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What children remember about ingroup and outgroup peers: Effects of stereotypes on children's processing of information about group members

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Abstract

Three studies are reported about children's memory for stereotypic behaviors attributed to ingroup and outgroup members. According to research and theory in social cognition, cues present in the situation make cultural representations about group members accessible, and once primed, influence all phases of the information processing sequence. In Study 1, Euro Canadian and Native Canadian children ($N = 98$) recalled stereotypic behaviors attributed to ingroup and outgroup members. In Study 2 ($N = 87$), the influence of individual difference variables was explored. In Study 3 ($N = 32$), the memory of Native Canadian children living on a First Nation reserve for behaviors attributed to ingroup and outgroup members was studied. Biases in recall were found in Studies 1 and 2, but in Study 3, outgroup favoritism, typically found among low status group members, was reversed among children attending a heritage school. Among the individual difference measures examined, age and level of cognitive development predicted what was remembered about group members. Older EuroCanadian children recalled more negative behaviors about outgroup members than did younger children, and more cognitively mature children recognized more information about ingroup than outgroup members. Results were discussed in terms of cognitive and situational factors influencing children's processing of group-relevant information and the challenges children in low status groups face in maintaining a sense of cultural identity.

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Introduction

What we remember about a person's traits or behaviors has a bearing on our impressions of that person and our interactions with him or her. Recalling that someone was kind or angry guides what we think of that person, and whether we will seek that person out or generate excuses to avoid him or her. Although many factors influence impression formation and personal recollections, many studies on person memory have examined the influence of stereotypes on memory and recall. Most of these studies (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kunda, 1999 for reviews) have been done with older adolescents and young adults, but the influence of stereotypes held by children on memory for behaviors attributed to same-age peers has been given less attention. What children remember about what peers say and do can be used to study questions about the impact of stereotypes on information processing, how memory is influenced by factors like perceived social status, and how information about others might be organized in memory. In addition, the present studies address issues raised by intergroup research (e.g., Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997), and theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) on cognitive and motivational processes involved in children's memory of stereotypic information.

To properly frame these issues, a selective overview of studies on the influence of stereotypes held by children and adults on judgments and recall sets the context for Study 1. Three factors are discussed in Study 1: the influence on recall of group membership of the perceiver and the other person and the consistency of stereotypic information received about others. As discussed subsequently, children and adults from high and low status groups recall more stereotypic consistent information about ingroup and outgroup members, and, in doing so, preserve the perceived status relations between groups. These issues were examined in Study 1 by asking EuroCanadian and Native Canadian children to recall behaviors attributed to ingroup or outgroup members that varied in valence and consistency with the group stereotype. Results from Study 1 raise questions about the role of developmental and motivational factors on children's information processing; these issues were addressed in Study 2. Study 3 explored the role of culture on stereotype accessibility by examining the influence of stereotypes on information processing among Native Canadian children living on a First Nation reserve.

Ingroup and outgroup membership and processing information about others

Categorizing others into ingroup and outgroup members influences all phases of information processing (see Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Hewstone, 1990; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992 for reviews). Among adults (Duncan, 1976; Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996; Hewstone & Jaspars, 1982; for a review see Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002) and children (Bigler et al., 1997; Hymel, 1986; Powlishta, 1995; Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 1994; Yee & Brown, 1992) ingroup members are evaluated more favorably, their successful task outcomes attributed to internal factors, more differentiated judgments are made about them, and

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