The Development of In-Group Favoritism: Between Social Reality and Group Identity

Maykel Verkuyten and Angela De Wolf
Utrecht University

This study examined how social reality restricts children's tendency for in-group favoritism in group evaluations. Children were faced with social reality considerations and with group identity concerns. Using short stories, in this experimental study, conducted among 3 age groups (6-, 8-, and 10-year-olds), the authors examined the trait attribution effects of reality constraints on eye-color differences and national group differences. The results show that the trait attributions of all age groups were restricted by the acceptance of socially defined reality. In addition, when the information about reality was not considered accurate, only the youngest children showed positive in-group favoritism. It is argued that these findings are useful in trying to reconcile some of the divergent and contrasting findings in the developmental literature on children's intergroup perceptions and evaluations.

Keywords: in-group favoritism, stereotypes, group identity, social reality

Teacher:	The blue-eyed people are the better people in this room.
Pupil:	Oh no.
Teacher:	Oh yes they are. Blue-eyed people are smarter than brown-eyed people.
Pupil:	Oh no.
Teacher:	One day you came to school and told us your dad kicked you.
Pupil:	He did.
Teacher:	Do you think a blue-eyed father would kick his son? My dad had blue eyes; he never kicked me. Greg's dad has blue eyes; he never kicked him. What color eyes did George Washington have?
Class:	Blue.
Teacher:	Blue, yes. This is a fact that blue-eyed people are better than brown-eyed people.

This extract is from the documentary *The Eye of the Storm* (Center for the Humanities, 1970) in which it is shown how Jane Elliot, a primary school teacher in Iowa, carried out her famous classroom intervention. All of her students were White, and to teach them something about race and racism, she divided the class into two groups, brown-eyed and blue-eyed students. This process of categorization changed the situation from one in which there were individual pupils to one in which there were two "racial" groups. Elliot proceeded to treat the one group as if they were

inferior, and the next day she subjected the other group to the same treatment. Having blue or brown eyes was no longer an insignificant feature but became consequential and meaningful. Elliot's classroom intervention is typically seen as a powerful example of the intergroup nature of stereotypes and prejudice. It vividly illustrates what happens when children's self-understandings are derived from the social groups to which they belong.

As shown in the extract, the distinction was not readily accepted by the students. Elliot had to do quite some discursive work to make it plausible and justified. She turned the distinction into realities by stressing their factual nature ("This is a fact") and by giving concrete examples that would prove that blue-eyed (or brown-eyed) people are smarter, nicer, or simply better. After defining it as real, she associated the two groups with different rights and privileges. She argued that because the blue-eyed people are the better people, they, for example, should sit at the best places in the front of the class, go first in line, be allowed to use a paper cup to drink from the water fountain, get extra minutes at recess, and be allowed to go for seconds in the cafeteria.

In the class and in the playground, the children started to use the labels among themselves for self-definition and for describing and treating others. They started to act in agreement with the way the categories were defined and began to understand and to live their lives accordingly. When an individual is one of the better people and being better means having more rights and privileges, then it is logical to behave in such a way. In other words, one could argue that within the logic of the situation as defined, the children's behavior was rational, reality oriented, and not stereotypical or prejudiced, although the children also started to use the labels in name calling. It is only because people know that blue- and brown-eyed children actually do not differ in capacities and traits that they see this as an example of stereotyping and prejudice. We expect that it is when people ignore socially defined reality and make an unfounded intergroup distinction in favor of their own group that social identity processes are involved.

Maykel Verkuyten and Angela De Wolf, Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Maykel Verkuyten, Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands. E-mail: m.verkuyten@fss.uu.nl

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is increasingly being used as an important framework for understanding group evaluations among children (see Bennett & Sani, 2004). The theory accounts for the development of intergroup relations in terms of processes of self-categorization and group identity, and it has been found to explain gender, ethnic, racial, national, and other group distinctions (e.g., Bennett, Lyons, Sani, & Barrett, 1998; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; Nesdale, 2004; Reizábal, Valencia, & Barrett, 2004; Rutland, 1999; Spielman, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001; Yee & Brown, 1992). A key assumption of the theory is that people are motivated to evaluate their own group positively, thereby enhancing or maintaining a positive sense of their social self. According to SIT, establishing favorable distinctiveness of one's group vis-à-vis other groups, or in-group favoritism, helps to achieve a positive group identity. In-group favoritism is regarded as a primary strategy for securing positive identity, and research among children has shown that such favoritism does indeed positively and causally affect self-feelings (e.g., Verkuyten, 2001, 2007). However, for SIT, in-group favoritism is by no means an automatic product of group distinctions (see Reicher, 2004). The theory stresses that psychological processes should be examined in social context. The cognitive process of social categorization and the striving for a positive identity can explain why people show, for example, in-group favoritism but do not explain when people show such favoritism and how people make positive group distinctions (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). In-group favoritism is a function, for example, of normative beliefs about group differences, perceived group threats, and the actual status positions of the groups concerned (McGarty, 2001; Nesdale, 2004; Turner, 1999). Tajfel (1979) argued that these forms of social reality should be taken into account when examining group behavior, and self-categorization theory (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994) states that the preference for positive social identities is constrained by the reality principle (Spears, 2002). Trait attributions or stereotype content, for example, are considered and found to be sensitive to the realities of group life. Stereotypes are seen as tools that are used to represent group members' shared social reality (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, & Doosje, 2002). Thus, there is not only the need for a positive identity but also the need to stay in touch with socially defined reality.

Social Reality Constraints

Children are curious about the elements that constitute the world that they try to make sense of. They are strongly motivated to seek appropriate evidence and arguments for understanding the social world. The mechanism of epistemic motivation implies a drive to understand and master events in the world and thus to create knowledge (Fischer & Connell, 2003; Van Geert, 1998). Epistemic motivation is central in a Piagetian framework in which, for example, the process of accommodation indicates the modification of existing knowledge structures in order to deal with new discoveries (Piaget, 1972). Children also have been found to strive to interpret or make sense of social rules, regulations, and practices (Corsaro & Eder, 1990). Furthermore, the research literature on children's societal cognition has argued and shown that acquiring an adequate understanding of social reality, including social groups (Hirschfeld, 1996), is a crucial aspect of the process of growing up (see Barrett & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005, for an overview). Such an understanding is important for being able to function appropriately within various situations and contexts. This means that it can be expected that the desire to view one's in-group in a positive way, as proposed by SIT, is restricted by epistemic motivation and social reality (Fischer & Connell, 2003).

By using the term *social reality*, we are not arguing for information about social groups that is necessarily valid or accurate. The emphasis is on social constructions and shared interpretations for which concepts such as socially shared knowledge (Thompson & Fine, 1999) and interobjectivity have been used (Moghaddam, 2003). According to the social identity perspective, this knowledge is inherently linked to group memberships and self-categorizations. Groups develop shared understandings of the social world, and epistemic authorities play a major role in this development (Bar-Tal, 2004; Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Brosh, 1991). Children arrive at objectifications of the social world based on the informational and normative system provided by these authorities, such as parents and teachers. Epistemic authorities, like Elliot, exert a determinative influence on the formation of a child's knowledge and beliefs about social groups.

Ellemers, Van Rijswijk, Roefs, and Simons (1997) showed that group ratings are indeed constrained by consensual definitions of social reality. Members of two students associations were found to display in-group favoritism but without violating the social definitions about which traits were typical for each group. Other studies have found similar results (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001; Spears & Manstead, 1989). People appear to take socially defined reality into account while giving group ratings. Social identity processes are constrained by social reality, especially for subordinate groups. Similar to the Elliot example, for high-status groups, expressed superiority or in-group favoritism on consensually defined status-related dimensions can be taken to reflect social reality. In contrast, defining positive group distinctions on these status-related dimensions is more difficult for subordinate groups. People who belong to such a group are motivated to differentiate their group in a positive sense from other groups, but the fact of their lower status prevents them from claiming a positive identity on these status dimensions. Hence, it can be argued that subordinate group members will display in-group favoritism but without violating socially defined reality. It is only when specific trait dimensions are not clearly or consensually associated with an out-group that there is room for in-group favoritism on these dimensions.

Empirical Evidence

To our knowledge, no studies have explicitly and systematically examined how social reality affects in-group favoritism among children. Studies have either focused on social identity processes or have examined cognitive development in terms of children's increased ability to make adequate sense of social reality. For example, sociocognitive theory (Aboud, 1988) suggests that the developmental trajectory of prejudice depends on cognitive development. The idea is that some group judgments reflect actual existing differences better than others and that, with age, cognitive processes and structures become more adapted to reality. Hence, a developmental sequence of reduced prejudice is proposed. There is some supporting evidence for this theory (e.g., Doyle & Aboud,

1995; Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988; see Aboud & Amato, 2001, for a review), but there are also some problematic research findings. For example, some studies indicate a renewed elevation in prejudice during early adolescence, which is not in line with the linear prediction of the theory (e.g., Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Reizábal et al., 2004; Rutland, 1999; Teichman, 2001).

Furthermore, the theory does not provide adequate explanations for understanding intergroup evaluations of children from low-status or subordinate groups. Bigler, Brown, and Markell (2001), for example, found that children of self-perceived high-status groups developed in-group favoring attitudes, whereas low-status group children did not. In addition, Nesdale and Flesser (2001) found that children as young as 5 years of age are sensitive to group status differences that have an impact on their group attitudes. Although expressing liking for their in-group, children in a low-status group were less positive about their in-group and wished to change groups more often than did children in the high-status group. Furthermore, ethnic and racial minority group children have been found to assign more negative than positive traits to in-group representative figures than out-group figures (e.g., Cramer & Anderson, 2003; Davey, 1983; Williams, Best, & Boswell, 1975). However, other studies did not find an effect for comparative status on group attitudes (e.g., Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2004; Yee & Brown, 1992, 1994), and various studies have found in-group favoritism among ethnic minority group children (e.g., Verkuyten, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001).

One probable reason for these varied results is the role of socially defined reality. Reality constrains minority group children in making favorable in-group comparisons on dimensions that are seen as more typical for the dominant out-group. In their research, Yee and Brown (1992) manipulated group status by giving pre-school and elementary school-age children bogus scores for an egg-and-spoon race that ostensibly placed them either in a fast or a slow team. The children were also told that members of the high- and low-status (i.e., fast and slow) groups were selected for membership in a particular group on the basis of their performance in the race. Group status was found not to affect in-group and out-group affective ratings because both groups showed in-group favoritism. Status did have a moderating effect, however, on the performance ratings. The in-group team was rated as faster than the other team by children placed on the fast team, whereas children placed on the slow team rated their in-group team as slower than the other team. Thus, the performance ratings were in accord with the actual comparison information given. Hence, these performance ratings reflected reality rather than social identity concerns that, probably, guided the affective ratings.

Social Identity and Social Reality Constraints

The central aim of the present research conducted in the Netherlands was to try to make a more systematic case for the importance of considering reality for understanding children's intergroup trait attributions. Thus, the focus was on the differential attribution of traits to the in-group compared with the out-group. The central idea tested is that in-group favoritism among children of subordinate groups is dependent on their understanding of social reality as defined by epistemic authorities. This idea was examined among three age groups (6-, 8-, and 10-year-olds) and by using short stories in which, first, Elliot's distinction between blue and

brown eyes was used and, second, national group differences were manipulated experimentally.

When one examines social reality constraints, it is important to be able to control for the stereotypicality of the dimensions that are used to give group ratings. Only then is it possible to reliably separate social reality constraints from biased judgments. This means that the way the social reality of the group distinction is defined should be manipulated or assessed independently. We used two approaches for doing so. First, in the story about eye color, we were able to consider children whose identity is not linked to membership in either the blue-eyed or the brown-eyed group. Children with green or gray eyes do not belong to these groups (the nonmembers) and therefore have no vested identity interest in one group or the other. Hence, their ratings most likely reflect the real perceived differences between the two groups (see Ellemers et al., 1997). These nonmembers' ratings can be compared with those of children who are members of one or the other eye-color group—and the low-status group in particular—and who will have a desire to make a favorable in-group distinction.

The assumption behind this first approach is that the nonmembers' ratings reflect reality. Although plausible, this assumption implies an indirect test of reality constraints because reality is not measured or manipulated experimentally. Therefore, we, secondly, used a more direct test in the three stories about national group differences. We experimentally used two frames that refer to the distinction between fact and opinion. Thus, national group characteristics were presented in either a social reality account or as a more personal belief. In the stories, children were presented with situations in which a comparison was made between the Dutch in-group and a national out-group. In the stories, three comparison out-groups were used: a nonexisting national out-group (Moorland) and two existing national groups (Chinese and Americans). For each out-group, one particular trait dimension was used. This means that there was a confounding of out-group and dimension. However, we were not concerned with the rating differences among these three out-groups but rather with the question of whether for these groups social reality restricts biased evaluations in a similar way. In addition, because our study focused on the relationship between social reality and group identity among subordinate groups, we tried to place the participants in a subordinate or low-status position. That means that all comparisons were unfavorable for the in-group. Inducing a low-status position in comparison with an unknown, nonexisting out-group might be difficult, however. That is why we also included two existing national groups (Chinese and Americans) and used two trait dimensions that were considered rather typical for both groups.

Age Differences

In order to examine possible age differences in reality constraints, we studied three age groups. Developmental accounts of group attitudes argue for changes as a function of age. For example, sociocognitive theory (Aboud, 1988) assumes an age-related progression in the ability to perceive and interpret group stimuli and intergroup behaviors. Changes in group attitudes would correspond to changing cognitive abilities that expand children's experiences and focus of attention. In particular, it is argued that, because of limited cognitive capabilities, affective influences, emotional attachments, and an egocentric social perspective, pre-

schoolers (4- to 6-year-olds) prefer their own social group and dislike other groups. When children reach the age of 7–8, cognitive development advances to concrete operational thinking (Piaget, 1972) whereby views of people shift from affective criteria to more objective and less egocentric ones, leading to a steady decline in prejudice. In their study, Yee and Brown (1992) found an age effect for the group performance ratings of the egg-and-spoon race. In the low-status group, the 5-year-olds did show the most overall in-group favoritism on these ratings, followed by the 7-year-olds, whereas the 9-year-olds did not favor their in-group. Hence, the 5-year-olds, but not the 9-year-olds, disregarded the comparison information provided and evaluated their own team as faster than the other (fast) team. In studying self-evaluative responses in an achievement setting, Ruble, Parsons, and Ross (1976) found a similar age effect. In two studies, they found that the use of outcome and task ease information about the achievement task increased with age: 10-year-olds made more use of the information for making self-evaluations than did 6-year-olds.

The developmental progression in group attitudes can also be accounted for in other terms (e.g., Ocampo, Knight, & Bernal, 1997). Rather than changes in cognitive development, age-related increases in knowledge and learning may be responsible for group attitudes. This is particularly likely for large-scale social groups with which children have few daily experiences, such as other nationalities. Awareness and knowledge about these kinds of groups increases with age (Barrett, Lyons, & Del Valle, 2004; Ocampo et al., 1997; McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Both lines of thinking led us to expect that with age, children would be more strongly influenced or restricted by "reality" in making intergroup differentiations.

To summarize, we examined children's group evaluations when the intergroup comparison is with their in-group disadvantage. We expected that socially defined reality would restrict the children's tendency to show in-group favoritism. Hence, under the condition of reality constraints, brown-eyed children (low status in the eye-color story) and participants in general (low status in the national comparisons) were not expected to show in-group favoritism, whereas in-group favoritism was expected when there was no such constraint. In addition, with age, children were expected to more strongly take account of the socially defined or evidence-based (lack of) differences between groups. This means that we expected social identity concerns to be more influential among 6-year-old than among 10-year-old children. Thus, the former age group was expected to show in-group favoritism, whereas the latter group was not.

Most studies on intergroup relations use difference scores to examine in-group favoritism or the evaluation of the in-group relative to the out-group. Difference scores have the dual advantage of corresponding to the theoretical idea of positive intergroup differentiation and that they take some response biases into account. For example, children may have a tendency to give positive responses so that in-group positive evaluations correlate strongly with out-group positive evaluations. Furthermore, difference scores are adequate when people do not evaluate groups independently but are explicitly asked to make an intergroup comparison, as in the present study. Hence, we examined in-group favoritism or difference scores. However, various authors have pointed out and found that there are different processes determining the in-group and out-group aspects of group differentiation among children

(e.g., Aboud, 2003; Bennett et al., 2004; Brewer, 1999; Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). In-group oriented patterns of preference do not have to be accompanied by rejection of other groups. Because of this, we also examined in- and out-group trait attributions separately.

Method

Sample

In total, 337 ethnically Dutch children participated in the study (52% were girls and 48% were boys). There were 119 children from Grade Level 3 whose mean age was 6.37 (SD = 0.53), 105 children from Grade Level 5 (mean age = 8.40, SD = 0.58), and 113 children from Grade Level 7 (mean age = 10.47, SD = 0.56). The participants were drawn from primary schools in the cities of Utrecht and Rotterdam.

Design

For measuring trait attributions, we used short stories. Similar to the Elliot example, the stories involved an adult person (the epistemic authority) making group assessments of, first, blue-eyed and brown-eyed children and, subsequently, of three national out-groups in comparison with the Dutch. These two types of tasks were used in order to examine social reality in two ways: (a) first, by using the ratings of children (green or gray eyes) who do not belong to any of the two eye-color groups involved in the comparison and (b) second, by using the distinction between a social reality account and a personal belief. The first task offers an indirect test of reality constraints and the second one offers a more direct test. The combination of both tasks allowed us to examine whether reality constraints are found across different tasks and different intergroup contexts.

The participants were presented first with a story about eye-color differences that read as follows:

> The other day on television in *The News for Children* there was a famous professor who was talking about teasing. He said, "I have done a lot of research on teasing and I have discovered that children who have blue eyes tease other children much less than children who have brown eyes. People with blue eyes are much nicer than people with brown eyes and that's why they tease less."

The aim of this story was to place the brown-eyed participants in a subordinate status position.

For measuring national stereotypes, we used three stories. Because we were interested in the ways that low-status groups coordinate identity concerns with social reality, we presented the three national out-groups as relatively more positive than the Dutch. This was done by using the traits "hard working" in relation to Moorlanders, "warm and friendly" in relation to Chinese, and "smart" in relation to Americans. The choice of the traits for the latter two nationalities was based on informal discussions with children about typical traits of different nationalities. Being warm and friendly was considered relatively typical of Chinese people, and being smart was considered typical of Americans (see also Cullingford, 2000). A between-subjects design was used in which half of the children of each age group were presented with stories in which epistemic authorities emphasized the factual nature of the national differences. The other half of the children were presented

with the same stories but with an emphasis on the characterization being a personal opinion. In doing so, the distinction between knowing and thinking was used, and children have been found to be sensitive to the epistemic implications of these mental verbs (see Wellman, 1990). In presenting these stories, we used a fully randomized design in which both the order of the three stories presented was randomized as well as the factual nature of the stories. The two stories about Moorlanders are as follows, with the alternate ending shown in brackets:

> Have you ever heard of Moorland? Do you know where it is? It is a country far away from here at the other side of the world, close to Australia. The Moorlanders live there. One day, at another school, a man came to tell the children something about Moorland. He knows a lot about it because he has lived there for many, many years. He says that Moorlanders are more hard-working people than the Dutch. [He has never been in Moorland but has heard about it. He says that he is not sure, but he thinks that Moorlanders are more hard working people than the Dutch].

The stories about the Chinese read as follows, with the alternate ending shown in brackets:

> Yesterday in the newspaper there was a story about a woman who for many years has studied Chinese at the University. She has learned very much about the Chinese and knows them well. She says that Chinese people are really much warmer and friendlier than Dutch people [. . . who likes China but does not know much about them. She says that she thinks that Chinese people are much warmer and friendlier than Dutch people].

And the following two stories were used for the Americans, with the alternate ending shown in brackets:

> Last week there was a TV program about America and all the beautiful things that they make there. In the program, there was an older teacher who has worked in Dutch schools but also in many American schools. She says that she knows why Americans make so many beautiful things: It is because they are much smarter than the Dutch. [In the program, there was an older teacher who has only worked at Dutch schools and never been to America. She says that she is not sure, but she thinks that Americans make so many beautiful things because they are much smarter than the Dutch.]

Procedure and Measures

The children were seen individually in 20-min sessions by two trained researchers, one of whom was Angela De Wolf. Interviews took place in quiet rooms set aside for the purpose of conducting the research.

After the eye-color story, the children were asked three questions. The first question was on eye-color self-categorization, and the children were asked to indicate what their own eye color was. Their self-labeling was checked by the experimenter and there were very few miscategorizations. Subsequently they were asked two questions on group stereotypes: "How many children with blue eyes are nice and friendly?" and "How many children with brown eyes are nice and friendly?" For these two questions and to visualize the response categories, children were presented with four cards with rectangles of increasing size (see Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Van den Bergh & De Rycke, 2003). The smallest card represented *very few* (1) and the largest card represented *many* (4).

For each story on the national group differences, the children were asked three questions using 4-point scales. The questions were on out-group stereotypes (e.g., "How many Chinese are nice and friendly?"), in-group stereotypes (e.g., "How many Dutch are nice and friendly?"), and their own assessment of the truth of the statement made by the person in the story (e.g., "Do you think that it is really true what that woman says that Chinese are nicer and friendlier than the Dutch?"). For the first two questions, children were presented with the same four cards with rectangles of increasing size as response categories. For the third question, similar cards were used but this time the response categories ranged from 1 (*not true*) to 4 (*true*).

In order to make sure that the children understood the task and were familiar with the response cards, we asked two preliminary questions. The children were asked whether they liked dogs and whether they thought that purple was a nice color. They responded by choosing the appropriate response card.

Results

Blue Eyes and Brown Eyes

On the self-categorization question, 144 children (43%) said that they had blue eyes, 128 children (37%) indicated that they had brown eyes, and 65 children (19%) had another eye color (green, gray).

The eye-color story had a clear intergroup character, and the children were explicitly asked to make a comparison between blue-eyed and brown-eyed peers. Thus, we examined the level of intergroup differentiation by subtracting the out-group eye-color score from the in-group eye-color score. Hence, a higher score indicates a more positive differentiation in favor of the own eye-color group. For the other eye-color participants, we subtracted the brown-eyed score from the blue-eyed score.

The intergroup score was subjected to a 3×3 analysis of variance (ANOVA), with age and self-categorized eye color (brown, blue, other) as between-subjects variables. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for self-categorized eye color, $F(2, 337) = 27.58$, $p < .001$. A post hoc analysis indicated that all differences among the three groups were significant ($ps < .01$). As shown in the last column in Table 1, the high-status blue-eyed participants had the most positive score, followed by the low-status brown-eyed participants and the participants with other eye colors. The score of the other eye-colored participants did not differ significantly from zero, $t(63) = 1.66$, $p > .10$. Hence, despite the introductory story, these nonmembers who have no vested interest in one eye-color group or the other did not see being nice and friendly as more typical for either brown- or blue-eyed peers. This social reality of no actual differences can be expected to restrict the desire to view oneself in a positive way. Thus, children who are members of the two eye-color groups under investigation should not hold more biased judgments favoring the in-group. However, positive in-group favoritism was found. The blue-eyed participants did evaluate blue-eyed peers more positively than brown-eyed peers, and their score differed significantly from zero indicating in-group favoritism, $t(144) = 7.16$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the low-status brown-eyed participants also showed in-group favoritism, $t(127) = 3.66$, $p < .001$.

Table 1
Positive In-Group Favoritism Scores for Three Age Groups

Eye-color self-categorization	Six-year-olds (N = 119)		Eight-year-olds (N = 105)		Ten-year-olds (N = 113)		Total	
	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n
High-status blue	1.03	56	0.31	53	0.09	35	0.55	144
Low-status brown	0.75	44	0.03	40	0.09	44	0.28	128
Other	0.42	19	−0.01	12	0.09	34	0.17	65

Note. For the other group, we computed the score by subtracting the brown-eyed score from the blue-eyed score.

As expected, however, the main effect for eye-color self-categorization was qualified by a significant interaction effect with age, $F(4, 237) = 14.07$, $p < .001$. Separate analysis revealed a significant effect for the 6-year-olds, $F(2, 118) = 31.32$, $p < .001$, no significant effect for the 8-year-olds, $F(2, 103) = 2.56$, $p < .08$, and no significant effect for the 10-year-olds, $F(2, 107) = 1.86$, $p > .10$. For the youngest age group, the score for the other eye-colored participants did not differ significantly from zero, $t(18) = 1.41$, $p > .10$. However, for the low-status brown-eyed participants, as expected, in-group favoritism was found among the 6-year-olds, $t(43) = 4.60$, $p < .001$, but not among the two older age groups. Thus, the reality of nonexisting differences between blue-eyed and brown-eyed peers restricted the older low-status participants (brown-eyed) from making a positive in-group differentiation but not the 6-year-olds.

For the high-status blue-eyed participants, significant in-group favoritism was found for the 6-year-olds, $t(57) = 7.11$, $p < .001$, and for the 8-year-olds, $t(53) = 3.33$, $p < .01$, but not for the 10-year-olds.

In addition to intergroup differentiation, the evaluations of the blue-eyed target group and the brown-eyed target group were analyzed separately. For the evaluation of the high-status blue-eyed group, significant main effects for age and for self-categorized eye color were found (ps $< .001$). These effects were qualified, however, by a significant interaction effect between these two factors, $F(4, 337) = 6.24$, $p < .001$. For the two oldest age groups, no differences for self-categorization were found. For the 6-year-olds, however, the evaluation of blue-eyed peers was significantly more positive among the blue-eyed participants ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.58$) than among the brown-eyed participants ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.84$). Post hoc tests indicated that the score for the other eye-colored participants was in between ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.98$) and did not differ significantly from the other two.

There was also a significant interaction effect for the evaluation of the low-status brown-eyed peers, $F(4, 337) = 2.70$, $p < .001$. Again, there was only a difference for the youngest age group. For this age group, post hoc analysis revealed that the brown-eyed participants ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.76$) had a significantly more positive score than did the blue-eyed participants ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.91$) and the other eye-colored participants ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.98$). These results suggest that compared with the two older age groups, the evaluations of the 6-year-olds were more strongly driven by social identity than by social reality concerns.

National Group Comparisons

Truth assessment. In a first set of analyses, we examined whether the experimental manipulations (facts vs. opinions) had effects on children's own estimation of how really true the claims in the stories were. ANOVAs, with experimental manipulation and age as variables, revealed that the experimental condition had significant effects for all three stories. There were no effects for age or for the interaction between experimental manipulation and age.

For the Moorland comparison, the children were more convinced of the stories in the experimental factual condition ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.95$) than in the opinion condition ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 0.90$), $F(1, 345) = 4.22$, $p < .05$. For the Chinese comparison, a similar difference was found, $F(1, 333) = 7.81$, $p < .01$. The truth score was higher in the factual condition ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.79$) than in the opinion condition ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 0.92$). For the American comparison, the difference was also significant $F(1, 333) = 4.55$, $p < .05$. Again, the children were more convinced of the stories in the factual condition ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.88$) than in the opinion condition ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 0.87$).

Thus, the children were more convinced of the stories in the factual condition than in the opinion condition. The mean scores, however, were low and around "a bit true" indicating that most children were skeptical. Furthermore, preliminary analyses showed no significant effects of the experimental condition on the various intergroup differentiations. However, because the experimental manipulation did have effects on the children's truth assessment, we did additional analyses with this variable for which a distinction between not true versus somewhat true was made.

Moorland comparison. The stories had a clear intergroup character, and the children were explicitly asked to make group comparisons. Thus, we examined the level of intergroup differentiation by subtracting the out-group (Moorland) score from the in-group (Dutch) score. Hence, a higher score indicates a more positive in-group differentiation. An ANOVA, with age and truth assessment as variables, revealed no significant interaction effect. However, there was a clear significant main effect for the latter variable, $F(1, 331) = 36.37$, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 2, the children who did not consider the assessment in the story to be true showed positive in-group differentiation, $t(133) = 4.32$, $p < .01$. In contrast, negative in-group differentiation was found for the children who rated the statement as true, $t(198) = 4.40$, $p < .001$. Hence, when there were no reality constraints, participants showed

Table 2

In-Group Favoritism Scores (Dutch Minus Other) for Three Age Groups and Children's Truth Assessment (Not True vs. Somewhat True)

Comparison out-group	6-year-olds ($N = 119$)		8-year-olds ($N = 105$)		10-year-olds ($N = 113$)		Total	
	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n
Moorland "more hard working"								
Not true	0.60	66	0.46	63	0.19	75	0.44[x]	204
Somewhat true	−0.09	53	−0.31	42	−0.45	38	−0.29[y]	133
Total	0.18[a]		0.07[a]		−0.25[b]			
Chinese "more warm and friendly"								
Not true	1.37	56	0.63	56	0.23	63	0.82[x]	175
Somewhat true	0.14	63	0.27	49	0.08	50	0.16[y]	162
Total	0.79[a]		0.44[b]		0.14[c]			
Americans "smarter"								
Not true	1.08	51	0.40	53	0.17	60	0.58[x]	164
Somewhat true	0.01	68	0.20	52	0.01	53	0.06[y]	173
Total	0.60[a]		0.29[b]		0.08[b]			

Note. Positive scores reflect in-group favoritism, and negative scores reflect out-group favoritism. Row and column total scores with different superscripts represent significant differences.

in-group favoritism. In contrast, when children accepted socially defined reality, they showed out-group favoritism.

This result for intergroup differentiation can be due to an effect on the in-group or the out-group score or on both. Additional ANOVAs, with the in-group and out-group evaluations as separate dependent variables, revealed that the truth assessment had a significant effect on both in-group evaluation, $F(1, 333) = 8.38$, $p < .001$, and on out-group evaluation, $F(1, 333) = 18.75$, $p < .001$. The children who rated the assessment as true had a more positive out-group score and a more negative in-group score than did the children who did not consider the assessment in the story very likely.

For intergroup differentiation, the ANOVA also revealed a main effect for age, $F(2, 331) = 3.85$, $p < .05$. Simple main effects analysis showed a linear age trend whereby the 6-year-olds showed the highest level of positive intergroup differentiation, followed by the 8-year-olds and then the 10-year-olds, who showed out-group favoritism (see Table 2). A post hoc analysis indicated that the difference between the latter age group and the two others was significant. The scores of the 6- and 8-year-olds did not differ significantly. Separate analyses for in-group and out-group scores indicated that there was a significant age effect for in-group evaluation only, $F(2, 333) = 14.74$, $p < .001$. The 6-year-olds had a more positive score ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.75$) compared with the 8-year-olds ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.72$) and the 10-year-olds ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.61$).

Chinese comparison. For intergroup differentiation (Dutch–Chinese), a significant effect for truth assessment was found, $F(1, 331) = 25.60$, $p < .001$. The result is shown in the last column in Table 2. There was positive in-group differentiation for the children who considered the claim in the story not to be true, $t(159) = 9.19$, $p < .001$. For the other children, the intergroup differentiation score did not differ significantly from zero, $t(174) = 1.32$, $p > .10$. Hence, positive in-group favoritism was found when no reality constraints were accepted. There was also a main effect for age, $F(2, 331) = 9.33$, $p < .001$. The youngest children showed more

in-group favoritism than did the 8-year-olds, and the oldest age group had the lowest score (see Table 2).

However, these main effects were qualified by an expected significant interaction effect between age and truth assessment, $F(2, 231) = 8.79$, $p < .001$. Separate analysis showed a significant effect for truth for the 6-year-olds, $t(118) = 5.44$, $p < .001$, and a nonsignificant effect for the 8-year-olds, $t(103) = 1.95$, $p = .053$. The effect for the 10-year-olds was not significant. Hence, only among the two youngest age groups was the in-group favoritism stronger in the not-true compared with the somewhat-true condition.

A separate ANOVA for in-group and out-group evaluation revealed for the former score a main effect for age, $F(2, 333) = 20.25$, $p < .001$. The 6-year-olds had a more positive in-group score ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.83$) than did the other two age groups that did not differ significantly (8-year-olds: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.79$; 10-year-olds: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.68$).

For out-group evaluation, there was a significant effect for truth, $F(1, 331) = 30.43$, $p < .001$, that, however, was qualified by an interaction effect with age, $F(2, 331) = 7.58$, $p < .001$. For the 6-year-olds, the truth assessment made a difference for their evaluation of the out-group, $t(118) = 3.53$, $p < .001$. For the 8-year-olds, the difference was not significant, $t(103) = 1.72$, $p < .08$, and for the 10-year-olds, there was not a significant difference.

United States comparison. Intergroup (Dutch–Americans) differentiation was examined as a dependent variable in an ANOVA, with age and truth assessment as between-subjects variables. As shown in Table 2 (last column), there again was a main effect for truth assessment, $F(1, 331) = 28.15$, $p < .001$. Those who doubted the reality as defined in the story showed positive in-group differentiation, $t(158) = 7.88$, $p < .001$, whereas those who rated the story as somewhat true did not make an evaluative distinction between both national groups. There was also a main effect for age, $F(2, 333) = 8.64$, $p < .001$. The youngest children showed more in-group favoritism than did the 8-year-olds and the 10-year-olds (see Table 2).

These main effects were qualified by the expected interaction effect between truth assessment and age, $F(2, 333) = 10.44, p < .001$. Separate analysis showed a significant effect for truth for the 6-year-olds, $t(125) = 5.45, p < .001$, but there were no significant effects for the other two age groups. Hence, only among the youngest age group was relatively strong in-group favoritism found in the not-true condition.

For out-group evaluation, an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for truth assessment, $F(1, 333) = 39.11, p < .001$, that was qualified, however, by an interaction effect with age, $F(2, 333) = 6.91, p < .001$. Six-year-olds and 8-year-olds were more positive about Americans when they accepted that the story was somewhat true, whereas the difference was not significant ($p < .08$) for the 10-year-olds.

For in-group evaluation, there was only a significant age effect, $F(2, 333) = 18.09$. The youngest age group was significantly more positive about the Dutch ($M = 3.33, SD = 0.68$) compared with the other two age groups (8-year-olds: $M = 2.89, SD = 0.75$; 10-year-olds: $M = 2.83, SD = 0.61$).

Discussion

In order to examine whether information about social reality restricts subordinate children's tendency for in-group favoritism, we used the distinction between eye color and manipulated experimentally the nature of national group differences. For the eye-color story, we included the ratings by nonmembers to assess whether the children found the claim in the story convincing. These nonmembers have no vested interest in either group and therefore no self-serving group identity reasons to favor one or the other group. Their ratings indicated that despite the story, they did not make an evaluative distinction between both groups. This finding suggests that being nice and friendly was not considered more typical for blue-eyed or brown-eyed peers. In addition, after answering the questions on the story, the majority of children (all eye colors) explained to the researchers that they did not believe the professor's claim in the story and they referred to their own everyday experiences to argue that there is no such group difference. The reality of a nonexisting difference restricts the possibility for in-group favoritism. It is very difficult to credibly claim in-group superiority when consensually no empirical basis for an association between groups and traits is acknowledged to exist. The results show that the 10-year-olds did indeed show no such favoritism and that there was only a tendency to do so among the 8-year-old blue-eyed participants. Hence, the two oldest age groups, and both the blue-eyed and brown-eyed group, did not show in-group favoritism. However, the 6-year-olds did show a clear pattern of in-group favoritism. The low-status brown-eyed participants evaluated the brown-eyed peers more positively, and the high-status blue-eye participants did the same with the blue-eyed peers. Hence, whereas the group evaluations of the older children appeared to be constrained by socially defined reality (the nonexisting group differences), the responses of the younger children seemed to be driven more by the motivation to make favorable evaluations of the in-group and thereby of the self (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These results are similar to research that has found that in making self-evaluations and intergroup evaluations, 5- and 6-year-olds disregard factual information more easily than do 9- and 10-year-olds (Ruble et al., 1976; Yee & Brown, 1992).

Our interpretation of these results for the eye-color task rests on the assumptions that the nonmembers' ratings reflect reality. This assumption is plausible but also limited because it implies an indirect test of reality constraints. Its potential limitation was addressed in the national group stories in which experimental prompts were used and children's own truth assessments were considered. The manipulation in the short stories was found to affect the children's truth assessment of the group distinctions as presented. All three age groups considered the factual stories as more true than did those with an expressed opinion. Hence, the experimental manipulation influenced children's assessment of the claim as being true. In turn, this assessment was found to be related to intergroup differentiation.

Overall, children who did not consider the claim accurate showed the common and well-established pattern of positive national in-group differentiation (see Barrett et al., 2004; Bennett et al., 2004). For them, there was no social reality constraint to restrict the tendency to differentiate their national in-group positively from out-groups. However, the children who accepted the distinction as being somewhat true did not show intergroup differentiation or indicated even negative differentiation (out-group favoritism). This latter result was found in relation to an unknown out-group (Moorlanders). Additional analyses indicated that children's truth assessment was predominantly related to the out-group evaluations. The Moorlanders, Chinese, and Americans were evaluated more positively when the claim in the story was considered true. In addition, there was a negative effect on in-group evaluation but only in comparison with the Moorlanders. This pattern of findings suggests that children's group ratings—and their out-group ratings in particular—are constrained by definitions of social reality. Children appear to take socially defined reality into account when giving out-group ratings. They do not display national in-group favoritism when it is not warranted by reality or does violate the social definition as to which traits are characteristic for the out-group. There were, however, clear interactions with age.

The effect of truth assessment on the evaluation of the Chinese and Americans was strong for the 6-year-olds, not significant for the 8-year-olds, and not significant for the 10-year-olds. In all national comparisons, the 6-year-olds indicated the strongest positive intergroup differentiation, followed by the 8-year-olds and then the 10-year-olds. These age differences were not found, however, when the story claim was accepted as somewhat true. In that case, reality appeared to constrain all age groups from making positive in-group distinctions. So, the typical in-group favoritism reported in many intergroup studies among children (e.g., Bigler et al., 1997; Nesdale, 2004; Reizábal et al., 2004; Rutland, 1999; Spielman, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) was not found among the participants who rated the statement about the in-group's low status as true. Children take information about reality into account while giving group ratings and out-group ratings in particular, showing that, for all three age groups, social identity processes are constrained by social reality.

In contrast, there was an age effect for the children who did not consider the story claim to be true. Hence, when there was more room for interpretation, the youngest children showed in-group favoritism, whereas the older children made less or no differentiation between the groups. The result for the youngest children is consistent with a social identity interpretation in which children

are assumed to be motivated to evaluate their own group positively. But this motivation is probably not the only important variable. Young children's egocentrism, for example, implies that they think that their own perspective is correct. In addition, the result for the older age groups also suggests that cognitive variables are involved. Sociocognitive theory (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Amato, 2001) argues that with age the cognitive ability to perceive people of large-scale groups in individualized terms increases. This ability hampers dichotomous thinking and social categorical evaluations (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Amato, 2001). Therefore, the theory predicts a peaking of childhood in-group favoritism and prejudice around 5–7 years of age and then a decline in subsequent years. The age effect in the not-true condition is consistent with this interpretation.

However, it could also be argued that it is not so much qualitative changes in thinking that matter but rather other changes. Older children have more knowledge and more developed personal beliefs about large-scale collectivities such as ethnic and national groups (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2003; Barrett et al., 2004; Ocampo et al., 1997; McKown & Weinstein, 2003). This interpretation is supported by our finding for the nonexistent Moorlanders about which the children could not have any knowledge or beliefs. For all three age groups, the children's truth assessment had a similar effect on the evaluation of this group. In addition, the finding of stronger positive intergroup differentiation for 6-year-olds compared with older children was due to in-group evaluation. In contrast, out-group evaluation was not related to age but appeared to be influenced by the perceived reality of the group distinction. These results are similar to Bennett et al.'s (2004) multinational study among 6-year-old children. They found that, in addition to positive in-group evaluation, out-group attitudes were influenced by the own nation's particular social representations or widespread beliefs about the nature of other nationalities.

A third interpretation of the age effect in the not-true condition is that older children are more able to regulate the expression of in-group favoring attitudes (Rutland, 2004). With age, children become sensitive to the norms of adult society, and this change often implies the unacceptability of stereotyping and prejudice. However, not all self-serving intergroup evaluations are viewed negatively in society. In contrast to racial and ethnic prejudices, national in-group favoritism is often seen as a tolerable or patriotic form of expression. Hence, social norms surrounding national group distinctions might actually encourage more in-group favoritism among older children, as was found by Rutland (1999). Our results do not support this interpretation, however, because we found a decline in national in-group favoritism with age.

To evaluate the present results and to give some suggestions for further studies, we consider three limitations of our research. First, the cross-sectional design of the current study implies that we cannot definitively determine whether the age-related differences are due to developmental differences in children's social cognition or to some other factor such as context effects. However, the different participating age groups attended the same primary schools, and the three age groups were examined at each school.

Second, we used only positive traits and no negative traits, there was no information on knowledge of national stereotypes and personal beliefs, we examined relatively abstract social categories, and we focused predominantly on the evaluations by children in a subordinate intergroup position. Hence, further studies need to examine the generality of these results by examining, for example, negative stereotypes, assessing personal beliefs, and using different intergroup contexts and different group positions. This should make it possible to investigate various conditions and variables that may moderate and/or mediate the effects found. However, despite these limitations, our study indicates that social reality considerations can influence out-group trait ratings in middle childhood, something that has also been found among late adolescents and young adults (Ellemers et al., 1997; Spears et al., 2001; Spears & Manstead, 1989). For the four stories, the same pattern of results was found despite the fact that different comparison contexts were presented and different tasks and traits were used. Together with findings from other child studies (e.g., Sani & Bennett, 2001; Sani, Bennett, Mullally, & MacPherson, 2003), and in agreement with self-categorization theory (Haslam et al., 2002; Oakes et al., 1994), this finding suggests that group stereotypes can be cross-situationally variable rather than rigid mental structures. Future studies could also examine whether social reality considerations do not only influence trait ratings but also, for example, children's liking of and preference for their in-group compared with the out-group. Children may accept that other groups are superior to their own group on particular attributes but still favor their in-group (Yee & Brown, 1992).

Third, the experimental manipulations affected children's truth assessments, but there was no direct effect on the group evaluations. This finding leaves room for alternative interpretations. It is possible, for example, that the children rejecting or accepting the claims in the stories differ in traitlike self-confidence and that self-confident children are more inclined to rate their in-group relatively favorably. Although this explanation cannot be ruled out, the results across the two tasks (eye color and nationalities) were quite similar. Furthermore, in such a traitlike interpretation, one would expect rather strong correlations among the truth assessments for the three different nationality stories. The correlations were indeed significant, but the highest one was 0.26, indicating that the questions shared a limited amount of variance ($< 7\%$). Thus, there is some support for this alternative interpretation, but it seems unlikely that it fully accounts for the present findings.

It could also be argued, however, that children's truth assessment did not influence their intergroup evaluations but rather the other way around. Children showing in-group favoritism may have been more likely to discount the stories as untrue than those with nonfavoring in-group distinctions. Social identity concerns can also influence children's perceptions of reality. However, the results for the national group comparisons were similar to the eye-color story in which social reality was also found to restrict in-group favoritism. In addition, the children were skeptical and were not very convinced by the group stories. We deliberately did not use neighboring national out-groups for which there are relatively clear stereotypical beliefs, such as Germans, Brits, and people from Belgium. The existing stereotypes would make it difficult to manipulate the distinction between fact and opinion. However, the finding that the manipulation did not have a direct effect on the evaluation of a nonexistent and relatively unfamiliar national groups suggests that the manipulation was insufficiently clear and strong. In other words, the methodology may well have prevented a powerful test of the ideas being investigated. Elliot had to do quite some discursive work to convince her students, whereas

the present experiment used a minor manipulation. Thus, future studies should use other experimental techniques in trying to disentangle more clearly the influence of social reality and group identity.

Children are members of various social groups and want to feel good about their group membership. They can do so by making a positive distinction in favor of their own group. This is not unrestricted, however, because there is also the need to develop an adequate understanding of social reality. Whereas sociocognitive development theory can be criticized for its tendency to ignore intergroup processes, intergroup research has a similar tendency to ignore children's developing understanding of social reality. We suspect that some of the inconsistencies in findings reported in the literature are due to these tendencies. For example, the result in the present study and in others that children from subordinate groups can show out-group favoritism does not have to be contradictory to a social identity interpretation. This finding can reflect an accurate assessment of the way that social reality is defined, and such an assessment is more likely among older children. Younger children have more immature understandings, which leaves more room for social identity concerns. This means that the stronger in-group favoritism and stereotypes often found among 5- to 7-year-old children is probably not only due to their social cognitions or a lack of knowledge but also to social motivational considerations (Nesdale, 2004). It is the lack of a relatively accurate assessment of social reality that allows the motivation to make favorable intergroup evaluations to play its part in order to establish a positive identity.

Furthermore, in-group favoritism and prejudice do not have to decline with age-related increases in cognitive maturity as socio-cognitive development theory would predict. One reason is that a dominant group can think and act in terms of the ways in which group distinctions are socially defined. This happened in Elliot's classroom intervention in which the "superior" children followed the social reality they found themselves in and started to feel superior. A second reason is that in many situations there are no clear, socially agreed on or real group differences. For all age groups, ambiguous and contested aspects of intergroup situations offer many possibilities for making evaluations that favor the in-group over an out-group.

In conclusion, we have tried to argue and show that there is an important relationship between the need to develop and maintain an accurate relationship with social reality and the need for positive social identity. This relationship should be considered in trying to understand the development of intergroup attitudes among children and the development of their out-group stereotypes in particular. We think that such a consideration has promises in trying to reconcile in future studies some of the divergent and contrasting findings reported in the literature. It also has promises for understanding why it often is so difficult to change children's attitudes and the important role that epistemic authorities play in fueling or reducing stereotypes and prejudice.

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