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Evaluations of Interracial Peer Encounters by Majority and Minority U.S. Children and Adolescents

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Abstract

U.S. majority (European-American) and minority (African-American, Latin-American, Asian-American) students were interviewed regarding race-based and non-race based reasons for exclusion in interracial peer dyads ($N = 685$), evenly divided by gender at 4th, 7th, and 10th grades attending 20 public schools. All students judged race-based exclusion as the most wrong followed by non-race based reasons such as lack of shared interests, parental discomfort, and peer pressure. Minority students were more likely to judge non-race based exclusion as wrong than were majority students, and were more likely to expect that racial exclusion occurs, indicating that ethnic background and social experience are significantly related to interpretations of interracial peer dyadic reasons for exclusion.

Most research on U.S. children's and adolescents' prejudice has focused on the extent to which European American participants hold prejudicial attitudes about minority individuals, particularly African American and Latino children (Aboud & Amato, 2001; Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006). As the urban areas around the globe become more heterogeneous, however, it is increasingly important to understand how individuals, both from majority and minority ethnic backgrounds, evaluate everyday interracial interactions, particularly peer relationships (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). This approach extends past research that focused on European American children's assignment of negative traits to others based on skin color to a focus on how children from a range of ethnic backgrounds evaluate intergroup relationships, specifically in peer contexts. The former approach provided a diagnostic test of whether majority children associated negative terms to pictures of children who

represented minority groups (Aboud & Levy, 2000). In contrast, the latter perspective has examined how children, majority and minority, evaluate social exchanges involving exclusion, and make attributions of intentions in social encounters. Our approach stems from research on social cognitive development (Smetana, 2006), which examines how children evaluate familiar everyday social experiences. The findings reveal that understanding children's social interpretations and evaluations of their experiences provides information about their behavior, both normative and clinical (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000).

Recent social psychological research with adults in the area of intergroup attitudes about race and ethnicity has been aimed at understanding the "target's perspective", which involves investigating how individuals who are typically the target of discriminatory and prejudicial behavior evaluate interracial interactions (Swim & Stangor, 1998). Research with adolescents has indicated that experiences of discrimination lead to stress and anxiety (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000), and that exclusion from groups as a function of ethnicity contributes to depression and low motivation in adults (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002). Further, children's perception of discrimination provides information regarding their behavior with one another (Brown & Bigler, 2005). Yet, very little research has been conducted on minority children's viewpoints about racial exclusion in school and home contexts (Aboud, 2005). For example, what forms of reasoning do minority children and adolescents use to evaluate racial exclusion, and how often do they perceive themselves to be the target of racial exclusion by their peers? Further, when do majority children become aware that racial exclusion occurs, and how often do they perceive that it happens? Answers to these questions will help to understand how children and adolescents from different ethnic backgrounds interpret interracial peer situations, which, in turn, will provide valuable insight into peer conflicts that result from intergroup interactions.

Recently social psychologists have provided a conceptual framework for examining exclusion, and for focusing on the multiple dimensions of decision-making around exclusion in a range of social relationships and contexts (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005). The findings indicate that the psychological consequences of exclusion based on group membership, such as ethnicity, can be quite negative, and that the motives and responses to exclusion from individuals are complex. Little research has been conducted on how children and adolescents evaluate exclusion based on ethnicity. An exception is a recent developmental study with minority and majority children which found that the vast majority of all children judged that race-based exclusion from peer groups was wrong, using moral reasons such as unfair treatment (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). This pattern reflected a similar pattern of findings found in social psychology research with adults on explicit racism, which has shown that overt racist statements are very rare. Yet, while explicit racism has decreased dramatically over the past 50 years in the U.S., intergroup bias is still quite prevalent (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002b; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) and this has been demonstrated extensively with adult samples.

Findings from studies using more indirect measures to capture intergroup bias, however, have found significant differences between majority and minority youth. For example, investigations of attributions of intention using ambiguous pictures have revealed that while majority and minority children make similar judgments about attributions of intention (with

some qualifications as described below), they have different viewpoints about the potential for cross-race relationships (Margie, Killen, Sinno, & McGlothlin, 2005; McGlothlin, Killen, & Edmonds, 2005b). Specifically, 6 and 9 year old minority students were more likely to judge that a cross-race dyad, depicted in a scenario, could be friends than did majority students (attending the same schools). This is important as cross-race friendships have been shown to be one of the most significant predictors for a reduction in prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Further, in one study, European-American majority students with little contact with minority students in school settings demonstrated an ingroup bias when making attributions about intentions (McGlothlin & Killen, in press), a bias not found for European-American majority students who had regular contact with minority students in school settings (McGlothlin et al., 2005b). These findings tell us that racial biases exist when children are making decisions about peer encounters, and that these biases may not be apparent when using more explicit measures.

This leaves us with several alternative interpretations of these mixed findings. On the one hand, direct measures of judgments reveal that majority and minority children and adolescents view racial exclusion in peer encounters as wrong, and on the other hand, indirect measures reveal that majority children attribute negative intentions to minority children when evaluating ambiguous situations involving peer encounters. What is not known is whether the racial biases that are revealed by indirect measures manifest when children and adolescents are making explicit judgments about exclusion. One way to analyze this is to describe complex exclusion situations to participants that involve race as well as other possible factors that could account for exclusion. This type of methodology draws on the previous methods by using exclusion scenarios with a mixture of direct and indirect assessments. Further, the few studies conducted on implicit and intergroup bias with children have been conducted with young children (Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). Thus, more research needs to be conducted with older children and adolescents, particularly as much evidence indicates that exclusion based on group membership increases during the adolescent years (Horn, 2003).

In the present study, children and adolescents at 9, 12, and 15 years of age (4th, 7th, and 10th grades, respectively) were interviewed regarding their interpretations and evaluations of interracial peer encounters. Rather than posing a straightforward racial exclusion scenario (Is it all right or not all right for X to exclude Y who is a different race?) as has been done in prior work on explicit judgments (Killen et al., 2002), three interracial peer situations, two at school and one at home, which involved multiple variables that could form the basis for an exclusion decision based on race-or non-race-related concerns were described to participants for their evaluations. These concerns included nonshared interests (one friend likes sports and the other does not), lack of familiarity (the friend is new), nonshared school affiliation (one friend is from a rival high school), and racial differences. We probed participants' reasons for why the exclusion occurred, and we asked participants to rate the wrongfulness of different reasons for exclusion (race-based, non-race-based), including a general reason pertaining to group functioning (What if the group won't work well with someone who does not "fit" in?). We included the latter assessment based on previous findings in which group functioning was used as a basis for gender and race-based exclusion decisions by majority adolescents (Killen & Stangor, 2001).

For the current study, we were interested in determining whether there were differences in terms of how children and adolescents from majority European-American and minority ethnic backgrounds evaluate peer exclusion. There are multiple bases for expecting that minority and majority children would differ in their evaluations of interracial peer exclusion scenarios. Potentially these factors include different levels of experience with members of outgroups, different prior histories of experience with exclusion, and different messages about such interactions from family, school, and society. Social psychologists have theorized that ethnic identity is related to intergroup attitudes, yet very little empirical research has been conducted on this dimension of children's social experiences (for an exception see (Rutland, Cameron, Bennett, & Ferrell, 2005). Moreover, in a recent analysis of intergroup contact research, Dixon and colleagues (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005) called for research that investigates how participants evaluate everyday interracial exchanges rather than research which relies solely on survey methods for documenting how these types of exchanges are experienced and interpreted. The former approach was used in the present study. We conducted one-on-one interviews with individuals to evaluate how they interpret interracial interactions, particularly those involving exclusion.

Thus, our measure was more direct than methodologies employing implicit bias (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Rutland, Cameron, Milne et al., 2005), and yet, less direct than methodologies probing explicit decisions to exclude solely on the basis of race (Killen et al., 2002). We investigated students' explicit judgments using potentially ambiguous situations. This provided information about decision-making in students' everyday lives regarding peer exchanges (unlike measures of implicit biases which assess associations between words and faces), and, at the same time, allowed us to assess how interpretations of situations vary as a function of one's ethnicity.

Our three interracial contexts were Lunch (one student does not want to invite another student to join him/her with a friend at lunchtime), Sleepover (one student does not want to invite another student to a sleepover party), and Dance (one student does not want to invite another student to a school dance). We tested hypotheses about whether participants would be more willing to exclude someone in a peer situation (Lunch, Dance) than in a situation involving parental expectations (Sleepover). In all three situations, the excluder was White and the target of exclusion was Black.

Hypotheses about context, ethnicity, and grade

In the peer contexts, we hypothesized that there would be no age or ethnic differences for evaluations of race-based exclusion (everyone would judge it to be wrong) based on prior findings in which straightforward exclusion based on race was viewed as wrong by students from a wide range of ethnic groups (Killen et al., 2002). We expected age and ethnicity differences regarding whether it was all right to exclude an African American child from an interracial situation based on non-race reasons, such as nonshared interests, unfamiliarity, and disruptions of group functioning.

Further, we predicted that, with age, majority students would be more likely than minority students to view group functioning as a legitimate reason to exclude someone. This

hypothesis derived from prior studies in which majority students justified exclusion based on gender by referring to group functioning, that is, that including a girl in an all-boys club would be disruptive and uncomfortable from the group's perspective (Killen & Stangor, 2001). Given their prior experiences with discrimination (Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel, 1998), we expected that minority students would view reasons such as "she doesn't fit the group" as a proxy for bias or prejudice, and thus would be less likely to view group functioning as a legitimate reason to exclude. At the same time, we also expected that all students would be less likely to rate non-race based exclusion as wrong with age given that adolescents become aware of multiple considerations involved in exclusion decisions (Killen & Stangor, 2001). Further, we hypothesized that, in explaining their evaluations, minority students would use moral justifications that reflected empathy as well as fairness given prior experiences with exclusion.

In the home context, which involved parental concerns in contrast to messages from peers, we predicted that all students would rate a parent's decision to exclude a child's friend at a sleepover based on race as wrong. The reasons would be moral, that is, that it would be wrong due to prejudice. Yet, we expected that exclusion in the home based on nonracial reasons would be evaluated differently, with minority students viewing such nonracial exclusion as more wrong than majority students. In previous studies on exclusion it has been shown that majority students, with age, challenge parental decisions to support exclusion based on race/ethnicity (Killen et al., 2002). However, majority students may be less likely to challenge parents' expressions of discomfort over someone "unfamiliar" as this is a more indirect assessment of parental support of exclusion. Minority students, on the other hand, may reject parental expressions of discomfort, even when described in an indirect context given their prior experiences with exclusion. Studies have shown that European-American parents convey indirect negative messages to children and adolescents about interracial friendships and dating (Killian, 2001; Yancey, 1998), and extensive research has shown that interracial friendships decrease with age (Dubois & Hirsch, 1990; Smith & Schneider, 2000).

Hypotheses about estimations of the likelihood of exclusion

We analyzed students' estimations of the likelihood of exclusion in order to determine whether minority and majority students differed in their interpretations of how often racial exclusion occurs in various contexts. This was in line with Dixon and colleagues' (Dixon et al., 2005) recommendation that in-depth analyses of how individuals reflect on interracial contact is needed. Moreover, this analysis provided another check on whether students in our sample, who attended the same schools, reflected on interracial exclusion in the same way. We predicted that perceptions of how often peer exclusion (race- and non-race-based) would also differ for majority and minority students, particularly as a function of the context of exclusion (school or home). We expected that differences in perceptions of the frequency of exclusion would be greater for the home context given that residential segregation is more pervasive than school segregation, particularly in the area that we collected our data. Specifically, we expected that minority students would estimate that non-race based exclusion occurs more often than would majority students given their prior experiences and knowledge of discrimination.

Summary

In sum, we expected that (1) majority and minority students would not differ regarding the wrongfulness of exclusion in interracial peer contexts when the basis for exclusion was explicitly about race; (2) majority and minority students would differ regarding moral justifications for ratings of race-based exclusion with minority students making more references to empathy; (3) minority students would rate non-race based exclusion as more wrong than would majority students; and (4) that all students would rate non-race based exclusion as less wrong with age. We also expected that (5) minority students would estimate that non-raced exclusion occurs more often than would majority students.

Method

Participants

Participants were 685 children and adolescents in 4th, 7th, and 10th grades, attending 20 public schools in mixed-ethnicity (range was 20% to 45% minority) suburbs of a mid-size city in the mid-Atlantic region. There were 94 girls and 70 boys in 4th grade ($M = 9.85$ years, $SD = .42$), 167 girls and 113 boys in 7th grade ($M = 12.86$ years, $SD = .49$), and 133 girls and 108 boys in 10th grade ($M = 15.89$ years, $SD = .52$). The ethnic breakdown overall was 60% majority (European American), and 40% minority (African American, 14%, Asian-American, 12%, Biracial, 8%, Latin-American, 5%). The ethnicity breakdown for each grade was: 4th grade, 115 majority and 49 minority students; 7th grade, 172 majority students and 108 minority students; and, 10th grade, 127 majority and 113 minority students. The sample was relatively evenly divided by gender for each ethnic group. All students were from middle-income to low-middle-income backgrounds.

Procedure and Instruments

Written parental consent (response rate = 80%) was obtained for all students taking part in the study. Students were individually interviewed in a quiet room at their school by a trained research assistant who was matched with the participants by race/ethnicity. Extensive pilot testing was conducted on the interview scenarios to ensure that children and adolescents were familiar with the situations, and that the language was developmentally appropriate (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2005). Prior to beginning each interview individual student assent was obtained and participants were assured of the voluntary, confidential and anonymous nature of the study. Interviewers first administered the *Social Reasoning about Exclusion* interview, which was audio-taped and later transcribed for coding purposes. After the interview, all participants completed the *Peer and Authority Experiences* survey; the interviewers read the survey to the fourth graders, while seventh and tenth graders completed the survey on their own.

For the *Social Reasoning about Exclusion* interview, participants were read three stories, each representing a different context in which racial exclusion could occur. The three contexts were: Lunch (personal choice about cross-race friendship), Dance (cross-race dating in high school), and Sleepover (having a cross-race friend in the home). The first two contexts were school-based and the third context was home-based. The stories were read in

the following order to all participants: Lunch, Sleepover, Dance. As described earlier, all stories portrayed a European American child excluding an African American child.

After each story, participants were required to respond to 8 assessments, 1) *Wrongfulness of Racial Motives* (the ratings of participants' judgments about the wrongfulness of exclusion if it were based on race, such as "What if Michael thinks that they won't have much in common because Doug is Black?"); 2) *Justification* (and why?); 3) *Wrongfulness of Non-Racial Motives* (such as "What if Michael thinks that they won't have much in common because Doug doesn't like sports?"), 4) *Justification* (and why?); 5) *Wrongfulness of Group Functioning Motives* (such as "What if Michael doesn't invite Doug to lunch because he thinks Doug won't fit with in Will and him?"), 6) *Justification* (and why?); 7) *Estimations of Race-Based Exclusion* (estimates of the frequency of exclusion among peers based on race, such as "How often do you think kids your age might not invite someone to lunch because they do not share the same interests?") and 8) *Estimations of Non-Raced Based Exclusion* (such as: "How often do you think kids your age might not invite someone to lunch because they are a different race?").

Participants' responses were audio-taped and later transcribed. Responses for the wrongfulness rating assessments ranged from 1 ("very, very good") to 8 ("very, very bad"). Responses for the two frequency estimation rating assessments ranged from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). Coding was conducted on participants' justifications for their ratings using four social cognitive domain categories (with subcategories which were collapsed), based on categories used in prior research (Killen et al., 2002; Smetana, 2006). The three overall categories were: *Moral* (Racial Prejudice, Discrimination, and Empathy), *Social-Conventional* (Group functioning, Traditions, Customs), *Stereotypes*, and *Uncodable*. There were three subcategories for *Moral* and *Social-Conventional* which were analyzed for specific hypothesis testing, as described in the next section. For each participant, justifications were scored dichotomously with a score of 1 indicating that the category was used and a score of 0 indicating that the category was not used. Reliability coding was conducted on 30% of the interviews by research assistants trained on the coding system. Cohen's kappas ranged from .81 to 1.00. Uncertainties or discrepancies in the codings were resolved through discussion among the coders.

Results

Plan for Analysis

Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) with repeated measures were used to test hypotheses pertaining to responses to three assessments: *Wrongfulness Ratings*, *Justifications*, and *Estimations of Exclusion*. Follow-up analyses included univariate ANOVAs for between-subjects effects and t-tests for within-subjects interactions effects. In cases where sphericity was not met, corrections were made using the Huynh-Feldt method. Initial analyses examining within-minority ethnicity effects on the major variables were not significant, thus these participant groups were collapsed into one "minority" category, which was compared with the "majority" group comprised of European-Americans. In addition, gender was not a significant variable in preliminary analyses and was omitted from all subsequent analyses. Ratings and Justifications were analyzed with ethnicity of participant, and grade of

participant as independent variables. The repeated-measures factors were context (Lunch, Dance, Sleepover).

Wrongfulness Ratings for Race-based Peer Exclusion in Interracial Contexts at School

A 3 (grade: 4th, 7th, 10th) X 2 (ethnicity: majority, minority) X 2(context: lunch, dance) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on participants' ratings of the two peer contexts in which participants were asked for their evaluations using race as a reason for exclusion. These means are displayed in Table 1. As predicted, the vast majority of all participants evaluated race-based exclusion as wrong ($M = 7.3$). There were no differences for context or for ethnic status. There was an overall age effect, $F(2, 673) = 5.73, p < .001$, with follow-up tests indicating that wrongfulness ratings increased from the youngest group to the two older groups ($ps < .05$). Thus, when participants were directly asked about whether exclusion based on race was wrong, there was an increase from 4th to 10th grade in ratings of wrongfulness. We did not predict age related findings given that no prior research had documented this type of increase with age in the wrongfulness of racial exclusion, and thus, this was a novel finding. In addition, 2 separate 3 (grade: 4th, 7th, 10th) X 2 (ethnicity: majority, minority) X 3 (type of exclusion: race-based, non-raced based, group functioning) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on participants' ratings of all three reasons for exclusion within each scenario. As expected, students viewed race-based reasons as more wrong than non-raced based reasons or group functioning reasons: for Lunch: $F(2, 1350) = 458.99, p < .0001$, for type of exclusion, and for Dance, $F(2, 1346) = 365.14, p < .0001$, for type of exclusion. Follow-up analyses indicated that all students rated race-based exclusion as more wrong than the other two reasons (non-raced based and group functioning) and there were no significant differences between the last two reasons (the means are displayed in Table 1).

Participants' reasons for their ratings of wrongfulness were evaluated and analyses revealed that the vast majority of participants used moral reasons to evaluate race-based exclusion as wrong ($M = .96$). Analyses for sub-types of moral reasons used revealed ethnicity and grade differences, however, as well as differences for the context of exclusion. The vast majority of all students cited reasons of racial prejudice in evaluating the wrongfulness of race-based exclusion ($M = .83$), and this type of reasoning increased with age, as indicated by the analyses that majority students used more statements about prejudice ($M = .87$) than did minority students ($M = .80$), $F(1, 677) = 13.60, p < .0001$. As hypothesized, minority students used more empathy statements than did majority students, $F(1,677) = 22.11, p < .0001$. Regarding age-related patterns, 4th and 10th grade minority students used more empathy statements ($Ms = .14, .11$, for 4th and 10th grade students) than did their majority counterparts who very rarely referred to empathy ($Ms = .05, .04$). Overall, all students explained their evaluations of using race as a reason for exclusion with moral justifications (references to the wrongfulness of racial prejudice and appeals to the feelings of others, such as empathy).

Wrongfulness Ratings for Non-Race Based Reasons for Peer Exclusion in Interracial Interaction at School

To test our hypotheses about whether majority and minority children would differentially evaluate non-racial exclusion in interracial peer contexts at school (referred to as “non-race” and “group functioning” in Table 1), we analyzed ratings of wrongfulness. A 3 (grade) by 2 (ethnic status) by 4 (non-race based exclusion decisions) ANOVA with the repeated measures on the last factor revealed a main effect for grade, $F(2, 673) = 37.36, p < .0001$, and for ethnic status, $F(1, 673) = 10.98, p < .001$. As indicated in Table 1, wrongfulness ratings decreased with age, $p < .01$, and, consonant with hypotheses, overall minority students evaluated exclusion that was not directly about race as more wrong than did majority students, $p < .05$; these findings were similar to those found for the peer contexts.

The explicit reasons given by participants for their ratings did not differ between majority and minority students, however. The majority of all students gave moral reasons for their ratings ($M = .83$) and less than a quarter of the students gave social-conventional reasons ($M = .13$); there were no differences for ethnic status or context. There was a significant age-related decline in the use of moral reasons, however, to explain their ratings for the exclusion between friends at lunch, with tenth grade students ($M = .77$) giving fewer moral reasons in contrast to 4th ($M = .87$) and 7th ($M = .87$) grade students, $F(2, 678) = 8.614, p < .0001$. As predicted, participants’ ratings revealed subtle but significant differences between majority and minority students regarding the wrongfulness of exclusion when the reasons given for exclusion were not explicitly about race; minority students rated the reasons as more wrong. The explicit justifications however, for evaluations of the exclusion decision were the same for both groups.

Wrongfulness Ratings for Race-based Peer Exclusion in Interracial Contexts at Home

The vast majority of all students rated a child’s decision to exclude a friend from a sleepover birthday party due to parents’ discomfort about race as wrong ($M = 7.22$); there were no significant differences for grade or ethnic status. The reasons were moral, that is, that it would be wrong due to prejudice ($M = .87$).

Wrongfulness Ratings for Non Race-based Peer Exclusion in Interracial Contexts at Home

Our hypotheses that minority students would view the decision to not invite a friend of a different race to a sleepover due to parents’ unfamiliarity with the person as more wrong than would majority students were confirmed. Analyses revealed a main effect for grade, $F(2, 675) = 15.33, p < .0001$, and for ethnic status, $F(1, 675) = 8.35, p < .004$. The grade effect indicated that wrongfulness ratings decreased with age ($M_s = 5.6, 5.3, 4.9$ for 4th, 7th, and 10th grade, respectively), $p < .0001$. The ethnic status difference indicated that minority students viewed the non-race based reasons for exclusion as more wrong than did the majority students as shown in Table 1. Thus, evaluating a child’s decisions not to invite a friend from a different racial background to a sleepover party because the parents were either unfamiliar with the child, or did not believe that the child would “fit in” were viewed as more wrong by minority than majority students at all three ages. Further, a 3 (grade: 4th, 7th, 10th) X 2 (ethnicity: majority, minority) X 3 (type of exclusion: race-based, non-raced based, group functioning) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted

on participants' ratings for the three reasons for exclusion indicated that, as expected, students viewed race-based reasons as more wrong than non-raced based reasons or group functioning reasons for Sleepover: $F(2, 1348) = 465.19, p < .0001$, for type of exclusion. Follow-up analyses indicated that all students rated race-based exclusion as more wrong than the other two reasons (non-raced based and group functioning) and there were no significant differences between the last two reasons (the means are displayed in Table 1).

Analyses of participants' reasons for their ratings of a child's decision not to invite a cross-race friend over for a sleepover due to non-raced based reasons from parents revealed no grade or ethnic status differences. All students used moral ($M = .35$) or social-conventional ($M = .61$) reasons to explain their rating of the parents' lack of familiarity with a friend as the basis for exclusion. Moral reasons pertained to "empathy" (how the new friend would feel) and social-conventional referred to a parent's need to know the child better (authority jurisdiction). When asked about parents' decision based on group functioning, that the new child would not "fit in", students used moral reasons ($M = .75$) and social-conventional reasons ($M = .21$) indicating that, for most students, this reason was viewed as unfair.

Estimations of the Frequency of Race-Based Exclusion

A 3 (grade) X 2 (ethnic status) X 3 (context: Lunch, Sleepover, Dance) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor for estimations of the frequency of race-based exclusion revealed a significant grade effect, $F(2, 675) = 4.20, p < .01$, and an ethnicity effect, $F(2, 675) = 3.87, p < .05$. With age, participants were more likely to state that race-based exclusion occurred. As predicted, minority students estimated that race-based exclusion occurred more often than did majority students. Significant interaction effects emerged for context and ethnic status, $F(2, 1350) = 8.18, p < .0001$, and follow up tests, indicated that minority students estimated race-based exclusion occurred more often than did majority students in both the Lunch and the Sleepover contexts, ($ps < .05$); there were no ethnic status differences for the dance context. For age-related changes, 10th grade students judged that friendship race-based exclusion and parental race-based exclusion occurred more often than did 4th and 7th grade students (who were not different), $ps < .0001$. Thus, with age, students estimated a higher level of race-based exclusion and this was also reported more often by minority than majority students at all ages.

The pattern was reversed for students' estimations of non-raced based exclusion. Majority students estimated that non-race based exclusion occurred more often than did minority students, $F(1, 676) = 9.55, p < .002$. Further, there was an age-related increase, $F(2, 676) = 14.5, p < .0001$, indicating that perceptions of how often exclusion happens increased with age. A context by grade interaction, $F(4, 1352) = 12.70, p < .0001$, showed that increases in estimations of the frequency of exclusion occurred for the Lunch and Sleepover scenarios but not for the Dance scenario.

Thus, minority students estimated that race-based exclusion occurred more often than did majority students, and majority students estimated that non-race based exclusion occurred more often than did minority students supporting our prediction that ethnicity status influences interpretations of interracial peer situations.

Discussion

The findings in this study revealed the multiple ways in which majority and minority students interpret interracial peer encounters, and demonstrated subtle, yet significant differences in evaluations of exclusion in such encounters. Majority and minority students did not differ regarding the wrongfulness of exclusion in interracial peer contexts when the basis for exclusion was about race. Yet, when asked to evaluate the wrongfulness of exclusion based on reasons other than race in interracial peer dyads, minority students viewed exclusion as more wrong, and did so for all four non-race based assessments of exclusion described to students for their evaluation (non-race based and group functioning for both the lunch and dance peer scenarios). While all students evaluated exclusion based on non-race reasons as significantly less wrong than that based on reasons of race, minority students were more likely to view non-race-based exclusion as unacceptable. Coupled with the findings that minority students estimated that exclusion based on race occurs more often than do majority students these findings indicate that minority students interpret the reasons for exclusion differently from majority students.

In light of Pettigrew and Tropp's (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) recent findings on the importance of cross-race friendships on the reduction of prejudice, these findings provide a basis for investigating why it is that cross-race friendships decrease with age in development (McGlothlin & Killen, 2005). On the one hand, overall, students' wrongfulness ratings of race-based exclusion increased with age. On the other hand, with age, students' wrongfulness ratings about non-raced based exclusion decreased with age. In other words, with age, students rated exclusion in an interracial peer context as all right when the reasons were not explicitly about race. Given that minority students rated the non-raced based assessments for exclusion as more wrong than did majority students, these findings indicate that interpretations of peer exclusion change with age, and particularly so for cross-race interactions. Thus, further investigations of these types of interpretations may shed light on what happens during cross-race interactions with age that leads to their decline.

Thus, employing a methodology which combined direct and indirect dimensions of evaluations of interracial interactions revealed significant differences between how majority and minority students interpret such exchanges. One reason for the different interpretations of exclusion in interracial peer dyadic contexts might be that minority students are more likely to expect that majority students hold biases, explicit or implicit, that contribute to their decisions to exclude someone from a different racial background in a peer situation. Recent research, in fact, has demonstrated that this is the case in some school contexts. A study with European-American students at 1st and 4th grades in homogeneous schools found that European-American students were more likely to attribute negative intentions to minority students than to majority students in ambiguous interracial peer dyadic situations (McGlothlin & Killen, in press). In contrast, minority and majority students in 1st and 4th grades in heterogeneous schools were unlikely to use race to make attributions of intentions (Margie et al., 2005; McGlothlin, Killen, & Edmonds, 2005a). However, by 4th grade, European-American students at both schools were less likely to expect that cross-race peer dyads could be friends than were minority students, suggesting that racial biases about friendships exist as early as 4th grade.

The evidence indicates, however, that there are times when majority students attribute negative intentions to children's behavior on the basis of race. Pilot research suggests that majority 7th and 10th grade students attribute negative intentions based on race in ambiguous peer dyadic situations as well (Killen, McGlothlin, Henning, & O'Connor, in prep). This information will shed light on the factors that contribute to majority and minority students' interpretations of racial exclusion. While it is not yet known how these biases manifest in adolescence, research on adolescent cliques indicates that adolescent exclusion decisions reflect stereotypic expectations based on group membership (Horn, 2003).

The findings that all students evaluated race-based exclusion as wrong, and that differences by students from different ethnic backgrounds were revealed in the non-race based exclusion situations is consistent with social psychological research with adults which has shown that in straightforward situations, adults support egalitarian views, and that stereotypes are activated in situations that are ambiguous or complex (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002a; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Probing students about whether a non-race-based reason for exclusion was legitimate in interracial peer dyadic contexts provided a potentially ambiguous situation in that there were multiple reasons that could be used for exclusion (race-based and non-race based).

Minority students' ratings of wrongfulness involved references to empathy unlike majority students who evaluated racial exclusion as wrong solely due to the unfairness of the situation. Again, this is another indicator that, for some minority students, peer decisions to exclude others in interracial dyads, are interpreted differently than how these situations are interpreted by majority students. The findings were subtle but significant, which is what one would expect given that straightforward evaluations of racial exclusion are most often viewed as wrong for equality or egalitarian reasons (Dovidio et al., 2002a; Killen et al., 2002). As expected, minority students estimated that race-based exclusion occurred more often than non-raced based exclusion, and this difference was greater for exclusion in the home context than in the school context. These analyses provide further support for social psychological arguments for analyzing individuals' justifications for intergroup behavior (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Jost and colleagues have asserted that adults use stereotypes as a form of justification for maintaining the status quo. In this study, we did not find that students used stereotypes to justify exclusion. Instead, students relied on social-conventional explanations such as nonshared interests, lack of familiarity, or disruptions to the social group functioning. In future research, it would be helpful to create a method to determine the extent to which stereotypes may underlie social-conventional explanations for exclusion decisions.

What are the reasons for the differences we found between majority and minority students evaluations of exclusion in interracial peer dyads? Factors such as previous experience with exclusion, with unfair treatment, and family influences remain to be tested as contributing variables that account for the differences. We anticipate that all of these factors contribute to these differences, and thus, multiple lines of research are necessary to understand the full picture. Our findings were consistent across multiple peer contexts. Examining other contexts within and outside of school will be important to understand how individuals evaluate exclusion.

Recently, Graham (Graham, 2006) has discussed the importance of studying ethnicity in context, and has asserted that it is essential for developmental researchers to examine how students from different ethnic backgrounds evaluate peer rejection, and how this is reflected in their social experiences in schools. Intergroup contact theory (Dixon et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) asserts that individuals' social experiences with others from different backgrounds has the potential to contribute to a reduction in prejudice. Future studies examining the relationship between intergroup contact and students' evaluations of race-based and non-race based exclusion would further illuminate how majority and minority students differentially evaluate exclusion in interracial contexts.

Another area for future research would be to investigate the intragroup and intergroup dynamics of interracial interactions (Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Marques, 2003). What happens during interracial interactions that contribute to different interpretations of motives and reasons for inclusion or exclusion? What messages are conveyed to children from the majority and minority members of the group about how the group functions and what are the goals of the interactions? Further, individuals' social identities are derived from membership in various groups (Brown & Zagefka, 2005). Most likely, minority participants identified with the excluded child in the scenarios described in this study, who was a member of an ethnic minority group. For future studies, assessing students' social identities in terms of ethnicity would shed further light on why it is that majority and minority students' evaluations of non-race based exclusion differed in this study.

This project, which drew on social psychological constructs for understanding age-related patterns of social cognition and social interpretations of situations, reflects a recent burgeoning area of research on developmental intergroup attitudes which holds promise for understanding the developmental origins of prejudice, racism, and discrimination (Levy & Killen, in press).

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Table 1
Wrongfulness of Exclusion Ratings for three Contexts by Grade and Ethnic Group

| Group | N | Context by Type of Exclusion | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|------------------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|----------|-------------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------|----------|-------------------|--|
| | | Lunch | | | Sleepover | | | Dance | | | | | | |
| | | Race | Non-Race | Group Functioning | Race | Non-Race | Group Functioning | Race | Non-Race | Group Functioning | Race | Non-Race | Group Functioning | |
| 4 th grade | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 115 | Mean | 7.04 | 5.84 | 6.51 | 6.89 | 4.95 | 6.03 | 7.13 | 6.41 | 6.28 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.98 | 1.22 | 0.96 | 1.04 | 1.30 | 1.23 | 0.91 | 1.05 | 1.18 | | | |
| Minority | 49 | Mean | 7.22 | 6.20 | 6.61 | 7.02 | 5.00 | 6.35 | 7.10 | 6.33 | 6.57 | | | |
| | | SD | 1.07 | 1.24 | 1.20 | 0.95 | 1.72 | 1.39 | 1.61 | 1.21 | 1.21 | | | |
| 7 th grade | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 172 | Mean | 7.51 | 5.77 | 6.16 | 7.32 | 4.64 | 5.84 | 7.51 | 6.05 | 5.89 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.69 | 1.19 | 1.08 | 0.76 | 1.36 | 1.34 | 0.63 | 0.99 | 1.13 | | | |
| Minority | 108 | Mean | 7.39 | 5.94 | 6.21 | 7.21 | 4.82 | 6.10 | 7.35 | 6.13 | 6.23 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.81 | 0.98 | 1.20 | 0.99 | 1.31 | 1.06 | 0.79 | 1.07 | 1.31 | | | |
| 10 th grade | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 127 | Mean | 7.50 | 5.20 | 5.76 | 7.26 | 4.24 | 5.38 | 7.39 | 5.52 | 5.37 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.71 | 1.14 | 1.14 | 0.85 | 1.32 | 1.30 | 0.67 | 1.12 | 1.24 | | | |
| Minority | 114 | Mean | 7.20 | 5.60 | 5.97 | 7.47 | 4.36 | 5.68 | 7.12 | 5.74 | 5.91 | | | |
| | | SD | 1.11 | 1.20 | 1.18 | 3.92 | 1.38 | 1.21 | 1.36 | 1.12 | 1.22 | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 412 | Mean | 7.38 | 5.62 | 6.14 | 7.18 | 4.60 | 5.75 | 7.36 | 5.99 | 5.84 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.81 | 1.21 | 1.10 | 0.89 | 1.36 | 1.32 | 0.75 | 1.10 | 1.23 | | | |
| Minority | 270 | Mean | 7.28 | 5.84 | 6.18 | 7.28 | 4.77 | 5.97 | 7.21 | 6.00 | 6.16 | | | |
| | | SD | 0.99 | 1.15 | 1.21 | 2.65 | 1.42 | 1.21 | 1.10 | 1.14 | 1.27 | | | |

Note. N = 685. Race = racial exclusion. Non-race = lack of shared interest (lunch), unfamiliarity (sleepover); rival school (dance). Group functioning = lack of fit with the group. 1 = very, very good 8 = very, very bad.

Table 2
 Participants' Estimations of the Frequency of Exclusion for three Contexts by Grade and Ethnic Group

| Group | N | Lunch | | Sleepover | | Dance | | |
|------------------------|-----|----------|------|-----------|------|----------|------|------|
| | | Non-Race | Race | Non-Race | Race | Non-Race | Race | |
| 4 th grade | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 115 | Mean | 2.94 | 2.10 | 3.02 | 2.13 | 2.68 | 2.43 |
| | | SD | 0.73 | 0.89 | 0.93 | 0.83 | 0.89 | 0.83 |
| Minority | 49 | Mean | 2.69 | 2.20 | 2.86 | 2.31 | 2.49 | 2.37 |
| | | SD | 0.74 | 1.12 | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.96 | 0.95 |
| 7 th grade | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 172 | Mean | 3.22 | 2.23 | 3.25 | 2.02 | 2.85 | 2.35 |
| | | SD | 0.80 | 0.90 | 0.78 | 0.73 | 0.91 | 0.90 |
| Minority | 108 | Mean | 3.11 | 2.24 | 3.29 | 2.30 | 2.50 | 2.31 |
| | | SD | 0.81 | 0.94 | 0.86 | 0.78 | 0.94 | 0.92 |
| 10 th grade | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 127 | Mean | 3.52 | 2.39 | 3.35 | 2.25 | 2.50 | 2.33 |
| | | SD | 0.63 | 0.81 | 0.68 | 0.64 | 0.94 | 0.79 |
| Minority | 114 | Mean | 3.37 | 2.61 | 3.34 | 2.59 | 2.41 | 2.29 |
| | | SD | 0.77 | 1.00 | 0.81 | 0.85 | 0.90 | 0.90 |
| Total | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 413 | Mean | 3.23 | 2.25 | 3.22 | 2.12 | 2.69 | 2.36 |
| | | SD | 0.76 | 0.84 | 0.81 | 0.74 | 0.93 | 0.85 |
| Minority | 270 | Mean | 3.14 | 2.39 | 3.23 | 2.42 | 2.46 | 2.31 |
| | | SD | 0.81 | 1.02 | 0.86 | 0.84 | 0.92 | 0.91 |

Note. N = 685. 1 = never; 7 = always.