Lippmann, 1922) and is still widespread (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). However, recently self-categorization theory has provided an alternative perspective. This approach contends that perception based on social categories should be regarded as a socially meaningful and appropriate activity structured by the subjective social realities of group life (Asch, 1952; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Spears & Haslam, 1997; Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron, 1997). For example, Spears & Haslam (1997) presented a detailed review of the literature on stereotyping and cognitive load and concluded that it was appropriate to see stereotyping as the product of a concern to discover social meaning and so enrich social perception of ongoing social reality. A study will be presented in this paper which supports self-categorization theory. This study will demonstrate that stereotyping, prejudice and in-group favouritism are not

\* Requests for reprints should be addressed to Adam Rutland, Department of Psychology, King's College, University of Aberdeen, Old Aberdeen AB24 2UB, Scotland, UK (e-mail: a.rutland@abdn.ac.uk).

products of information-processing biases that result from the supposed limited cognitive capacity of young children, but are rather psychologically meaningful and effortful attempts to categorize social reality within different social contexts.

The 'cognitive miser' approach (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Taylor, 1981) views stereotyping and intergroup discrimination as a default option for social judgment that is used when we do not have sufficient cognitive resources (the time, the ability and the motivation) to perceive people in individual terms. Perception in terms of individual traits is seen as functionally superior and more cognitively demanding than perception using social categories. Cognitive-developmental theory is probably the most well-known account of how stereotyping and prejudice develops in childhood (Aboud, 1988; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Katz, 1976; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967). This approach to the development of stereotyping and prejudice has much in common with the 'cognitive miser' approach.

The cognitive-developmental approach also views stereotyping and intergroup discrimination as information-processing errors due to young children's insufficient cognitive ability to perceive people in individual terms (Aboud, 1988). This theory argues that cognitively immature young children are prone to intergroup discrimination and prejudice because they are unable to decentre. This means they cannot process multiple classifications and attend simultaneously to two or more different perspectives. The poor cognitive ability of young children, according to the cognitive-developmental theory, means they can only see the world in bipolar terms and are incapable of processing all the internal qualities of individuals. Thus, they cannot see the similarity between individuals in different groups and differences between people within groups. Only with cognitive development do children not engage in social categorization and intergroup differentiation, because they begin to make social judgments in terms of unique personalities or interpersonal, not intergroup, qualities.

The cognitive-developmental approach would predict that young children aged around 6 years of age should show high levels of prejudice and in-group favouritism (Aboud, 1988; Clark, Hogevar & Dembo, 1980) since they are basically egocentric and cannot appreciate either individual or group differences. The theory would also predict that in-group favouritism and prejudice should 'peak' at about eight years of age because children then are 'sociocentric' (Piaget & Weil, 1951) since their social judgments are dominated by perceptions of similarity and dissimilarity between social groups. Finally, the cognitive-development theory argues that around 10 years of age children should develop the ability to decentre and then can simultaneously attend to two or more different perspectives. Thus, prejudice and in-group favouritism should begin to reduce, since the children become aware of an individual's internal qualities and are no longer prone to the cognitive biases of stereotyping and intergroup discrimination.

In contrast to the cognitive 'miser' approach and cognitive-developmental theory, self-categorization theory (Spears & Haslam, 1997) argues that all human perception is categorical. This is not a new idea. Indeed, Vygotsky (1978) clearly stated 'that all human perception consists of categorized rather than isolated perceptions' (p. 33). Perception is also essentially social, according to Vygotsky,

because people do not only see the world through their eyes but also through language and it is in communication between people that the world is made meaningful.

Self-categorization theory contends that individual and categorical perceptions are not opposites because social perception is intrinsically categorical in at least two senses. First, elements of so-called individual perception (e.g. traits) can be seen as meaningful categories for perceiving people. Perceiving an individual as 'an individual' also involves categorizing him or her in terms of a number of attributes or traits (e.g. friendly-unfriendly, introvert-extrovert) and these traits are clearly also cognitive categories (Pratto & Bargh, 1991; Simon, 1997). A personal attribute can very easily become the basis for social categorization. For example, an attribute like 'altruism' could function as a cue to individuality, to a particular social identity or to being a human, depending on the social context (Oakes *et al.*, 1994).

Second, when someone is defined as an individual this implies some reference to other levels of social categorization without which particularity cannot be appreciated. Like commonality and consistency, individuality and inconsistency are also defined categorically. Therefore, it is not an issue of individuation versus categorization, but of different levels of categorization (Spears & Haslam, 1997). We can categorize an individual as either a unique individual, a group member or even a member of the human race (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). The process of individuation involves the perception of similarity and difference relative to a categorical frame of reference at the next level of self-categorization. Stereotyping via social categorization and individuation equally involve the same comparative and contrastive processes. Both these processes are needed to perceive someone as a unique individual (i.e. different from other individuals) and to perceive them as a member of a specific group (i.e. different from other groups). In theory, just as much cognitive capacity is required to perceive someone as an individual as to perceive them as a member of a group, since both are the product of the same process. Therefore, there seems no reason to believe that if young children have limited cognitive ability they are likely to have more problems with individuated perception compared to group perception. Any problem with cognitive capacity is likely to effect both types of perception equally. Indeed, Tajfel, Jahoha, Nemeth, Rim & Johnson (1972) found that young children below the age of 9 years did not show national in-group favouritism. This early study lends some empirical weight to the critique of cognitive-developmental theory presented by self-categorization theory.

Self-categorization theory emphasizes the subtlety of the discrimination process and its sensitivity to the realities of social context and intergroup relations. Here social categorization and in-group favouritism are seen as flexible effortful on-line constructions in context, when people have to take into account stimulus 'fit' and choose between alternative categorizations to see what best makes sense in terms of the stimulus. Self-categorization theory contends that both social categorization and in-group favouritism require cognitive effort and ability. Therefore, young children with supposed cognitive limitations compared to older children will not necessarily demonstrate higher levels of intergroup discrimination and in-group favouritism. The process of social categorization and in-group favouritism will be more

dependent on motivation, goals and the 'fit' within the environment (Oakes *et al.*, 1994) and argument or bargaining between actors (Edwards, 1991).

The relationship between cognitive ability, prejudice and in-group favouritism described by cognitive-developmental theory is not compatible with self-categorization theory, since this theory does not regard treating individuals as the preferred or superior mode of perception. The particular level of categorization in context will determine which mode of perception is appropriate. On many occasions our action and relationships with others can be determined by group membership, therefore perception based on individual qualities is not always appropriate. Self-categorization theory would argue that stereotyping, prejudice and in-group favouritism are first and foremost not primarily a product of a child's cognitive ability, but are closely related to the perceived appropriateness and meaning of categorization prescribed by the context.

Therefore, in line with self-categorization theory, it is predicted within this study that the supposed limited cognitive ability of young children to engage in individuated perception will not necessarily result in prejudice, in-group favouritism and self-stereotyping. This prediction was tested by investigating the development of national in-group favouritism, national prejudice and self-stereotyping of 'Britishness' between 6 and 16 years of age among British children. The degree of national in-group favouritism and prejudice shown by the children between these ages was measured using a photograph evaluation task, whereas the development of children's self-stereotypes of 'Britishness' was examined using open-ended questioning.

Qualitative means of assessing self-stereotypes were preferred in this study to more traditional trait measurements of stereotypes because it was felt that the trait conception would be unable to deal adequately with the phenomenon of stereotype change (Reicher, 1997; Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997). This was important since the study was essentially concerned with how self-stereotypes change and develop in the significant early years of life between 6 and 16 years of age. A trait approach would ignore the fact that change predominantly occurs through negotiation within and between social groups about different understandings of social reality. Such collective activity may have changed the children's self-conceptions as they grew older. However, a predetermined static set of attributes used with all participants may not have proved sensitive to the relational context and so provided an unsatisfactory measure of developments in the children's self-stereotypes of 'Britishness'.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were 329 white British children from primary and secondary schools (172 females and 157 males) in southern England. The sample ranged from 6 to 16 years of age and had a mean age of 10.7 years. The total number of children and adolescents included: 60 6-year-olds, 59 8-year-olds, 59 10-year-olds, 54 12-year-olds, 52 14-year-olds and 45 16-year-olds. The participants and their parents were all asked to name the occupation of the main earner within the family. Eighty-six per cent of the participants or parents provided an adequate answer to this question. These participants were then assigned a social class category according to their parents' occupations, using a classification scheme

devised by Reid (1981, pp. 41). This showed the students came from a mixed social class background: 51% were middle class (classifications I, II and III N) and 49% were working class (classifications III M, IV and V).

### *Procedure*

Participants were interviewed by the researcher over a period of approximately 20–30 minutes. The interview included a photograph evaluation task and some open-ended questions.

*Photograph evaluation task.* First, each participant completed the photograph evaluation task. Fourteen photographs of people aged between 18–40 years were produced (seven male and seven female). Each photograph only showed the head and shoulders of the person. The people shown in the photographs were all white and did not have any abnormal facial features. Each participant was tested individually in two successive sessions, one unlabelled and one labelled, with the sessions being separated by two weeks.

Initially in both sessions, the participants were orientated to the task by evaluating four (two male and two female) of the 14 photographs. The participants were asked to evaluate photographs on a four-point bias scale by placing each photograph in one of four cups labelled: 1 = 'I like very much', 2 = 'I like a little', 3 = 'I dislike a little' and 4 = 'I dislike very much'. Therefore, the higher score the more negative the response of the participant. First, the experimenter asked the participant if they liked or disliked the individual in the photograph. If the participant responded, for example, that they 'liked' the person they were instructed to hold the photograph near the two cups for the 'liked' people and was then asked if they liked the person 'very much' or 'a little'. Once the participant had responded they were shown the appropriate cup for the photograph. This procedure was repeated for at least three more orientation photographs; if the participant had further difficulties the prompting continued. The experimental phase began once the participant was adequately orientated to the task. The participants were presented with the 10 experimental photographs without any prompting in an unlabelled session. They were asked to evaluate these 10 photographs on the same four-point bias scale by placing the photographs in one of the four cups. The unlabelled session ensured that each child had a baseline measure for each photograph.

In a labelled session, the participants were initially shown the same 10 experimental photographs together. However, they were also told the category membership of the people in each photograph. Five national categories (British, German, American, Russian and Australian) were used in the experiment. The four national out-groups were chosen because most children were probably familiar with these countries and therefore they would feel able to express an attitude towards these groups. In addition, throughout history each of these four countries has had various relationships and dealings with Britain which might influence the children's evaluations of each group. Two photographs (one female and one male) were assigned randomly to each national group in each labelled session. The participants were asked to evaluate the labelled photographs on the same four-point bias scale used in the unlabelled session. The mean rating for each national category was the average score for the male and female photographs.

Half of the children had the unlabelled session first and the labelled session later. The other half had the labelled session first followed by the unlabelled session. The two sessions experienced by the second half of the children were separated by two weeks so the children were unlikely to remember which photographs had been assigned to which national group. Nevertheless, the children in the unlabelled session were explicitly instructed to ignore any previous categorizations of the photographs. In addition, in all unlabelled sessions the children were told to base their evaluations solely on an instantaneous judgment of the faces shown in the photographs. The photographs were always presented in four different random orders. There were no significant order effects in the overall design of this study.

*Open-ended responses.* After the children had completed the second session of the photograph evaluation task they were asked some open-ended questions. First, the children were asked 'Are you British?' followed by 'Do you feel proud/glad to be British?'. These two questions were used to examine whether the children self-categorized themselves as British. Finally, the children were asked 'What

things make you proud/glad to be British?'. This question was intended to assess the children's self-stereotypes of 'Britishness'. Responses to the third question were analysed using content analysis, which involves the counting of categories or themes (Holsti, 1969; Weber, 1990). This analysis involved careful reading for recurrent themes in the participants' responses, and counting the number of participants who mentioned each theme. This produced 12 categories or themes of responses. Only categories used by 10 or more of the participants were included in the analysis. To establish the reliability of the content analysis, a second rater independently categorized a random sample of 10 per cent of the total. Cohen's kappa was 0.8, which confirmed a satisfactory level of inter-rater reliability.

Correspondence analysis was used to provide a graphical representation (a plot) of the relationship between the six age groups (or columns) and the categories (or rows). This statistical technique allows an examination of the similarities between the age groups and the possibility of drawing inferences about the relationship between age groups and the categories (Hammond, 1993). Greenacre (1984) and Lebart, Morineau & Warwick (1984) provide overviews of this technique. Simply put, this method of analysis involves a two-dimensional contingency table being subjected to a singular value decomposition (Eckart & Young, 1936; Hill, 1976). The result is the identification of a coordinate space into which the columns and rows may be jointly projected as points in this space. The coordinate of any column or row along a significant dimension may be viewed as the equivalent to a factor loading in conventional factor analysis.

## Results

### *Photograph evaluation task*

First, the development of national in-group favouritism was analysed. The scoring procedure used in this task meant that the higher the bias score the less positive the response of the children. The mean bias score for the British photographs in both the no-label and label sessions across the six age groups are shown in Fig. 1. There was no significant difference between the mean bias scores in the no-label and label

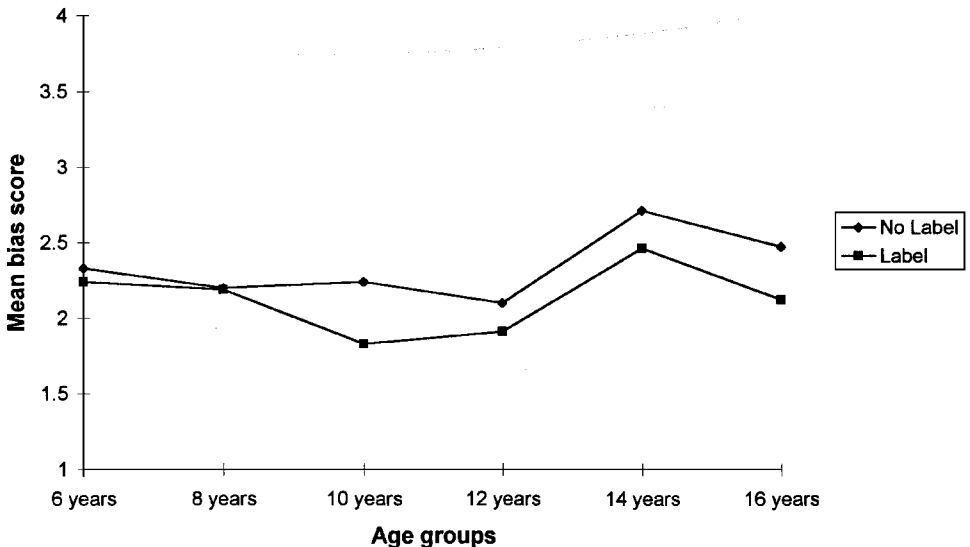
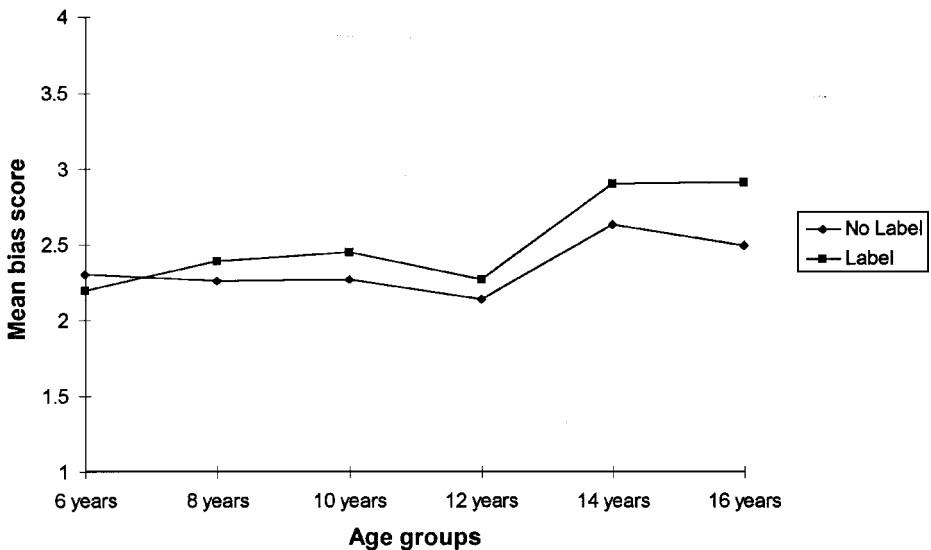


Figure 1. Mean bias score for the British photographs in both the no-label and label sessions across the six age groups.

sessions for the children aged six and eight years old. There was evidence of national in-group favouritism among the 10-year-old children. They made significantly more favourable evaluations of the photographs in the labelled session ( $M = 1.83$ ) than in the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.24$ ;  $t(53) = 3.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As illustrated in Fig. 1, the 12-year-old children also made significantly more positive evaluations in the labelled session ( $M = 1.91$ ) than in the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.10$ ;  $t(53) = 2.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

National in-group favouritism was also evident among the 14- and 16-year-old children. The 14-year-old children made significantly more positive evaluations of the photographs in the labelled session ( $M = 2.46$ ) than in the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $t(50) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This was also true for the 16-year-olds in the labelled session ( $M = 2.12$ ) and the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.27$ ;  $t(44) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

This study was also concerned with the development of national prejudice in British children. The children of all age groups showed no evidence of national prejudice towards the Australians, Americans or Russians as out-groups, since the children's evaluations of the photographs belonging to these national categories did not differ significantly between the unlabelled and labelled sessions. However, some age groups showed evidence of national prejudice towards Germans. From an examination of Fig. 2, it can be seen that, for the 6- to 10-year-old children there



**Figure 2.** Mean bias score for the German photographs in both the no-label and label sessions across the six age groups.

was no evidence of national prejudice towards Germans. These children showed no significant difference in their evaluations of the photographs in the no-label and label sessions.

The 12-year-old children made significantly more negative evaluations of the German photographs in the labelled session ( $M = 2.27$ ) than in the unlabelled session

**Table 1.** Main explanations (percentages) used by the six age groups when asked to explain what made them proud or glad to be British

6-year-olds (N = 60)	8-year-olds (N = 59)	10-year-olds (N = 59)	12-year-olds (N = 54)	14-year-olds (N = 52)	16-year-olds (N = 45)
English language, 18 Family/friends, 10	English language, 32 Family/friends, 17 Developed country, 17 Beautiful countryside, 14 Nice weather, 10	English language, 25 History & heritage, 17 Safe & peaceful, 17 Family/friends, 17	History & heritage, 39 Helpful, 24 Developed country, 22 Sporting achievements, 15 Beautiful countryside, 15 Safe & peaceful, 13	History & heritage, 29 Sporting achievements, 17 Developed country, 15 Helpful, 15	History & heritage, 51 Developed country, 36 Sporting achievements, 31 Helpful, 22 Safe & peaceful, 22 Civilised, 18 Food & clothes, 13



**Table 2.** The coordinates of the columns (age groups) and rows (themes) along the significant dimension identified via correspondence analysis

Columns	Coordinate	Rows	Coordinate	Rows	Coordinate
8-year-olds	73.70	English language	80.55	Helpful	- 21.77
6-year-olds	56.12	Family/friends	76.04	Food & clothes	- 25.77
10-year-olds	34.05	Nice weather	51.46	Safe & peaceful	- 27.02
12-year-olds	- 27.31	Beautiful	34.11	History &	- 40.86
		countryside		heritage	
14-year-olds	- 37.42	Places of	33.45	Sporting	- 49.85
		entertainment		achievements	
16-year-olds	- 54.53	Developed	- 13.76	Civilized	- 71.67
		country			

( $M = 2.14$ ;  $t(53) = -2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, it is necessary to be cautious when considering this as evidence of national prejudice since the 12-year-old children's mean rating in the labelled sessions was only 2.27 and not negative on the four-point scale. Nevertheless, the 14-year-old children evaluated the German photographs significantly more negatively in the labelled session ( $M = 2.90$ ) than in the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.63$ ;  $t(50) = -2.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This was also the case for the 16-year-old children in the labelled session ( $M = 2.91$ ) and the unlabelled session ( $M = 2.49$ ;  $t(44) = -4.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The evaluations of the German photographs by the 14- and 16-year-old children in the labelled sessions were clearly negative.

### *Open-ended responses*

Overall, 89% of the participants self-categorized themselves as British. Specifically, 90 to 100% of the participants in the 8- to 16-year-old age groups accept the self-categorization of British, whereas only 50% of the 6-year-old group responded 'yes' when asked whether they considered themselves British. Second, overall 69% of all the participants stated they were proud/glad to be British. Eighty-four per cent of the 16-year-old age group were proud/glad to be British compared with only 40% of the 6-year-olds.

The participants were also asked 'What things make you proud/glad to be British?'. This question was used to assess the development of the children's use of self-stereotypes of 'Britishness'. It is apparent from Table 1 that the six age groups differed noticeably in terms of the themes they used when describing what gave them pride in their nation. There were differences in the nature and quantity of the children's responses. The younger children did not spontaneously produce self-stereotypes of 'Britishness'. Being British to them simply meant they spoke the English language and had family and friends who were British, while the older children actively used self-stereotypes of 'Britishness'. For example, they talked about Britain having its own history and heritage, they positioned Britain as a 'developed' country. In addition, Britain was seen as a country with many sporting

achievements, one that was a safe and peaceful place and a country of helpful or friendly people.

Correspondence analysis was used to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between the six age groups and themes used by the participants. Only one dimension was significant in this correspondence analysis ( $\chi^2(16) = 114.69, p < .01$ ). This dimension accounted for 76% of the variance between the rows (themes) and columns (age groups). The coordinates of each age group and theme along this significant dimension are shown in Table 2.

The six age groups were approximately positioned along the significant dimension in chronological order. The end of the dimension associated with the older children included themes that were essentially self-stereotypes of 'Britishness', which were effectively comparative and collective in nature, while the themes at the younger children's end of the dimension could not be described as self-stereotypes and were effectively non-comparative and personal. An examination of coordinates in Table 2 shows that children began to produce self-stereotypes of 'Britishness' involving social comparison between the ages of 10 and 12 years. Interestingly, 10 years old was also the age when children began to show national in-group favouritism in the photograph evaluation task. There was almost a significant correlation between the children's evaluation of the British photographs in the labelled session and a composite measure of the children's use of self-stereotypes which involved social comparison ( $r = -.11, p = .06$ ). This composite measure included all the themes with negative coordinates on the significant dimension. However, the children's use of the 'developed country' ( $r = -.11, p < .05$ ) and 'history and heritage' ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ) self-stereotypes did correlate significantly with their evaluation of the British photographs in the labelled session.

The younger participants, 6- and 8-year-olds, typically perceived being British in terms of their personal experiences (i.e. belonging to a family and speaking the English language). These children frequently used themes that were not self-stereotypes of 'Britishness' and did not involve social comparison. They were simply factual justification for self-categorizing themselves as British (i.e. 'I can or I like'). For example: 'I know how to speak English...' (P69, 8-year-old); 'my family is English...' (P86, 8-year-old); 'my friends live in England and so do my family...' (P33, 6-year-old); 'I like talking English...' (P46, 6-year-old). Even when the young children talked about 'beautiful countryside' or 'nice weather', they did not employ social comparison in their discourse. For example: 'There is nice countryside here...' (P91, 8-year-old); 'it is not too hot or cold...' (P76, 8-year-old); 'I like the weather...' (P48, 6-year-old); 'lots of countryside and trees...' (P58, 6-year-old).

In contrast, the older children aged between 10 and 16 years began to use clear self-stereotypes of 'Britishness', which involved social comparison between the in-group and out-groups (i.e. 'we are or we have'). For example: 'We have the best army in the world thanks to Oliver Cromwell. We beat Germany in World War II...' (P168, 10-year-old); 'we have good football and rugby teams, such as England in the World Cup...' (P164, 10-year-old); 'we had the British Empire and we have a monarchy and not many countries have them...' (P219, 12-year-old); 'we are not poor, like Bangladesh, we are a rich first-world country...' (P199, 12-year-old); 'we are more civilized and friendly compared to the French and Germans...' (P247, 14-year-old);

‘we are not at war, unlike in Bosnia...’ (P269, 14-year-old); ‘the food here is better compared to other places...’ (P308, 16-year-old); ‘we are different from other countries, for example, we do not have capital punishment and we have not lost any wars’ (P318, 16-year-old).

### Discussion

These results provide support for self-categorization theory (Oakes *et al.*, 1994; Spears & Haslam, 1997), and little evidence in favour of cognitive-developmental theory (Aboud, 1988). They suggest that stereotyping, prejudice and intergroup discrimination are not the products of information-processing biases that are caused by the supposed limited cognitive ability of young children to perceive people in individual terms. Rather, the results suggest that stereotyping and its associated phenomena are closely related to the perceived appropriateness and meaning of categorization prescribed by the social context.

National prejudice, in-group favouritism and self-stereotyping were not evident among the young children below 10 years of age. In-group favouritism only first developed at 10 years of age, which was approximately when children began to produce self-stereotypes of ‘Britishness’. In addition, national prejudice was only shown towards Germans and showed signs of appearing at 12 years of age and was clearly evident among 14- and 16-year-olds. These findings are not compatible with the predictions of the cognitive-developmental approach. This perspective would expect young children to show intergroup discrimination and stereotyping since they should be incapable of perceiving individual differences and their social judgments should be dominated by the similarity and dissimilarity between social groups. Self-categorization theory predicted that young children would not necessarily show national prejudice, in-group favouritism and self-stereotyping. Moreover, this theory provides various plausible explanations of the findings relating to young children within this study. These accounts evolve around both the children’s effortful on-line constructions in the comparative context taking into account stimulus ‘fit’ and their understanding of the social or ideological significance of their group identity.

Previous research (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991; Turner, 1978) has shown that identification with the group is a necessary precondition for in-group favouritism. The young children in this study possibly did not identify with the ‘British’ group. Indeed, only 50% of the 6-year-old children actually self-categorized themselves as British within this study. In addition, it is well known that 6- to 8-year-old children have little awareness and knowledge of their nation and other countries (Barrett & Short, 1992; Jahoda, 1962; Piaget & Weil, 1951; Rutland, 1998).

Another possibility is that the young children could not detect ‘fit’ within the context because the relevant social category, British, was not salient. This explanation finds some support from a study conducted by Tajfel, Jahoda, Nemeth, Rim & Johnson (1972) in Glasgow. They used ‘British’ as the in-group category and found that national in-group favouritism developed between the ages of 9 to 11 years and not earlier. However, a study by Tajfel, Nemeth, Jahoda, Campbell & Johnson (1970), involving a sample from Oxford, defined the in-group as ‘English’ not ‘British’, and found clear evidence of national in-group favouritism among 6- to 8-year-old children. These two studies suggest that the lack of national in-group

favouritism and self-stereotyping in the 6- and 8-year-olds within this study, which used 'British' as the in-group category, occurred perhaps because the salience of the superordinate national label develops later. The results may have been different if 'English' had been used as the national in-group category.

The failure to find national prejudice and in-group favouritism in the young children may also be due to the adoption of a multi-categorization comparative context within this study. Wilder & Thompson (1988) found contextual variations in how an out-group is evaluated. In their study, a moderately different out-group was evaluated relatively positively when an extremely different out-group was present. Moreover, the presence of an extreme out-group meant the participants did not demonstrate any in-group favouritism over the 'acceptable' out-group. Hartstone & Augoustinos (1995) also failed to find in-group favouritism in a multi-categorization context. Tajfel *et al.* (1970) used a dichotomous categorization setting, which might also explain how they found a higher level of national in-group favouritism among 6- and 8-year-olds.

The fact that national prejudice was shown only towards Germans in this study also suggests that the children were sensitive to the comparative context and the frame of reference may have structured their perceptions in a particular way. Previous research (Barrett & Short, 1992; Johnson, 1973) has indicated relatively high levels of negative stereotyping towards Germans among British children. Furthermore, Britain has a history of relatively recent actual physical conflict with Germany (i.e. the First and Second World Wars), which is not true for America, Australia and Russia. Negative images of Germans possibly stem from the frequently unsympathetic representation of Germans as the 'enemy' in British war stories found in children's comic books, films and television programmes. Indeed, the children in this study frequently mentioned the Second World War in their responses to the open-ended questions. This is not really surprising, since this study was conducted just prior to and during the 'celebrations' in 1995 of the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day that marked the end of the Second World War. These findings suggest that the mere presence of a memory of intergroup conflict with certain groups is enough to increase the likelihood of prejudice and intergroup discrimination.

Self-categorization theory recognizes the possibility of a developmental path in children's level of intergroup discrimination and stereotyping, although it would contend that cognitive ability is not primarily the driving force behind development. Rather, self-categorization theorists argue that children develop ideological flexibility, since they can perceive the world in either an individualized or social categorical manner depending on the nature of the social and comparative context. Children develop an understanding of more and more forms of categorization and they start to show flexibility in their categorical judgments. This flexibility is based on an understanding of the ideological significance attached to particular social categories. Intergroup discrimination and stereotyping are more likely once children have developed an understanding of the ideological meaning associated with a particular social category and this category is salient within the social context.

Previous research has documented clear and consistent evidence that ethnic prejudice and in-group favouritism is high among young children and then decreases

with age (see Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995). This study suggests that the universalistic cognitivist account of prejudice development provided by the cognitive-developmental approach is inadequate, because there is no reason to believe that such an account would not also be valid in the case of national prejudice and in-group favouritism. Therefore, how might we attempt to reconcile the seemingly contradictory results in the areas of ethnic identity and national identity development?

Billig (1991, 1995) offers one potential explanation when he argues that social psychologists need to examine further the relationship between intergroup differentiation and social representations (Moscovici, 1981, 1984) of 'prejudice' in majority discourse. He contends that the word 'prejudice' attracted the meaning of irrationality and uninformed thought during the Enlightenment. However, Billig (1991, p. 132) cites contradictions in people's arguments about 'prejudice' dating back to the 18th century, with prejudices of religion and race being condemned, while national prejudice is defended. Indeed, Barker (1981) has shown that this combination was typical among New Right Conservative thinkers in the 1980s. In the 1990s this is still true as shown by a recent article in the *Daily Telegraph* (the most popular Conservative broadsheet in Britain) on 31 May 1996 entitled 'A little xenophobia goes a long, long way', when it was argued that 'a little bit of xenophobia is not at all a bad thing... there is a sort of playful xenophobia which reflects the character of the British people. Whenever enlightened commentators loftily dismiss "tabloid xenophobia" we should be on our guard because they are complaining about something which, historically, has more often been a creative than a destructive force'.

Therefore, Billig is suggesting that western societies typically give a different meaning to 'ethnic prejudice' and 'national prejudice', with a declaration of the former being seen as illegitimate in most sections of society while the latter is viewed as an admissible form of expression among the majority. Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest adolescents may be showing reduced ethnic prejudice due to the increasing influence of the social representation of 'ethnic prejudice' in wider society, whereas the social representation of 'national prejudice' may actually encourage more national prejudice. Indeed, Breakwell (1993) has argued that social representations play a crucial part in shaping both the content and evaluations of social identities. However, while there is no evidence to support this claim within this study, this seems a potentially fruitful line for future research. In fact, two recent studies by Jetten, Spears & Manstead (1996, 1997) have demonstrated that group norms about 'fairness' and 'differentiation' significantly effect the levels of intergroup discrimination shown by people. These studies have shown that manipulation of the in-group norm, especially among high identifiers, influences the willingness of people to express in-group bias and positive differentiation.

The present study provides evidence that in-group favouritism, prejudice and self-stereotyping are not the product of the supposed cognitive limitations of young children who cannot engage in individuated perception. Rather, the findings suggest that the development of intergroup differentiation and self-stereotyping are closely related to the perceived appropriateness of categorization within the comparative context and the social or ideological significance of a particular social identity.

Therefore, stereotyping and its associated phenomena should not be seen as a response to poor cognitive ability but a reaction to a 'concern to uncover social meaning and thereby enrich social perception' (Spears & Haslam, 1997, p. 205). Doubts about the validity of the cognitive–developmental approach to prejudice (Aboud, 1988) are raised by this study. Indeed, it is suggested that the apparent contradiction between the findings of the present study and those in the field of ethnic prejudice development may well be explained by the different social representations or group norms found in society about the meaning of both 'ethnic prejudice' and 'national prejudice'. This is an issue that certainly deserves future research. It is argued here that a 'perfect' world, with zero prejudice and stereotyping, would not be created if children could only improve their cognitive ability. Instead, intergroup discrimination and stereotyping are more dependent on the ability to construct social meaning within a comparative context and possibly the group norms within wider society.

### Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Amélie Mummendey, Glynis Breakwell and various anonymous reviewers for their useful and constructive comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The research described in this paper was funded by the British Academy and the Nuffield Foundation.

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*Received 4 February 1997; revised version received 28 May 1998*