

Child Development 'in press'

Peer group norms and accountability moderate the effect of school norms on children's
intergroup attitudes

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Abstract

The present study examined the interactive effects of school norms, peer norms, and accountability on children's intergroup attitudes. Participants ($n = 229$) aged 5-11 years, in a between-subjects design, were randomly assigned to a peer group with an inclusion or exclusion norm. They learnt their school either had an inclusion norm or not and were accountable to either their peer group, teachers or to nobody. Findings indicated, irrespective of age, that an inclusive school norm was less effective when the peer group had an exclusive norm and children were held accountable to their peers or teachers. These findings support Social Identity Development Theory (Nesdale, 2004, 2007) which expects both the in-group peer and school norm to influence children's intergroup attitudes.

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Recent research (Nesdale & Dalton, 2011; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011), inspired by social identity development theory (SIDT; Nesdale, 2004), has explored the use of school norms as a means of curtailing the development of explicit out-group bias, especially in children who are members of groups with negative exclusionary norms. Yet, Nesdale and Lawson (2011) found that while an inclusionary school norm could instigate more positive out-group attitudes there was still a negative effect of an exclusionary in-group peer norm.

In the present study, we extended research by Nesdale and colleagues by examining whether the positive effect on attitudes of an inclusive moral norm promoted in schools by teachers was moderated by a negative exclusionary in-group peer norm (see Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010). We also investigated, for the first time in the same study, whether the moderating effect of an inclusive school norm increases when children are made accountable to significant others (i.e., they think their attitudes will be known by their teachers or peers and hence that they may be answerable for how they respond). The present study examined 5 to 11-year old children because previous research on children's intergroup attitudes has shown that children develop self-presentational and normative concerns during middle childhood (Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007; FitzRoy & Rutland, 2010; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005).

Social identity development theory (SIDT; Nesdale, 2004, 2007) contends that the norms of the peer in-group are given great weight by children. Previous research has shown children's motivation to maintain a positive image in the eyes of peers means the norms of the peer group hold a powerful sway (e.g., Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005; Rutland et

al., 2005). As an example, Nesdale, Maass, Kiesner, Durkin & Griffiths (2008) demonstrated how an exclusionary peer in-group norm increased children's intentions to bully members of the out-group. Given such findings, it is important to know the relationships between negative exclusionary peer group norms and positive inclusive school norms.

Recent research from a SIDT perspective has assessed whether an inclusionary school norm might moderate the negative effects of an exclusionary peer group norm (Nesdale & Dalton, 2011; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011). Nesdale and Lawson (2011), for example, examined the effects of both peer and school norms on seven and ten year old children's intergroup attitudes. The children were led to believe that the peer in-group had either an inclusionary or exclusionary group norm, and that the school had either an inclusionary school norm, or no school norm. Results showed that an inclusive school norm was related to more positive out-group attitudes. However, contrary to the view that an inclusive school norm is an important factor for intergroup bias reduction, it did not act to moderate the negative effects of an exclusionary peer group norm.

The present study sought to extend previous research in three ways. First, it was possible that the mild inclusive school norm used by Nesdale and Lawson (2011) was simply drowned out by the exclusionary peer group norm. Their school norm was relatively benign since an experimenter mentioned to children that their teachers have “said to me that this school likes all children to like kids in other groups”. In contrast, in the present study, an actual teacher delivered a more explicit school norm statement. This statement declared that prejudiced attitudes are morally wrong, and that those who go against the inclusive school norm would face repercussions. We felt that this novel manipulation of an inclusive school norm would give added strength to the message based on both its authority and the clarity of the moral message. We expected that such a strong inclusive school norm would result in

more positive out-group attitudes compared to either an exclusionary norm or no explicit norm.

Second, we investigated whether an inclusive school norm is more effective in curbing the negative effects of exclusionary peer group norms when children are made accountable to their teachers. Within SIDT, accountability is considered to have an influence on intergroup attitudes because it makes the social norm of the audience salient (Nesdale & Dalton, 2011; Rutland et al, 2005). Previous research (FitzRoy & Rutland, 2010; Nesdale & Dalton, 2011) has examined how the relationship between accountability and norms influences children's intergroup attitudes. However, FitzRoy and Rutland (2010) did not differentiate between the peer group norm and school norm, with the children made accountable simultaneously to both their peer group and teachers.

Nesdale and Dalton (2011) also only manipulated peer group norm and accountability, since an inclusive school norm was made salient to all children. They found that an exclusive peer group norm increased intergroup bias but only amongst the seven year olds, while the accountability manipulation had no significant effect. In our view, the lack of an effect for accountability most likely resulted from all children being made aware of the inclusive school norm at the beginning, so making the accountability manipulation superfluous.

Accordingly, in the present study, we manipulated school norm explicitly by having both an inclusive school norm condition and a condition when no school norm was made salient. In addition, we extended previous research (FitzRoy & Rutland, 2010) by manipulating accountability to the peer group and teachers separately, as well as having a control condition when only an experimenter was present. We anticipate that accountability to both peers and teachers will affect the children's intergroup attitudes, though we don't

expect either peers or teachers to have a greater impact given these are both 'significant others' during middle childhood.

Consistent with SIDT, we expected more positive out-group attitudes when the school had an inclusionary norm (versus no norm) and the children believed they were accountable to the teachers, rather than to the peer group. In contrast, when the school had no explicit norm, and the children believed they were accountable to the peer in-group, we expected that the children would be more positive towards the out-group when the peer group had an inclusionary norm, and more negative when the peer group had an exclusionary norm. Overall, we expected an inclusive school group norm to be most effective in promoting more favorable out-group attitudes when the children also experienced an inclusive peer group norm and their school norm was highly salient because they were held accountable to their teachers.

Importantly, given the explicit nature of our school norm manipulation, we expected an inclusive school norm to increase liking for the out-group even when the peer group norm was exclusive. This positive effect of an inclusive school norm, however, was not expected to occur when the children were held accountable to their peer group who held an exclusive norm. Under these conditions, the peer group normative pressure and self-presentation concerns amongst our 5-11 year old children (see Nesdale, 2008; Rutland, 2013) should be so strong that any positive effect of an inclusive norm would be extinguished.

Third, we anticipated that the previous effects would be most prominent with increasing age. Several developmental social identity theorists have now recognized that from the beginning of middle childhood (5-7 years old) normative awareness and self-presentational concerns (i.e., social acumen) systematically increase and are noticeably more advanced by the end of middle childhood (8-11 years old) (see Nesdale et al., 2005; Nesdale, 2013; Rutland, 2013; Rutland et al., 2005). That is, as children transition through middle

childhood, their knowledge of how social systems and groups work increases, as does their strategic understanding of how to use this information to their advantage, and their skill in making it happen. In a similar vein, others (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009; FitzRoy & Rutland, 2010), have focused on children's developing social cognitions, such as group norms and theory of social mind (TOSM), as important factors that develop in middle childhood and influence the emergence of children's inter and intra-group attitudes.

The effect of these social acquisitions is that between five and eleven years of age children's social acumen or group norms increases, such that they are increasingly concerned about responding appropriately to the expectations of significant others, including the peer group as well as adults in authority. For this reason, in the present study, we examine how 5-7 and 8-11 year old children react to normative and accountability manipulations. On the basis of developmental social identity theories, we expected that the effects of both school norms and peer group norms would intensify as our participants increased in age, and that this would be exacerbated when they were accountable to either their peers or teachers.

Method

Participants

Two-hundred and twenty-nine white British children (111 males and 118 females) aged between 5 - 11 years of age (5 - 7 years, $n = 132$, 8 - 11 years, $n = 97$) were randomly selected from six elementary schools from semi-urban areas within the Midlands of England. The ethnic makeup of these schools was approximately 97% White, 2% Asian, and 1% Black children. Children were predominantly of lower to middle socioeconomic status (SES) and lived in majority lower SES areas

Procedure

First, each child was asked to imagine they were participating in a team as part of an intergroup drawing competition that would involve children from other schools in the local

area. The children were then asked to imagine that a local artist had judged their drawings, and that the groups were based on drawing ability. At this point, they were asked if it was okay to have their instant photo taken, which, if consent was given, was taken using a webcam.

Further, the children were told to imagine that their drawings had been viewed by a judge who deemed them to be of an ‘excellent’ standard. Participants were then shown two photos of children of the same age, gender and ethnicity and told that this was their team. Two sets of head and shoulder photographs were used to present the in-group team members to participants (see Nesdale & Lawson, 2011). Within age and gender categories, the photographs were matched for attractiveness and facial expression.

To emphasize team membership, each child's photo appeared in between the two other “team members”. To further enhance in-group identification, participants chose a team shape (either a star or a sun) and a favorite color. The chosen shape was transformed into their chosen color and placed alongside their teammates photo. The children were shown a second photo set of same age and gender children, who were the competing “other team”. This team was singled out as having done “just OK, not as good as your excellent drawings”. To enhance membership and the status of the in-group, a certificate was prepared to be presented to in-group members to show they were part of the ‘excellent’ drawing team.

Peer norm manipulation: In line with the peer norm manipulation used by Nesdale and Lawson (2011), children listened to a “secret message” for new group members via headphones spoken by a child from their in-group, who shared their gender and age. Children in the *inclusion peer norm* condition heard the message as follows; “*we’re really happy that you’re going to be on our team for this drawing competition game. We just have one rule: if you’re going to be on our team, and that is you have to like and include all the members of the other team*”. Children in the *exclusion peer norm* condition however heard the following

message; “*we’re really happy that you’re going to be on our team for this drawing competition game. We just have one rule if you’re going to be on our team, and that is: you can’t like or be friendly to any members of the other team*”.

School norm manipulation: We adapted the school norm manipulation used in previous research (e.g., Nesdale & Dalton, 2011), such that in the *inclusion school norm* condition children listened to a message via a speaker, recorded by an adult male, whom the children thought was a teacher at the school. The message was as follows; “*your head teacher has asked me to record this message to let you know what we think about how you should behave with kids from other groups. Your head teacher and the other teachers at the school have all agreed that they want kids like you to like all kids in other groups and be friendly to them all the time. They have decided that it is wrong to be mean to someone from another group just because they aren’t on your team, and kids who are mean to other groups shouldn’t be part of the school*”. Children in the “no school norm” condition acted as a control and did not hear a message.

Accountability: In line with previous research (Abrams et al., 2007; FitzRoy & Rutland, 2010), children were made accountable to either their in-group peers, teachers, or to no-one. In the *peer accountability* condition, participants were told that the other members of their team would read their responses. In contrast, children in the *teacher accountability* condition were told that their teachers and head principal would read their responses. In the *no accountability* condition, participants were told their answers would remain confidential. Furthermore, participants in the experimental conditions were shown a box labeled with either the name of their teacher or with “*excellent drawing team members*”, and told that their response sheet would be put in the relevant box at the end of the study to be later shown to either their teacher or in-group peers.

Intergroup attitudes: In- and out-group attitudes were measured using three questions previously utilized by Nesdale and Lawson (2011). Participants were asked: "how much do you like members of your team/the other team?"; "how much do you trust the members of your team/the other team?"; "how much would you like to play with the members of your team/the other team?". They answered by selecting a face that best represented how they felt about either their own or the other team members on a 5 point smiley-face scale, ranging from happy to sad faces. Responses were then coded from 1 (the saddest face) through to 5 (the happiest face). Participants received a summed score over the three scales for both the in-group and out-group with a higher score indicating a more positive attitude towards each group. The in-group ($\alpha = .83$) and out-group ($\alpha = .84$) attitude scales both showed a high degree of internal reliability.

After completing the workbook, all children were reassured they would not be accountable for their attitudes and children from the "excellent drawing team" were not really part of a team, and that they would not be competing against another group.

Results

Initial analysis found no significant gender effects so this factor was not included in subsequent analyses.

Children's inter-group attitudes were analyzed using a 3 (Accountability: none, peer, teachers) x 2 (Peer norm: inclusion, exclusion) x 2 (School norm: none, inclusion) x 2 (Age Group: 5 - 7 years, 8 - 11 years) x 2 (Group: in-group, out-group) mixed design ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor. The ANOVA showed a significant main effect for Age Group, $F(1, 215) = 12.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Pairwise comparisons suggested that the younger children ($M = 10.80$, $SD = 3.72$) rated the out-group significantly more positively than the older group ($M = 9.04$, $SD = 3.29$). However, Age did not significantly interact with any of the other variables in the analysis.

The ANOVA also showed a significant main effect for Group, $F(1, 215) = 116.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .304$, and a significant Group x School norm interaction, $F(1, 215) = 6.52, p < .05, \eta^2 = .047$. However, these effects were qualified by a significant four-way interaction between Group, School norm, Peer norm, and Accountability, $F(2, 215) = 5.11, p < .01, \eta^2 = .045$. To examine this interaction further, separate 3 (Accountability: none, peer, teachers) x 2 (Peer norm: inclusion, exclusion) x 2 (School norm: none, inclusion) between-participant ANOVAs were performed on both the children's in-group and out-group attitude. These analyses revealed a significant three-way interaction for out-group attitudes, $F(2, 227) = 6.20, p < .01, \eta^2 = .055$, but not in-group attitudes, $F(2, 227) = 1.19, ns$.

A 3 (Accountability: none, peer, teachers) x 2 (School norm: none, inclusion) between-participant ANOVA was then carried out on children's out-group attitudes when the peer norm was exclusion. This analysis showed a significant main effect of School norm, $F(1, 107) = 6.68, p < .05, \eta^2 = .062$ and a significant interaction between Accountability and School norm, $F(2, 107) = 3.38, p < .05, \eta^2 = .063$. Simple main effects analysis on this interaction found that children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 11.73, SD = 3.14$) compared to the condition with no school norm ($M = 7.32, SD = 4.12$) were significantly more positive towards the out-group in the no accountability condition, $t(39) = 3.89, p < .001$. In contrast, in the peer group accountability condition there was no significant difference, $t(35) = .94$, between the out-group attitudes shown by the children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 10.68, SD = 3.79$) and the condition with no school norm ($M = 9.56, SD = 3.53$). This was also evident in the teacher accountability condition, $t(27) = .05$, with no significant difference between the out-group attitudes shown by the children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 9.93, SD = 3.59$) and the no school norm condition ($M = 9.83, SD = 4.13$). From another perspective, these findings indicate that, when there is a peer norm of exclusion, children are least positive towards out-group members when the school does not

have an inclusion norm and there is no accountability. In contrast, children are most positive towards out-group members when the school does have an inclusion norm and there is no accountability (see Figure 1).

In contrast, a 3 (Accountability: none, peer, teachers) x 2 (School norm: none, inclusion) between-participant ANOVA on children's out-group attitudes when the peer norm was inclusion revealed a significant main effect for School norm, $F(1, 120) = 6.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .052$ and a marginally significant interaction between Accountability and School norm, $F(2, 120) = 2.87, p = .06, \eta^2 = .048$. Simple main effects analyses found children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 11.73, SD = 3.14$) compared to the condition with no school norm ($M = 7.32, SD = 4.12$) were significantly more positive towards the out-group in the school accountability condition, $t(35) = 3.02, p < .01$. In contrast, in the peer group accountability condition, there was no significant difference, $t(33) = 1.36$, between the out-group attitudes shown by the children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 11.22, SD = 3.19$) and the condition with no school norm ($M = 9.65, SD = 3.64$). This was also apparent in the no accountability condition, $t(46) = -.26$, with no significant difference between the out-group attitudes shown by the children in the inclusion school norm condition ($M = 10.08, SD = 3.42$) and condition with no school norm ($M = 10.32, SD = 3.43$). Looking at these results it is apparent that, when there is an inclusion peer norm, children's out-group attitudes are most positive when the school has a norm of inclusion and then are accountable to the teachers. In contrast, children are least positive when there is no school norm of inclusion and there is no accountability to the teachers (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The findings of this study show that promoting an inclusive school norm, delivered directly by a teacher and with a clear message about what makes exclusion unfair to others, can encourage more positive intergroup attitudes. However we showed, for the first time, that

this positive effect of an inclusion school norm was dependent on both the peer in-group norm and accountability to either peers or teachers. This study extends previous research because it shows the interactive effect of accountability, peer group norm and school norm on children's intergroup attitudes, within the same study.

As expected, our explicit school norm of inclusion did lead to more positive out-group attitudes even when the peer group had a norm of exclusion. It appears an inclusive school norm is a pertinent reminder to children that they should express positive attitudes towards the out-group, even when the in-group has a negative exclusion peer group norm. As anticipated, however, this effect was not present when the children were held accountable to their peer group who held an exclusion norm. This suggests that making the children accountable to their peer group increased the salience of the exclusive peer group norm, and this was enough to reduce the positive effects of the inclusive school norm.

When the peer group norm was exclusion, we also found the positive impact of the inclusive school norm was absent when the children were held accountable to their teachers. Here, it seems the presence of accountability to anyone in the school was enough to moderate the positive effect of an inclusive school norm. Arguably, there was no difference between these children's intergroup attitudes when they heard an inclusive compared to no school norm, because accountability to their teachers was enough to make all children attend to a generic moral norm of fairness (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013). Alternatively, the children may have thought being accountable to teachers would also mean their responses would be known by their peer group, since their teachers may well make their negative attitudes public to all in the school. Future research should examine the psychological processes that could explain how accountability in an exclusive peer group context undermines the positive effects of an inclusive school norm.

The findings were different when the peer group norm was inclusive. We found an inclusive school norm was most effective in promoting positive out-group attitudes when the peer group norm was also inclusive. However, as anticipated, this effect was only evident when making children accountable to their teachers highlighted the school norm. This finding extends previous research (Nesdale & Dalton, 2011; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011) by showing that an inclusive school norm is most successful in facilitating positive out-group attitudes when paired with an inclusive peer group norm, and children think teachers will hold them accountable. Future research should consider whether these public attitudes under conditions of accountability are in line with the children's private attitudes when not held answerable to their teachers. This would require the use of implicit attitude measures and previous suggests there may be an asymmetry between children's explicit attitudes expressed in public and their implicit attitudes (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Rutland et al., 2005).

Our assumption was that making children accountable to their teachers increased the salience of a generic moral norm of fairness. However, alternatively children may simply have felt compelled by the conventional authority of the teacher to conform to what was expected. Future research on accountability and children's intergroup attitudes could address these differing accounts by examining how children reason about (i.e., justify) the particular attitudes they express publically when held accountable (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland et al., 2010). Then it would be clearer whether children's attitudes are driven by authority relationships or the appropriation of inclusive moral principles, such as fairness and equity, which are prevalent in most schools.

There were no significant interactive effects of age, even though these were predicted, since the effects of school or peer norms and accountability did not increase with age. This highlights that peer group normative pressure and concerns about self-presentation may be strong enough, even from five years onwards, to neutralize any positive benefits of an

inclusive school norm (Nesdale, 2008; Rutland, 2004, 2013). Research suggests that these influences are most present when children show high group identification, hold a high status position and there is a competitive intergroup context (e.g. Abrams et al., 2003; Nesdale, Durkin, Maass & Griffiths, 2005; Nesdale, Zimmer-Gembeck & Roxburgh; 2014). Lack of age effects in our stimulated intergroup context may have resulted from one or any of these factors. Future research should consider how group identification, group status and intergroup competition might interact with age when examining norm sensitivity and its influence on children's intergroup attitudes.

The implication of these findings is that school-based approaches to reducing children's intergroup bias should not just consider school norms. These results suggest they need to consider both school and peer group norms together (Jones, Bombieri, Livingstone, & Manstead, 2012; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004) and the degree to which children focus on inclusive norms when held accountable to significant others (Rutland et al., 2005, 2010). In ethnically heterogeneous schools, where opportunities for cross-ethnic friendships exist, research suggests that the promotion of cross-ethnic friendships is one way to encourage more inclusive in-group norms, and in turn, this results in more positive ethnic attitudes (e.g. Cameron et al, 2011; Feddes, Noack & Rutland, 2009).

In sum, the present study showed an explicit morally-based inclusive school norm was effective in promoting positive out-group attitudes amongst children. Importantly, though, we demonstrated that this positive benefit was absent when the peer group norm was exclusionary and children were held accountable to either peers or teachers. Finally, the present study also showed an inclusive school norm was most effective when paired with an inclusive peer group norm and children thought they were answerable to their teachers. The development of inclusive group norms has the potential to challenge negative intergroup attitudes, and even prejudice-based bullying. However, when designing interventions to

challenge such attitudes and behavior, consideration needs to be given to which norms are important and when will they be most influential in changing attitudes.

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Figure 1. The effect of school norm and accountability on children's out-group attitudes when the peer group norm was exclusive (with Standard Error bars).

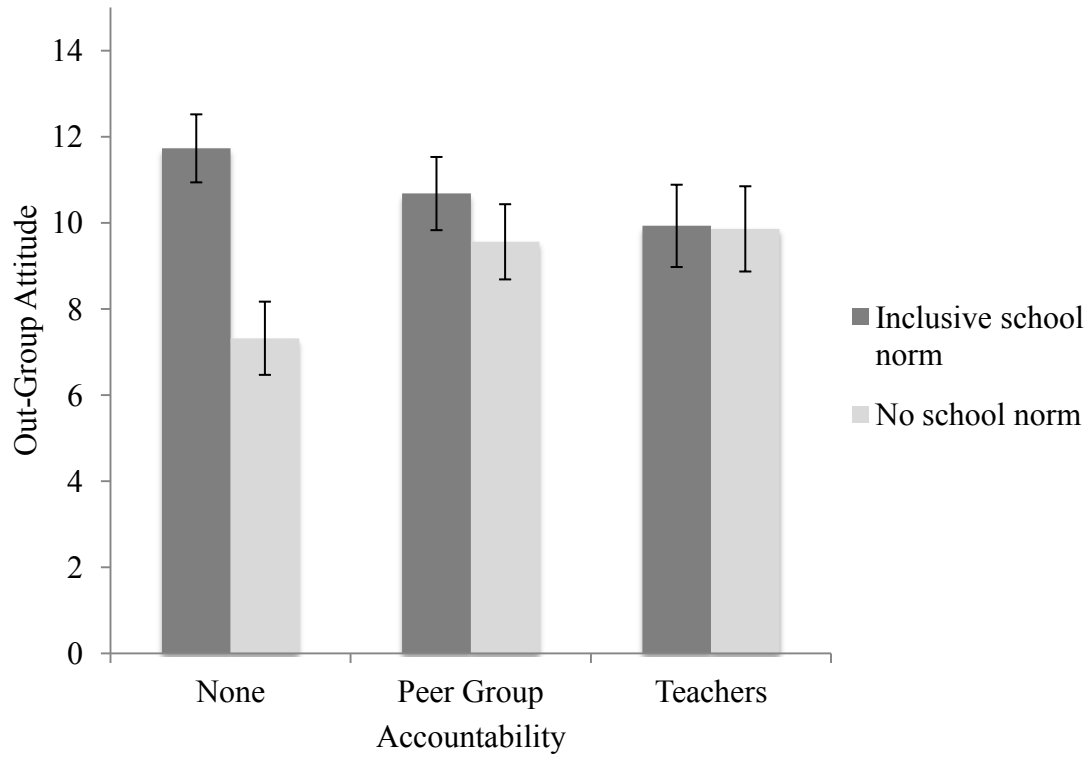


Figure 2. The effect of school norm and accountability on children's out-group attitudes when the peer group norm was inclusive (with Standard Error bars).

